Paul and writing

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Abstract: This paper takes a philosophical approach to the subject of Paul and Scripture, relying especially on insights from deconstruction. While the discussion of Paul and Scripture in recent years has been preoccupied with methodology, the discussion should begin with theory, particularly with the issue of Paul and writing *per se*. I will demonstrate that Paul's form of religion is founded upon an ideology of presence and absence that can be designated "apocalyptic logocentrism." This ideology has profound implications for the subject of Paul and Scripture because of where writing falls in its hierarchy of values. An awareness of Paul's apocalyptic logocentric symptoms will allow a number of key texts pertaining to his usage of writing and Scripture to be read from a new and illuminating perspective.

Introduction

> The hardest task confronting any New Testament scholar is to come up with an idea or an argument that is at the same time fresh, interesting, and not too far-fetched. —John Ashton[1]

The need for this essay became apparent to me at the first meeting of the SBL's new Paul and Scripture Seminar in 2005. For that meeting, each of us were asked to make a ten minute statement about our ideas for the seminar, the tasks we considered most important for a group assembled to address this topic for seven years. Most members suggested methodological matters, especially literary-critical ones brought to the forefront by the seminal work of Richard Hays, as well as rhetorical-critical ones popularized especially by the recent work of Chris Stanley.[2] A few members were also interested in ideological issues of the socio-historical and political variety. When all had finished giving their ideas, only a couple of us had emphasized the importance of spending some time on the issue of what Scripture *is* for Paul, Paul's theory of Scripture one might say, as well as examining our own

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[1] John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) 244.

[2] Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Yale University Press, 1989); Christopher D. Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004).

theories of Scripture. This essay is an attempt to state my theory of what Scripture is for Paul.[3]

Of course, it is not as if this question has never been touched upon in the history of interpretation. The issue is present in Protestant biblical scholarship as early as Luther, and becomes prominent among the Neo-orthodox, Bultmann being a prime example. In this tradition, the possibility opened up of seeing the issue not only as a matter of Paul and Scripture, but of Paul and script, Paul and writing. The title of this paper, "Paul and writing," signals that this topic will not be narrowly pursued in the way the topic of "Paul and Scripture" often is. My discussion of Paul and writing will be woven into a very broad context, a theory of Paul's religion.

A Theory of Paul's Religion: Apocalyptic Logocentrism

> Many responsibilities begin in dreams, and many transfigurations of the tradition begin in private fantasies. Think, for example, of Plato's or St Paul's private fantasies—fantasies so original and utopian that they became the common sense of later times. —Richard Rorty[4]

Let me say immediately that I am not offering *the* theory of Paul's religion. Scholars today who specialize in "theory of religion" are leery of "grand theories" that claim to have all the answers. Instead, we must rely on a variety of theories (anthropological, psychological, sociological, rhetorical, philosophical, etc.) that illuminate various aspects of whatever phenomena we choose

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[3] Note well how I have constructed this sentence. While some aspects of Dale Martin's reflections on how "texts don't mean; people mean with texts" remain problematic to me, I agree fully that interpreters must take responsibility for the meanings they *construct* while reading Scripture. See Dale B. Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), esp. 1-35.

[4] Richard Rorty, "Is Derrida a Transcendental Philosopher?" in *Derrida: A Critical Reader* (ed. David Wood; Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 237-38. Against Culler, Norris, and Gasché, Rorty argues that Derrida fits in the company of Plato and Paul, not that of "rigorous" philosophers.

to classify as religion.[5] Therefore, I am only offering one possible philosophical theory of Paul's

religion, one that trades upon one of the most basic insights of deconstruction's critique of the

Western philosophical tradition. I think the time for this approach is ripe, especially given the

recent positive interest taken in Paul by a variety of philosophers.[6] Surprisingly, however, little

has been written about Paul's particular form of logocentrism aside from Daniel Boyarin's

excellent contribution. [7] Even less has been written about its possible implications for his

attitude towards Scripture.

A brief definition of logocentrism will serve as the guiding thread for this entire

essay.[8] *Logocentrism is Derrida's shorthand term for the Western privileging of "speech over*

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[5] See, e.g., Ivan Strenski, *Thinking about Religion: an Historical Introduction to Theories of Religion* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), esp. 337-45; Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, eds., *Guide to the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 2000).

[6] E.g., Giorgio Agamben, *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Alain Badiou, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006; Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, or Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (New York: Verso, 2000); idem, *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003). A major problem with several of these philosophical forays into Paul is that they are completely out of touch with modern scholarship on Paul. While it is clear from my own work that I believe there are still valid insights in the ways thinkers like Augustine, F. C. Baur, Luther, and Bultmann read Paul, much recent philosophical interpretation of Paul shows no awareness of how radically such classic readings have been problematized in the wake of "the new perspective."

[7] Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994). Brian Ingraffia attempts "to demonstrate . . . that Derrida's deconstruction of the logocentrism of Western thought undermines only the human *logos* of Greek and modern rationalism, not the divine *logos* of biblical, Christian theology" (Brian D. Ingraffia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology: Vanquishing God's Shadow* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995], 213). However, Ingraffia's reference to "the human *logos* of Greek . . . rationalism" reveals how little he understands the concept of "logocentrism." The Greek *logos* was every bit as much a theological concept as the Christian one. What did *logos*, actually *Logos*, mean to the Stoics? While I agree with Kathy Ehrensperger that Derridean deconstruction can and should be applied to expose the logocentrism of Paulinism, she appears to assume that Paul himself is not logocentric. See Kathy Ehrensperger, "'. . . Let Everyone be Convinced in His/Her Own Mind': Derrida and the Deconstruction of Paulinism" (SBLSP 41; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2002), 53-73; idem, *That we may be Mutually Encouraged: Feminism and the New Perspective in Pauline Studies* (New York and London: T & T Clark, 2004). There are varieties of logocentrism, and that is why I speak here of explicating Paul's particular form of it.

[8] There are many full discussions available of all facets of deconstruction, so I will not be offering a crash course in such matters here. A classic highly readable introduction is Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1982), esp. pp. 85-225. Unfortunately, some introductions of deconstruction by and for biblical scholars probably impeded rather than encouraged recognition of its potential for a variety of reasons. Some were too reductionistic, explaining some concepts fairly well, but muddling others. Moreover, from the beginning there was too much preoccupation with the question of whether or not deconstruction was compatible with theology on the assumption that if it is not, it is useless or dangerous. This says a lot

writing, immediacy over distance, identity over difference, and (self-) presence over all forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity."[9] Therefore, among other things, deconstruction is a strategy for uncovering this privileging. In the history of Western philosophy that stretches back at least to Plato, existentialism would appear to mark the final outworking of this tradition with its intense preoccupation with Being and beings, and its supreme valorization of Present-ness, an experience, however, which is always frustrated by the differing and deferring of time and space.[10] Derrida, especially through his deconstructive readings of Heidegger, critiques this tradition, and a second step in my reading of Paul could be to perform a similar deconstruction, noting the self-contradictions that emerge from his logocentrism.[11] That is not my focus here—perhaps some will be relieved. My more modest goals are 1) to explicate how thoroughly logocentric Paul is by analyzing the logocentric symptoms displayed by a number of his texts; 2) to reveal the distinctive characteristics of his particular manifestation of logocentrism, i.e., apocalyptic logocentrism, and argue that it can serve as a theory of his religion, and, 3) to highlight how this theory can explain his complex attitude towards Scripture and writing. These goals will be pursued simultaneously, not sequentially.

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about the ideological investments of many biblical scholars. In contrast, some philosophers of religion and theologians have engaged with deconstruction in fascinating ways. E.g., John D. Caputo, *The Prayer and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), and Graham Ward, *Barth, Derrida, and the Language of Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1995). Of particular interest for Paul scholars is Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., *Reading Derrida/Thinking Paul: On Justice* (Cultural Memory in the Present; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

[9] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (trans. Barbara Johnson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 4.

[10] I.e., *différance*.

[11] See esp. Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1989).

1 Thessalonians

From the beginning to the end of Paul's fragmented corpus, his logocentrism is readily apparent. Beginning with 1 Thessalonians, probably his earliest extant letter, Paul says that "our message of the Gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake" (1 Thess 1:5). The effectiveness of Paul's *logos* depends on the real presence of God within it. He gives thanks that "when you received the Word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's Word, which is also at work in you believers" (2:13). Moreover, as we will see more fully in the case of 2 Cor 3, Paul's own legitimacy ("what kind of persons we proved to be") is somehow bound up with this presence. While "dead letter" is usually associated with written texts, even spoken words can be empty for Paul if they do not proceed from the mouth of a person filled with the Spirit of Christ so that they become vehicles of the presence of God.[12] As epistemologically doubtful as this may sound to moderns and postmoderns, Paul *literally* believed that the presence of Christ was in him and speaking through him, and that this spiritual presence was what made his *logos* effective.[13]

Given his apocalyptic logocentric presuppositions about the power of the Gospel, the frequent rejection of his message it must have been very mysterious to him. His frustration led him in the direction of the ancient equivalent of modern conspiracy

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[12] Cf. the concept in Acts 9:15–17. See the discussion of Paul's Spirit in Mark D. Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning and Deception in Greece and Rome* (ESEC 7; Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 46-60.

[13] However, this did not lead to Paul forsaking rhetoric. No doubt, he believed that the Spirit inspires rhetoric.

theory.[14] The "god of this world" must be responsible (2 Cor 4:4)! While I think that many

New Testament scholars underestimate the degree to which Paul believed a real war was

going on in which Satan was actually winning many battles, I also think that Paul was

ultimately unsatisfied with this explanation alone. Therefore, of course, we see him

revealing the secret in Romans 11 that the hardening of part of Israel to the Gospel is

actually God's doing and only temporary, a surreptitious plan designed to save everyone.

Paul longs for the presence of the Thessalonians: "But we, brothers and

sisters, being taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart,

endeavored the more eagerly to experience your presence with great desire,

because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered

us" (1 Thess 2:17–18; cf. 3:6 and 10). What is obviously presumed by this sentence,

though it bears emphasis, is that resorting to a letter instead of a visit is, as so often

stated, "a substitute for Paul's presence." Indeed, it is made necessary by a demonic

aspect of the form of this world, the activity of Satan, the great divider, separator,

and interrupter of divine spiritual presence.[15]

Later we get a glimpse of Paul's eschatological utopia. From the moment of the

parousia, the being-there, the *presence* of the Lord (1 Thess 4:15; cf. 5:23), believers "will

always be with the Lord" (4:17; cf. 3:13; 5:10). It is interesting to observe how Paul

formulates the consummation of his relationship with the Thessalonians in 2:19. He says,

"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting—is it not precisely you in the presence of

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[14] See Mark D. Given, "On His Majesty's Secret Service: the Undercover Ethos of Paul," in *Rhetoric, Ethic, and Moral Persuasion in Biblical Discourse* (ed. Thomas H. Olbricht and Anders Eriksson; ESEC 11; New York/London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 196-213.

[15] See note 14.

our Lord Jesus at his *parousia*?" In the *parousia*, the desire for presence will be fully

satisfied, fully present not only to the Lord, but also to one another. Perfect *koinonia*. This

is what gives Paul's logocentrism its distinctive apocalyptic form. It is not simply a state of

mind or a mode of being that values "immediacy over distance, identity over difference, and

(self-) presence over all forms of absence." It includes the fervent and expectant hope that

immediacy, identity, and (self-) presence will be fully attained in the future.[16]

And what of writing? "Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not

need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been God-taught to love one

another . . ." (1 Thess 4:9).[17] Already in the letter that provides our first glimpse of Paul, in

a letter that quotes no Scripture at all, it would appear that empowerment to love, and thus

fulfill the whole Law (Gal 5:14), does not come through writing.   It comes through knowing

God and being taught by him. There are several ways to interpret what Paul means by

theodidaktos, and I would not want to exclude any of them precipitously, including the

possibility that Paul is referring to Lev 19:18. [18]   However, as the shorter and probably more

original form of 1 Cor 8:12–13 says, "If anyone thinks to have arrived at knowledge, that one

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[16] Therefore I do not agree with Boyarin that it is "a serious hermeneutic error to make one's interpretation of Paul depend on the apocalyptic expectation, which is after all not even mentioned once in Galatians, rather than the apocalyptic fulfillment which has already been realized in the vision of the crucified Christ according to the spirit, Christ's spirit, Paul's, and that of the Galatians" (*A Radical Jew*, 36). Paul's own perspective is that "If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor 15:19; cf. Rom 8:18–25). The vision already attained is but a foretaste for Paul and he does not expect his hope for a new humanity, "a new creation" (Gal 6:15) to be fulfilled in "this present evil age" (1:4). Maintaining this perspective is important for addressing the cultural problems of similarity and difference explored by Boyarin. Paul may well have desired a spiritual universe of the Same in the age to come, but one can make a strong case that he recognized—or came to recognize—the harmfulness of trying to realize that goal in this age.

[17] Cf. 1 John 1:26–27.

[18] See the alternatives in Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32b; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 244-45. Several involve the concept of being taught through the Spirit. Actually, Malherbe omits Lev 19:19, but see Wayne A. Meeks, The *Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 154.

does not yet know as one ought to know. But if anyone loves, that one is known."[19] It is one thing to know through precept or Scripture that God commands love, but from Paul's point of view one must be known by God, intimately one might say, in order to be able to fulfill this commandment that fulfills all commandments. His neologism *theodidaktos* probably captures that thought.

1 Corinthians

The pervasive discourse of Spirit in this letter is, of course, highly symptomatic of logocentrism. To give only a few examples, as early as 2:1–5 Paul is using the same legitimating rhetoric we saw in 1 Thessalonians: "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God" (2:4–5). It is not the logical content of the—moronic by worldly standards!—proclamation that makes the gospel persuasive, but the actual presence and power of God conveyed by it, the Spirit.

Chapter 13 is a passage too often marginalized in the Pauline corpus, but one that I think takes us close to the heart of Paul's religion. In that chapter, Paul contrasts the provisional and partial nature of prophecy, tongues, and knowledge, things that were *dividing* the Corinthians, with what will happen when "the complete" comes (v. 10). Over against these sources of division and separation, Paul sets love with its images of full intimacy and full presence, such as being "face to face," and "knowing fully as I have been

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[19] See Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 367-68, for a thoroughly persuasive defense of the shorter P[46] reading. My translation differs from Fee's only in the use of inclusive language.

fully known."[20] "Knowing fully as I have been fully known" is as powerful an expression of

logocentrism as one can imagine. In it, presence and self-presence are united.[21] Therefore,

there is an intimate relationship between chapters 13 and 12. Rather than spiritual gifts

creating division in the church, they should be a penultimate manifestation of the

eschatological unity of love described in chapter 13 since they are all from "one and the

same Spirit" (12:4, 9, 11, 13).

In 1 Cor 15, the apocalyptic logocentric aspects of Paul's anthropology come more

fully into view. Paul explains at some length what a resurrection body is. *Pace*

traditionalist interpreters who continue to create convoluted interpretations of the passage

in order to reconcile it with the quite different conceptions in the gospels and later

orthodox Christian doctrine, Paul insists that a resurrection body is constructed entirely of

one substance, *pneuma*.[22] Why so? One reason is to facilitate participation or

incorporation. As Dale Martin puts it,

> Christians currently partake of two natures: because they possess pneuma, they share something
> with the heavenly natures; because they are also made up of sarx and psyche, they share something
> with the earth, Adam, animals, birds, fish, and even dirt (15:39–40, 47–48). The transformation
> expected at the eschaton will cause the Christian body to shed the lower parts of its current nature
> and be left with the purer, transformed part of the pneuma. Christians will have bodies without flesh,
> blood, or soul—composed solely of pneumatic substance—light, airy, luminous bodies. The
> presupposition underwriting Paul's argument here is that the nature of any body is due to its
> participation in some particular sphere of existence. It gets its identity only through participation.[23]

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[20] Though Paul would certainly argue that by *agapē* he means something far more "spiritual" than physical
intimacy, surely sexual imagery is influencing his expression here, as is so often the case in mystical religious
language. Marriage, of course, is spoken of as *two becoming one* in Paul's culture.

[21] In addition, in 1 Corinthians 15, the ultimate outcome, after all opposition to God and his Messiah is
destroyed, is that "God may be all in all" (15:28).

[22] For an excellent discussion of the concept of the resurrected body in 1 Corinthians 15, see Dale B. Martin, *The
Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 104-36, esp. 123-29. Also, see David E. Aune,
"Anthropological Duality in the Eschatology of 2 Cor 4:15–5:10," in *Paul Beyond the Hellenism/Judaism Divide*,
215-40; Alan F. Segal, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion*, (New York: Doubleday,
2004), 399-440.

[23] Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 132. See further Martin's discussion of the views of Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius,
Cicero, Philo, Apollonius of Tyana, and Epictetus (113-17).

As Martin explains earlier, many ancient philosophers held that, "The reason why the normal human body cannot experience immortality is that it occupies a relatively low place on the spectrum of stuff, which ranges from fine, thin, rarefied stuff down to gross, thick, heavy stuff."[24] Therefore, it makes sense that in order to enjoy immortality with God, a Christian must be transformed into the same stuff as God, i.e., *pneuma*. Identity is valued over difference. Furthermore, the only way one could be fully self-present would be to be composed entirely of one substance. A being composed of multiple substances, flesh and spirit, is by nature divided against itself, creating that inner conflict of flesh and spirit that Paul and other ancient moral philosophers often spoke of.[25] Instead, in the apocalyptic logocentric "end," God must "be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

2 Corinthians

The classic passage pertaining to writing in Paul is 2 Cor 3:1–4:15, so I will give it a more extended treatment here and return to it again later as well.[26] I find the argument that he is under some considerable Hellenistic influence here to be quite convincing, and it is certainly relevant to comprehending his form of logocentrism.[27] Interpreters have already suspected that a Hellenistic devaluation of writing is influencing Paul's letter/Spirit dichotomy in 3:6ff. For example, while commenting on 1 Cor 3:6, Furnish refers to the "oft-

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[24] Martin discusses the views of Plutarch, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Philo, Apollonius of Tyana, and Epictetus (*The Corinthian Body*, 113-17).

[25] See Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 57-85, *passim*.

[26] For something closer to an exegesis of this passage, see *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 118-26.

[27] Paul is clearly multicultural, a cultural hybrid. As Boyarin puts it, "Jewgreek is Greekjew" (*A Radical Jew*, 79). See the essays in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, ed. *Paul in his Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995; idem, ed. *Paul Beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2001).

cited passage from Plato's *Phaedrus*," i.e., 275D-276E (*II Corinthians*, 195). Furnish says,

and I quote extensively here,

> The metaphor of commendatory letters is further extended when Paul describes by what agency and on what material they have been inscribed: *not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God; not on stone tablets but on tablets that are human hearts*. An oft-cited passage from Plato's *Phaedrus* provides a detailed exposition of the thesis that "written words" (*logous gegrammenous*, 275D) are but the faint "image" (*eidōlon*) of "the living, breathing word" (*ton logon zōnta kai empsychon*, 276 A). Socrates argued (276 C–E) that truth is not effectively sown "in ink . . . through a pen" (*melani . . . dia kalamou*), in "gardens of letters" (*in grammasi kērous*), but only by "the dialectic method," whereby truth is planted "in a fitting soul" (*psychēn prosēkousan*). In this connection, one may recall that Paul himself regards his own letters as but a poor substitute for his actual presence with those whom he addresses (see, e.g., 10:9-11; 1 Cor 4:14, 18-21; 5:3-5). This point of view corresponds to one frequently expressed by ancient letter writers (see Thraede 1970) and may also reflect, as Rivken suggests (1978:275), Paul's background in Pharisaism, with its concern for the *un*written Torah and for traditions orally conveyed (cf. ibid.:241-43).[28]

This all makes sense to me, and I have quoted it at length as a reminder that interpreters

have found it quite plausible that Paul is influenced by the very type of logocentrism

Derrida analyzed. However, I want to offer some further observations, with an eye toward

Paul's particular form of apocalyptic logocentrism.

I begin by noting that this entire passage is part of an apology. This is apparent from

what I take to be the thesis of 2 Corinthians expressed in 2:15–17. Paul says,

> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are being destroyed; to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is fit for these things? For *we* are not—*like so many*—peddlers of God's word; but in Christ we speak as persons of sincerity, as persons sent from God and standing in his presence.

Recognition that this is the thesis of the letter, and that the passage with which we are

concerned is part of the immediately ensuing first argument in favor of it, clarifies much

about the passage when combined with an awareness of the basic characteristics of

apocalyptic logocentrism. Paul begins by comparing himself and his colleagues to aromas

or fragrances. They are rather airy sorts, and I do not say that just to be funny, but rather

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[28] Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB32a; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 195. On ancient letters more generally, see Hans-Josef Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006).

to call attention to how this characterization already suggests that their activity is *pneumatic* in nature. We hear also, of course, that these are spiritual matters of life and death. Then Paul states the fundamental question, one that goes by so fast that we may miss its crucial significance in the thesis: "Who is fit for these things?" The NAB captures the sense of the question even better when it says, "Who is qualified for this?" The next sentence forcefully answers that question. It is not peddlers of the Word of God who are qualified, but "persons of sincerity . . . persons sent from God and *standing in his presence.*" This motif of standing in his presence is going to be taken up in the ensuing argument in a very creative way, and this is where our theory of religion is most helpful. In apocalyptic logocentrism, the ideal state is unmediated presence. Therefore, the measure of one's success as an apostle, standing in God's presence, is not the ability to mediate, but rather to reflect. In apocalyptic logocentrism, to mediate is to fail, if by mediation one means the performance of some indispensable function that places the mediator permanently between two persons. Such forms of mediation involve re-presenting, but reflection is a matter of presenting or présenting. Therefore, what Paul will go on to find wrong with the peddlers of God's word, Moses the man, *and Moses the text*, is that in one way or another they all function as mediators, not reflectors; as re-presenters, not présenters.

Comparison (*synkrisis*) is a typical strategy in apologetic discourse, and the comparisons here encompass contrasts between Paul and the peddlers of God's word, Paul and Moses, and Paul and Moses' respective ministries, which also happen to involve different types of texts. What is wrong with the peddlers of God's word is exemplified by the super apostles, who are not forms of presence but forms of "simulation" and "substitution," as expressed quite clearly by Paul's other title for them, the pseudo-apostles.

In 2 Cor 11:4, he speaks of those who "preach another Jesus than the one we preached . . . a different spirit from the one you received . . . [and] a different gospel from the one you accepted." These are purveyors of forms of simulation and substitution.[29] In addition, as Paul says repeatedly, they represent something different, not the same.

Moving on to Moses the man, Paul quite shockingly puts him in the same camp as the peddlers of God's word by homologizing their activities, though in a somewhat veiled fashion. I do not limit 3:12–18 to only one interpretation, but I am going to state the one that makes the most sense to me in light of the dynamics of apocalyptic logocentrism. Paul asserts repeatedly in vv. 7–11 that the ministry of death once had *doxa*. *Doxa* can mean many things. Most naturally, in the context one might think of "divine presence." Paul would be saying that the glory of God was only temporarily present with Moses and his covenant, but both have been surpassed by a ministry that has permanent spiritual presence.   However, *doxa* can also mean "reflection," as in a reflected radiance.   So Paul's figurative interpretation of what Moses was trying to do by putting a veil over his face was that he was trying to hide the fact that his ministry was only temporary (v. 13).[30] This makes Moses a (dis)simulator who was trying to substitute his own temporary ministry for the permanent one, much like the peddlers of God's word who preach a different a different Jesus, a different spirit, and a different gospel.

So, as Paul continues his contrast at the beginning of chapter 4, we must ask with whom is he contrasting himself when he says, "We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God"? Is the contrast with the

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[29] Most revealingly, peddlers of God's word rely on actual letters of commendation written with ink rather than living letters written with the Spirit.

[30] This and the following verses, of course, invite comparison with Rom 10:4 where Christ is end of the Law.

peddlers or Moses? Or is it that Moses is the paradigm of their simulation and substitution? Whatever one decides, Paul goes on to state clearly what an ideal apostle does in 4:5-6 when he says, "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 God in the face of Christ." True apostles are reflectors, not mediators, and when the perfect comes, everyone will reflect the same image, the image of the Same, God.

Romans

At the end of Romans 8, Paul waxes eloquent as he asserts that "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (8:38–39). Not only obvious obstacles, but literally every created thing and the very dimensions of the universe will give way to the consummation of im-mediate and eternal love. Since unmediated, total presence is the utopia of Paul's religion, then *all* aspects of the "form of this world" (1 Cor 7:31) are, to quote again from our definition of logocentrism, "forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity." However, they are all "passing away." Paul, consciously or not, was creating a hierarchy of value based on the degree to which any of the forms of this world, seen or unseen, encourage or impede realization of presence. We have already begun to see that these forms include those of apostles. We will soon see more clearly that they include forms of writing.

The logocentric symptoms we have observed so far resonate with a reading of Paul associated with Luther and most fully developed in neo-orthodoxy, especially by Bultmann. Appropriately enough, at the heart of Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, that is, at almost the exact center of the two-volume work, we read the following emphasized statement: "*the salvation-occurrence is nowhere present except in the proclaiming, accosting, demanding, and promising word of preaching*." And immediately Bultmann adds that "A merely 'reminiscent' historical account referring to what happened in the past cannot make the salvation-occurrence visible." Then a few sentences later we read, "Consequently, in the proclamation[,] Christ himself, indeed God Himself, encounters the hearer, and the 'Now' in which the preachèd word sounds forth is the 'Now' of the eschatological occurrence itself (II Cor. 6:2)."[31] "Word" and "presence," along with many equivalent expressions, return repeatedly in tandem in the following thirty pages. References to Romans 10 are frequent,[32] and vv. 6–10 may be characterized as the catalyst of two passages crucial for understanding Bultmann's entire theology, his discussions of faith as "confession" and "hope."[33]

These sections presuppose a reading of Rom 10:6–8 that takes us to the heart of Bultmann's word-presence Christology, i.e., his own Pauline-aided, and Heideggerian-abetted, logocentrism and phonocentrism.[34] One does not require a mediator to ascend

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[31] Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (One Volume Edition; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955) 301-302, italics his.

[32] Ibid., 301, 306, 307, 312, 314 (twice), 316 (twice), 317 (twice), 318 (twice), 319, 320.

[33] Ibid., 317-320.

[34] Derrida assumed a close relationship between Paul and Heidegger, one that sometimes amounts to intellectual plagiarism of the former by the latter. E.g., after exposing Heidegger's "foreclosure" of the Hebrew *ruah* behind his linguistico-historical triad of *pneuma-spiritus-Geist*, Derrida says, "Without being able to invoke here the vast corpus of prophetic texts and their translations, without doing any more than recalling what makes it permissible to read a whole tradition of Jewish though as an inexhaustible thinking about fire; without citing the evidence from the

into heaven or descend into the abyss to make Christ present (vv. 6–7). For Bultmann, this

would no doubt be trying to establish faith by searching for the Christ "according to the

flesh" (2 Cor 5:16), the historical Jesus. Therefore, the "word of proclamation" can be "no

mere report about historical incidents." Instead, grace itself is "*actively present in the

word*," since "*the word is near*" (Rom 10:8). Or, as he already said, "in the proclamation,

Christ himself, indeed God Himself, encounters the hearer," a thought encountered

repeatedly throughout the central sections of this work. Certainly, as Bultmann himself

concedes, he goes beyond Paul in his insistence on the degree to which the "salvation-

occurrence" in the "Now" of the "word of proclamation" eclipses the importance of "the

mere report of historical incidents."[35] This preoccupation with "present-ness," the "Now,"

"self-understanding," "authenticity," etc., reflects Bultmann's well-known debt to

existentialism.[36] Nevertheless, it seems to me that Bultmann is reflecting a comparable

logocentric and phonocentric desire for immediate presence we have been observing in

Paul's own logocentrism, a desire strongly rooted in his apocalypticism. However,

Bultmann's desire is hardly for a presence through the word in the sense Paul would have

approved.[37] Between Paul and Bultmann stands Heidegger's "destruction" of the

metaphysics that would allow for a *real* presence like Paul's Spirit. Heidegger's influence

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Gospels of a pneumatology which has an ineradicable relationship of translation which *ruah*, I will refer only to one distinction, made by Paul in the First Epistle to the Corinthians (2:14), between *pneuma* and *psyche*. Corresponding to the distinction between *ruah* and *néphéch*, it belongs—if it is not its opening—to the theologico-philosophical tradition in which Heidegger continues to interpret the relationship between *Geist* and *Seele*" (*Of Spirit*, 101). This leads to a footnote that links Paul to Luther (137-38). Derrida is exposing the fact that concepts of *Geist* that the Nazi Socialist Heidegger claimed to be only fully realized by German philosophy in the German language were already present in ancient Jewish texts, and that Paul may be the "opening" of the theological-philosophical tradition in which Heidegger stands.

[35] E.g., ibid., 319

[36] For an introduction to his hermeneutic, see the essay collection, *New Testament & Mythology and Other Basic Writings*.

[37] Although his statement that grace is "*actively present in the word*" makes one wonder.

motivates Bultmann to argue erroneously that Paul is already beginning to reject the notion of Spirit "as a material."[38] Nevertheless, what I take to be the real, though not fully realized, insight of Bultmann's (mis)reading is the implication that the essence of Paul's apocalypticism is a desire for im-mediate presence. What remains true to Paul is the notion that mouth and ear is the proper medium for this message.[39] The "word which is near" in Rom 10:8 is defined not as Scripture, but as "the word of faith which we preach." It is "on the lips" and "in the heart." So while Scripture can play a corroborating role in presenting the "word which is near," Paul presupposed that this word is only available through proclamation (Rom 10:14–17): "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the preaching of Christ" (10:17). Here we begin to sense Paul's phonologism and phonocentrism. Scripture on its own cannot bear "the Word." The voice, "preaching," is privileged over writing. Therefore, both consequently and necessarily, faith comes through *hearing*.

In 2 Corinthians 3, life under the new covenant is pictured as a process of being metamorphosized into the image of the Lord from one degree of glory to another (3:18), a process that will be completed when he appears (cf. Phil 3:21). Therefore, what might we expect Paul's attitude to be towards a covenant "engraved in letters on stone" (2 Cor 3:7)? The answer is implicit when he reinscribes Deut 30:12–14 as a text about the Word of faith, not the law (Rom 10:6–8). In context, Deut 30:12–14 is precisely about the nearness, the present-ness, and the *life*-giving or *death*-dealing *pharmakon*-like effects of the law. No one

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[38] *Theology*, 334. Like Beker, I cannot agree with Bultmann that Paul's apocalyptic worldview can be demythologized while staying true to his thought. See J. Christiaan Beker's critique in *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 140-143, 146-149.

[39] Even though, as noted above, the logocentric superiority of speech over writing is no guarantee that the word will not be empty.

needs to ascend into heaven or cross the sea to obtain it, for it is "in your mouth and in your heart." For Paul, what is in the mouth and heart is the spiritual presence of Christ. Paul has transferred the life-giving or death-dealing present-ness of the law to the "Word of faith" (Rom 10:8; cf. 2 Cor 2:16). The Word supplements by filling up what is lacking in the law— it is the "goal" prepared for but unreachable through the law. In addition, by taking the law's place, it is the law's "end."

Apocalyptic Logocentrism and Writing

Does all this apply to the law only? What about Scripture? Paul is, overall, more positive toward Scripture than the law, and some interpreters have emphasized the difference between letter (*gramma*) and script (*graphē*). To be sure, they are not exactly the same thing, but the contrast between the two has been exaggerated. The possibility of a metonymical overlap between "Script," "Scripture," "Law," "Old Covenant," and "Moses" tends to be ignored. For example, since Richard Hays, using texts like Gal 3:8, wants to claim that "Paul thinks of *Graphē* (Scripture) as alive and active," he must radically separate it from *gramma*.[40] Nevertheless, Paul says a veil lies over the Israelites' minds when the old covenant is read in 2 Cor 3:14 and when *Moses* is read in the next verse.[41] Are we really to suppose that the *gramma*, the old covenant, and "the read Moses" are easily separable from one another, or all three from *Graphē*? One wonders where the Law (*nomos*) would fit into this neat dichotomy of *gramma/graphē*, especially when confronted

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[40] Hays, *Echoes*, 106.
[41] Indeed, Hays himself, in a brilliantly suggestive passage, declares that "a coherent reading of 2 Cor 3:12–18 is possible only if we recognize that in these verses a metaphorical fusion occurs in which Moses *becomes* the Torah," and shortly thereafter speaks of "the dreamlike transfiguration of Moses from man into text" (Hays, *Echoes,* 144–45, italics his).

with a text like Gal 3:22–23 where the very same constraining function is attributed to both *graphē* and *nomos*.[42] Or what about Rom 3:19–20? Here Paul clearly refers to the immediately preceding list of denunciations quoted mainly from the Psalms (also Ecclesiastes, Proverbs, Isaiah, and Leviticus). Yet in doing so, he says, "Now we know that whatever *the law* says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be accountable to God. For no flesh will be justified in his sight by works of the law, since through the law comes knowledge of sin." "The law," in this case, is a metonym for Scripture.

The errors attendant upon turning the *gramma/graphē* distinction into a firm exegetical principle are exemplified by Schrenk when he says, "The word which is near (R. 10:8) is not the *gramma* but Scripture, which is self-attesting through the Spirit of Christ."[43] In point of fact, the very verse cited, Rom 10:8, explicitly defines "the Word which is near" not as Scripture, but as "the Word of faith which we preach." It is "on the lips" and "in the heart." So while Scripture can play a corroborating role in presenting the "Word which is near," Paul presupposes that this Word is only available through proclamation (Rom 10:14–17): "So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the *preaching* of Christ" (10:17). Paul's phonologism and phonocentrism are readily apparent. Scripture cannot bear "the Word" in the full sense. Therefore, the voice, "preaching," is privileged over writing. Moreover, both consequently and necessarily, faith comes through *hearing.*

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[42] See Bernardin Schneider, "The Meaning of St. Paul's Thesis 'The Letter and the Spirit,' " *CBQ* 15 (1953): 163–207, which shows, on the basis of a survey of the use of *gramma* before and during Paul's time, that it was used for particular written laws and for written law taken as a whole (188–91).
[43] Gerhard Schrenk, "*gramma/graphē*," *TDNT* 1:768.

Speaking for the moment with a Johannine accent, Paul no longer searches the scriptures thinking, "in them you have life" (John 5:39). This is because he has discovered the source of life is not a text but an apocalypse (Gal 1:12), an encounter with a living being, a Spirit.[44] Paul knew, however, that not everyone was privileged to have such a direct experience. How then could they experience something salvific? Through "the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the likeness of God" (2 Cor 4b). I have been capitalizing Gospel throughout this essay because for Paul it has divine power, divine presence, quite unlike writing. Though one may read the old covenant or Moses for centuries, Christ will never be found there (2 Cor 3:14-15; cf. 1 Cor 3:6-12). The problem is not that *the text* is veiled, hiding Christ the spiritual signified within a living Text, but rather that the mind of *the reader* is hardened. Only by the reader being equipped with something outside the cosmic (textual) apparatus, *only by first turning away from the text* towards the Lord can the promise of Scripture be recognized (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3-4; Rom 1:2; 3:21; 15:4). Is it any surprise that the Lord the reader turns to *is* the Spirit (2 Cor 3:17-18)? For Paul, in a certain way, spiritual exegesis must be spiritual eisegesis. The "first installment" of the Spirit (*arabōna*, 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5) is the source of her reader competency. Paul's is a spiritual hermeneutic (1 Cor 2: 9-16).[45]

Spirit in Paul is an active material power that can invade and transform people, giving them abilities they never had before.[46] It is nothing less than the active presence and power of

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[44] On Paul's apocalyptic mysticism, see Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 34-71.

[45] See discussion in *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 95-101.

[46] "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit . . ." (Rom 15:19); "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power . . ." (1 Cor 2:4).

God.[47] That is why Paul asks those who want to be under the Law, "Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by *hearing* with faith" (Gal 3:5). "Works of the law," which in the context of Galatians is primarily a fleshly writing on the flesh, is opposed to "hearing with faith," a spiritual writing on the heart.[48] *For Paul, no Life, no Power, no Presence, is ever to be expected from writing, the letter, the law.* If it were, the law would be against the promises of God, which is also to say, in conflict with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone: "for if a law had been given *which could make alive*, then righteousness would indeed be by the law" (Gal 3:21). What makes righteousness possible? What is able to "make alive"? The Spirit. Why can the law not make alive? Because the law is devoid of Spirit. For Paul, *there is nothing in the text*. Recognition of this point is crucial. If we miss this, we will be tempted to turn him into Philo or an Alexandrian church father, neither of whom fully shared his apocalyptic pessimism towards the things—even the good things—of this world. Paul does not search for the Spirit in the Letter.[49] The reason he does not emerges from the preceding discussion: *the text has no agency, no power, and no life, of its own*. Paul is no less logocentric and phonocentric in this matter than Luther, Heidegger, and Bultmann.

It is crucial to see that Paul's allegory in 2 Cor 3 does not begin with the Spirit penetrating the veil. First, the mind must be penetrated by the Spirit conveyed by the Gospel through the mouth and ear. There is a quite simple apocalyptic logocentric "common sense" going on here. Since a text is a material testimony to the absence of the author, and in this case the absence of the Author of Life, one is deceived if one thinks that

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[47] "And we have received *not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God*, that we might understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (1 Cor 2:12).

[48] "He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God" (Rom 2:29). See discussion in Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, [].

[49] See Wai-Shing Chau, *The Letter and the Spirit: A History of Interpretation from Origen to Luther* (American University Studies 7.167; New York: Peter Lang, 1995).

life is present in the text or is mediated through the text. It is as if one's mind is hardened

or a veil lies over one's heart and mind (3:14-15). In short, once the veil is removed and

one stands in the presence of Christ through the Spirit, one sees that the text had nothing

salvific to offer. One can see that when "Moses writes that the one who practices the

righteousness which is based on the law shall live by it" (Rom 10:5; cf. Gal 3:12; Lev 18:5),

it is a deception.[50]

I remain convinced that J. Louis Martyn is on the right track concerning Lev 18:5.[51]

Martyn suggests that what Paul is trying to say to the Galatians through the example of the

scriptural contradiction set forth in 3:11–12 can be expressed in an emended form of 1

John 4:1: "Beloved [Galatians, in light of the Teachers' work in your midst], do not believe

every spirit [or every text], but test the spirits [and the texts] to see whether they are from

God."[52] In the same vein, he also suggests that "the wording of 1 Cor 7:19 itself suggests

that Paul uses the expression 'the commandments *of God*' because he presupposes

something he does not explicitly state: Not all the commandments come from God!"[53]

Would such an idea be unthinkable? Recently while reading Philo's *Questions and

Answers on Exodus*, I was struck by his answer to a question concerning Exod 24:13: "Why

does Moses, who has been summoned alone, go up not alone but with Joshua?"[54] One of his

answers is that,

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[50] See discussion in *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 122-26. See also Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith* (London and New York: T & T Clark, 2004), 291-96.

[51] J. Louis Martyn, "The Textual Contradiction Between Habakkuk 2:4 and Leviticus 18:5," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 183-208.

[52] J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, 334. On the fascinating possibility of explaining the divided voice of the law presupposed by Paul on the basis of a plurality of angelic authors, see Francis Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 280-81. I am, however, offering a simpler explanation.

[53] Ibid., 519.

[54] *QE*, 1:43.

> Rightly, therefore, does he go up as an assurance (*eis pistin*) of two most necessary things: one, of the election of the contemplative race, and the other, that the Law should be considered not as an invention of the human mind but as a divine command and divine words.[55]

The second reason answers a thought that could occur to any thinking person possessing a healthy skepticism. Perhaps Moses did not receive the law from God while on the mountain, but wrote it himself. Philo counters the idea by suggesting that Joshua was taken along "as a proof" that this was not the case. Paul does not suggest that the law was the invention of Moses. But perhaps he does suggest something else that also could have occurred to any thinking person possessing a healthy skepticism in an age quite familiar with the tendency of scribes to alter texts. Paul could be suggesting that Moses sometimes mixed his own words in with God's words. Perhaps we should not only speak of "the textual contradiction" in the law, but of "the textual corruption" in it.

Notice that after Paul has made his subtle shift from stone tablets to the Moses read in his own day, he also restates the candor vs. concealment theme of 2 Cor 3:12-13 in a new way: "Therefore, having this ministry as ones who have received mercy, we do not act badly.[56] On the contrary, we have given up disgraceful concealments, not practicing cunning nor *corrupting* the word of God, but rather by a manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience before God" (2 Cor 4:1-2). This is the *coup de grâce* of Paul's unflattering comparison of himself and his ministry with Moses, and a low to deliver against the scribe *par excellance*. Moses the scribe corrupted the text, the word of God. What would be Paul's prime example of such a textual corruption? He says, "*Moses writes* concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that comes from faith *says* . . ." (Rom

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[55] Ibid.

[56] On the translation of *egkakeō* as "act badly," see *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 118.

10:5-6a). This happens to be the only place in Paul's letters where we read, "Moses writes." I would not have been surprised to find him use the expression elsewhere.[57] But even if he had, we would still have to read this occurrence contextually. What Moses *writes* is contrasted with "what the righteousness that comes from faith *says*." And what Moses writes in Lev 18:5 is to his advantage since it lends a salvific purpose and permanency to his ministry God never intended it to have. Yet Paul's charge here seems rather ironic given that he himself is notorious for rewriting the Writing in ways that magnify the importance of his ministry!

None of this is to say that Paul did not consider most of Scripture to be Scripture, "the oracles of God" (Rom 3:2). He certainly believed that God said most of what God is reported to have said there. Nevertheless, these archived words of God are not the "Word of God" for Paul.[58] The Word of God is something Paul hears and proclaims in the present. Once one grasps the logic of Paul's apocalyptic logocentrism, debating if Paul has a negative attitude towards the law (*nomos*) but a positive one towards the Scripture (*graphē*) is beside the point. From the standpoint of apocalyptic logocentrism, even if the first stone tablets written by the finger of God himself had not been destroyed, they would still have been powerless because what brings life is the Spirit, the presence of God; they would instead mark the absence of that life-giving Presence. What is "alive and active" for Paul is God, not scripture.

The paper is a work in progress, so at this point I cannot write a proper conclusion. To sum it up as it is, I have presented apocalyptic logocentrism as a theory of Paul's religion. What Paul looks forward to is an unmediated and uninterrupted experience of the

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[57] However, is it not fascinating that the name Moses occurs only eight times in Paul, and that these are limited to Romans and the Corinthian letters?

[58] See further discussion in *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 133.

presence of Christ: *parousia.* To be in this presence is to be in the presence of God, and to be fully self-present. Longing for pure presence is the underlying cause of logocentrism and one that Paul fully exhibits through a variety of symptoms. Paul's eschatology, far from insulating him from logocentrism, actually explains why his case of it is especially acute. Once one grasps the logic of Paul's religion, his apocalyptic logocentrism, it comes as no surprise that he exhibits an ambivalent attitude towards writing in general, including Scripture, and that he favors the living "breath," *pneuma*, of divinely inspired speech, Word, Gospel.

From 2 Corinthians 3–4 it is easy to see where Paul locates himself and his covenant in relation to each of the logocentric binary oppositions: "speech over writing, immediacy over distance, and identity over difference." Paul is one of the "ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of Spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (3:6). These words apply no less to Scripture than to Letter. Does this mean that Paul was a Harnack where Scripture is concerned? No, it just means he knows that Scripture is one of the forms of this world that can either be used to forward or impede the goal of presence. Scripture for Paul is what you make of it. If you try to make it a source of life, a way of salvation, or means of righteousness, then it becomes one of the "forms of absence, ambiguity, simulation, substitution, or negativity." If you remove the veil and see that it is not a means of righteousness, a way of salvation, or a source of life, then it becomes "the oracles of God," "holy and just and good," and even "spiritual."