

CHAPTER 5

JESUS AND PAUL

Because they proclaim Jesus as the embodiment of the divine presence and the source of authentic holiness, the Four Gospels are a major reason why the New Testament is considered “sacred” by Christians. Through the Gospels, the believing Christian encounters the person of the Risen Christ who embodies that sacred reality. The same is true of the writings of Paul the Apostle, although in a manner quite different from the narrative format of the Gospels. As we noted earlier, Paul’s letters form a substantial part of the New Testament writings.¹ Combined with the attention to Paul in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles, the Apostle stands as a colossus on the New Testament landscape.

Interest in Paul continues to absorb modern biblical scholarship. What precisely were the circumstances that prompted Paul to move from being a persecutor of Jesus’ followers to an ardent proponent of the gospel?² Why did Paul from the outset feel compelled to proclaim Christ to the Gentile world? What was the nature of Paul’s relationship with his Jewish heritage? To what degree was his theology influenced by Judaism or by Greco-Roman philosophy? What is the chronology of his life and the occasions and motivation for writing his letters? How were his letters composed and circulated to various Christian communities? These and many other such questions command the attention of contemporary Pauline studies.³

Here, too, as has been the case throughout our study, there is an understandable divergence between those who analyze the Pauline writings from a purely historical or ‘secular’ viewpoint and those who engage the Apostle’s writing from the perspective of Christian faith. Many scholars working from an exclusively historical approach stress the “discontinuity” between the exalted Christ figure who is the central focus of Paul’s writings and the presumed historical reality of the first century Galilean Jew, Jesus of Nazareth. For many, Paul should be considered the “second founder” of Christianity, one whose dramatic portrayal of Jesus as a divinely exalted figure and savior of the world completely transformed the historical reality of who Jesus actually was, and laid the foundation for Christianity as a world religion. For those who also view Paul’s writings as an essential part of the New Testament and therefore as sacred, find in Paul an inspired grasp of the profound identity of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, and consequently as a privileged guide to authentic Christian life. From this viewpoint, Paul is not the “second Founder” of Christianity but one who was able to articulate for posterity the profound identity, God-given mission, and enduring significance of the First and only Founder, Jesus himself. In Paul’s writings, as in the Gospels, the believing reader can encounter the sacred.

Paul’s Biography

¹ See above, pp. xx.

² Note that the term “gospel” can refer to the entirety of the Christian message as proclaimed by Paul and others as it does here, or to the written “Gospels, namely the four narratives that tell the story of Jesus.

³ See, for example, the works of James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul & His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2nd ed., 2017); Udo Schnelle, *Apostle Paul: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Michael Wolter, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2015).

The basic components of Paul's life can be deduced both from his own letters and from corroborating details in the Acts of the Apostles. Paul himself notes his deep roots in Judaism, as he informs the Philippians, one "circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil 3:5-6). Acts spells out the "zeal" Paul refers to, portraying him as a relentless persecutor of the early followers of Jesus and someone who, even as a young man, approved the execution of Stephen the first Christian martyr (see Acts 8:1-3), a past history that would continue to be an embarrassment for Paul in his later life. In Gal 1:13 Paul speaks bluntly of his former attitude: "You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it" (see also 1 Cor 15:9, "For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."). But, as both Paul and Luke testify, Paul would experience a profound change of heart due to a visionary encounter with the Risen Christ (see Acts 9:1-30; Gal 1:13-24)—an event, as we will note below, caused Paul to profoundly re-think his understanding of God and the dynamics of God's relationship to the world.

Although Paul traces his call to be "the apostle to the Gentiles" to his first encounter with the Risen Christ, his missionary work took some time to untrack. After spending some time in Damascus and the surrounding region of Arabia and a brief but somewhat tense visit to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem, Paul went back to his hometown of Tarsus in southern Asia Minor (Gal 1:18—2:10). According to Acts, it was Barnabas, a revered figure in the Jerusalem church, who retrieved Paul from Tarsus and brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). In this major city, the third largest in the Roman Empire at that time, there was already a community of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Paul no doubt experienced among these Christians a deeper formation as a follower of Jesus. The presence of both Jews and Gentiles in the Christian community of Antioch probably also strengthened Paul's commitment to bring the gospel to the Gentile world.

After a year or so in Antioch, the community there commissioned Paul and Barnabas to set out on their first missionary journey, first to Cyprus and then into the heart of Asia Minor (Acts 13). Paul and his companions seemed to have followed a typical pattern when entering a new town or region. They would go first to a local synagogue and proclaim the gospel message to the congregation—a congregation often composed not only of Jews but also with some Gentile "Godfearers" who admired Judaism but did not choose to become full proselytes (the centurion in Luke 7:1-10 seems to be such a person; also Paul refers to those, who along with the children of Abraham, "fear God" see Acts 13:11,26. Often Paul's preaching would lead to a division of the house—some Jews and god fearers accepting his message and others taking offense at it, in some instances leading to conflict and violence. Thus, a pattern of rejection and suffering that Paul would later incorporate into his desire to be like his crucified master.

For the next several years, Paul and his fellow missionaries (Paul never seems to have traveled alone) would travel throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Achaia proclaiming the gospel message and founding local communities of Christians. Some estimate that Paul may have traveled some 10,000 miles on foot, on the sea, and perhaps occasionally on horseback or on a donkey in the pursuit of his mission. Acts traces the westward movement of Paul, from the first foray into south central Asia Minor (Acts 13), then a second journey further west that would, under divine inspiration, bring him to Macedonia (Acts 15-16), with important stops at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. After another outbreak of opposition, Paul moved south to Athens, then to Corinth and ultimately to the major city of Ephesus on the west coast of Asia

Minor. A third and final missionary journey would have Paul re-visit several of these communities before undertaking his final and fateful voyage to Jerusalem (Acts 18-22). There, according to Acts, a disturbance by Paul's opponents in the Jerusalem temple would lead to his being put under protective custody by Roman authorities and to confinement in Caesarea Maritima, the coastal city that was the seat of Roman governance in Judea. After two years, Paul's appeal as a Roman citizen to have his case heard in the imperial capital, would bring him in Roman custody by ship on a dramatic sea voyage to Malta and then Italy and finally to Rome where Acts leaves Paul under house arrest (Acts 28:11-31). Acts concludes with Paul confined in Rome yet still evangelizing both Jews and Gentiles. It is presumed that some time after this, Paul was martyred in Rome, probably under the Emperor Nero.

As we noted earlier Paul's commitment to keeping in contact with the various Christian communities he had evangelized would lead to the composition of his various letters (with the exception of Rome which Paul had not evangelized or yet visited). The circumstances of each community, the questions and concerns they raised, and Paul's reflections on his own Christian experience would shape the content and spirit of these pastoral letters. And it is from these that one must attempt to stitch together Paul's overall theological perspective. This is certainly the case with those letters that are undisputedly authored by Paul himself: Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon (the latter addressed to a leader of a local house church rather than directly to a community). [As noted previously, there is some debate whether Paul himself or a later disciple of Paul writing in his name composed Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians and the Pastoral Letters of I & II Timothy and Titus. We will consider the content of these letters to Paul's overall theology below.]

Paul's Theology

Our goal here is not to attempt a synthesis of Paul's entire robust and challenging theology, but to focus primarily on his portrayal of the figure of Jesus as the ultimate warrant for the sacred character of his writings. Paul's perspective was shaped by multiple factors: his strong Jewish faith and the Old Testament scriptures, his absorption of the Greco-Roman culture of the world in which he lived and was educated, his formation as a Christian, and the experience and problems of the Christian communities with which he was engaged. There is no doubt that having to wrestle with the questions and problems of his fellow Christians deepened Paul's own reflection and understanding of what faith in Christ meant. But, above all, Paul's profound spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ was the defining factor for the Apostle's theology.

The Starting Point: Paul's Inaugural Experience

Where to start in sketching Paul's theology? Perhaps the best way to enter into Paul's Christology is to begin with his inaugural experience--his encounter with the Risen Christ. In emphasizing for the community of Galatia his credentials as an apostle, that is where Paul himself begins: "I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11-12). By a "revelation of Jesus Christ" Paul refers to his visionary encounter with Christ narrated both in Acts and by Paul himself in at least two of his letters (Gal 1:15-16; I Cor 15:8). The Greek word Paul uses for this "revelation" is *apokalypsis*, implying some kind of revelation coming from an outside source rather than a deduction coming Paul's own reflections. In Acts that encounter is described by Luke in dramatic fashion (see Acts 9:1-18). Paul, as Luke vividly describes, "breathing threats and murder against the disciples" is on his way to Damascus, authorized by the High Priest in Jerusalem and the leader of the Synagogue in Damascus to arrest Christians and bring them back

to Jerusalem. On the way, he is stunned by a vision of the Risen Christ and thrown to the ground. Jesus challenges Paul, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Blind and disoriented Paul is sent to Damascus where the Lord had already instructed Ananias, a Christian, to heal Paul. Ananias is hesitant, given Paul’s reputation: “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” In response, the Lord reveals Paul’s destiny: “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

Paul is healed when Ananias lays his hands on him, both a gesture of healing and a sign of his commissioning as an apostle. Paul himself springs into action. After staying a few days with the disciples in Damascus, Luke notes that Paul “immediately...began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’” (Acts 9:19-20). Controversy follows Paul throughout Acts and it begins here; his Jewish opponents threaten his life and Paul must escape from Damascus somewhat ignominiously, lowered down in a basket through a hole in the city wall! Shortly after, Paul goes to Jerusalem where the Christians there remain fearful of him until Barnabas tells the marvelous account of his conversion. Later, Paul’s zealous preaching about Jesus causes some of the “Hellenists” (that is, Greek speaking Jews) to react violently, so the members of the Jerusalem church send him off to safety in his hometown of Tarsus in southern Asia Minor (Acts 19:20-30).

This dramatic account of Paul’s conversion contrasts with Paul’s own reflections on his inaugural experience in his letter to the Galatians (see Gal 1:11-24). Paul is frustrated with the Galatian community because they apparently have been persuaded by some Jewish Christians who came to their community after Paul’s visit and claimed that a Gentile must first become a Jewish proselyte (i.e., accepting circumcision for men; adopting a kosher diet, etc.) before one could be a follower of Jesus. This was a position Paul rejected—believing that through faith in Christ, Gentiles had full access to Christian discipleship on a par with Jewish Christians. To bolster his response in his letter, Paul begins by asserting his apostolic credentials. His role and authority as an apostle of Jesus Christ came from a direct encounter with the Risen Christ, as the account in the Acts of the Apostles also claims.

But Paul’s own reflection on that definitive moment has a much different tone than the drama in Acts about the encounter on the way to Damascus. In Galatians Paul begins by confessing his former role as a persecutor of the church (corroborating the view of Acts): “You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism. I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors” (Gal 1:13-14). Paul describes his turning point as a “call” from God: “But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus.” (Gal 1:15-17).

There are several striking features in Paul’s description of this experience. In speaking of God who “had set me apart before I was born,” Paul may be alluding to the way the Old Testament figures, Jeremiah and Isaiah, spoke of their prophetic vocations. Jeremiah speaks of his prophetic destiny as a primordial call from God: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jer 1:4-5). Isaiah, too, speaks of a prophetic call before he was born: “The Lord called me before I

was born, while I was in my mother's womb he named me..." (Isa 49:1,5). In both of these Old Testament passages, the universal horizon of their prophetic missions is stated; Jeremiah is appointed to be a "prophet to the nations" and in Isaiah, God also expands the horizon of the prophet's mission: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6). In Galatians, Paul, too, traces his call to go to the Gentiles to the very moment of his call from God: "God... was pleased to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15).

Notice, too, that Paul describes this experience with the same word used in Acts: "God ... was pleased to reveal (*apokalypsai*) his Son to me." In both instances Paul refers to this "revelation" as a unique experience breaking in on him from the outside. In Paul's listing of resurrection appearances in I Cor 15:3-11, he notes that he was the last in line but that the Risen Christ also "was seen" or "appeared" to him. Here Paul uses the passive voice of the verb "to see," stressing that his encounter with the Risen Christ was an experience that originated with God and not from Paul's own musings.

Luke and Paul himself describe this inaugural encounter with the Risen Christ in different literary modes. Luke's account emphasizes a sharp and rapid turn in Paul's experience, from being an overly zealous persecutor of Jesus' followers to becoming an ardent proclaimer of the gospel. Paul's own reflection in Galatians on this moment describes it as a "call" or vocation, an awakening of a God-given destiny that was his from the first moment of his existence. Nevertheless, there are important convergences in the two accounts. Both are triggered by an encounter or "revelation" of the Risen Jesus that profoundly effects Paul, changing in dramatic fashion the trajectory of his life and thought. Both Luke and Paul himself trace the beginning of his vocation as an apostle to the Gentiles to this very moment. Paul did not gradually take on this role later in his Christian experience, even if he did in fact learn more about what was entailed. But from the very outset, Paul reminds the Galatians, he was called by God to preach the gospel to Gentiles (as well as Jews).

Equally important is the fact that Paul apparently had not met Jesus of Nazareth in person; his first encounter is with the Risen Jesus who has triumphed over death, death by crucifixion. The "surprise" for Paul was not the possibility of resurrection—as a Pharisee (see Phil 3:5) Paul would believe that at the final judgment, God would raise the just who had died to a new life, a common conviction of the Pharisee party (see, for example, Act 23:6-10 where Luke notes that the Pharisees, contrary to the Sadducees another major faction, believed in resurrection.). What was confounding for Paul must have been the realization that the Risen Christ was also the *crucified* Christ. How could one who was a condemned criminal, a threat to public order, an agitator who had endangered the Jewish Passover pilgrims by his actions in the Temple, one who suffered the most ignominious forms of capital punishment and hung on a cross naked for all to witness—how could this one be the Chosen of God, the Messiah, the beloved Son of God claimed by Christian faith?

The fundamental reality of a Crucified and Risen Christ—a reality that now because of his own experience he could not deny—is what would transform Paul in a radical way. This awareness of God working through the Crucified and Risen Christ permeates all of Paul's letters and is the fundamental key to his theology. This would lead Paul, not to reject his religious heritage, but to view it in a new way. Paul was confronted with the paradox of how the God of Israel works in the world—in a way far different from human calculation. God does not use overwhelming power to make his presence felt but works through what humans often calculate

as “weakness”: acts of selfless service, a spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness, giving one’s life for the sake of others.. Paul wrestles with this “divine logic” in the opening chapter of his First letter to the Corinthians. Learning that some of the house churches in Corinth were quarreling with each other, Paul turns to the his proclamation of the crucified Christ: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength” (I Cor 1:22-25).

While this profound realization is a turning point for Paul, it was also not without continuity with the God of the Hebrew Scriptures, the God Paul the Jew worshipped all his life. The awesome God of Israel also embraced the poor and the outcasts with a particular love. As Deuteronomy reminded Israel, its choice as God’s people was not because of its prowess or accomplishments but because it was “the least” of nations (Deut 7:7), A constant motif running through the Scriptures is that God favors the “widow, the orphan, and the stranger”—each representative of the vulnerable and powerless people that God care for. Thus the realization that God would work through a crucified and powerless Messiah as judged by human standards already had echoes in the Old Testament.

Paul and the Crucified Christ

One of the most evident consequences for Paul of his visionary inaugural encounter was an intense and life-long spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ. This relationship became the center and driving force of his life. A couple of quotations from his letters illustrates this. In writing to the church at Philippi, a community that Paul evidently favored, the apostle considers his relationship with Christ more precious than anything else in his life, even his deep and lasting bond with his Jewish heritage:

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil 3:7-11)

Paul continues by affirming that growing in his relationship with Christ is the goal of his entire life and he urges his fellow Christians at Philippi to do likewise. Paul was not hesitant in asserting that his own spiritual life should become the pattern for the lives of those he addresses in his letters, as in 1 Cor 11:1 where he tells the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.” Such exhortations no doubt was one of the major reasons Paul’s letters were treasured by subsequent Christian communities.

Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind; and if you think differently about anything, this too God will reveal to you. Only let us hold fast to what we have attained. Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. For many live as

enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved. (Phil 3:12-4:1).

Paul's ardent love for Christ is evident in these passages from the Letter to the Philippians. Every other aspect of his life he considers "rubbish" compared to his relationship with Jesus Christ. Throughout his letters Paul uses a phrase that captures the intensity of this relationship for him. He speaks of being "in Christ," of being immersed in Christ, or of Christ being "in him" over 170 times in his letters. A famous passage from his Letter to the Galatians reflects this: "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:19-20).

Paul's relationship with Christ was not generic but had a specific content and meaning. For Paul, as with the entire New Testament, the heart of Jesus' mission was revealed, paradoxically, in his death and resurrection. The condemnation and death of Jesus was the outcome of his mission of healing, of confrontation with evil, of his association with those on the margins, and his bold proclamation of the "reign of God." As we noted above, the crucifixion of Jesus was an emphatic "no" to him and his cause on the part of those who condemned him, but, from the perspective of the New Testament, through the power of God Jesus was liberated from death and exalted to the right hand of God.⁴ Because Christian faith viewed Jesus as the Messiah and the Son of God, the destiny of Jesus in overpowering the force of death revealed the destiny of all humanity.

For Paul, then, being in an intense relationship with the crucified and risen Christ meant that Paul, too, would experience dying and rising. He would share in the experience of Christ by being united with him. Through faith in Jesus and by the experience of baptism, Paul believed that Christians were radically liberated from death and destined for life with God. Paul speaks eloquently of this in his Letter to the Romans:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. (Rom 5:8-10)

Paul follows this passage with his extended comparison between Adam, the first human ancestor as presented in Genesis, and Jesus, the "new" Adam representative of a redeemed and transformed humanity. Through the sin of Adam, a heritage of sin and mortality burdens all subsequent human generations. But through the death and resurrection of Jesus, the "Second Adam," that is, the new representative human being and Son of God, the heritage of sin and death is definitively broken.

⁴ See above, chapter on Jesus and Gospels, p. xx.

Paul returns to this fundamental dynamic in his relationship to the crucified and risen Christ in a later passage in Romans:

Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. For whoever has died is freed from sin. But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus. (Rom 6:5-11).

For Paul, the ultimate basis for hope was the enduring love of God revealed through the death of Jesus “for us” and his triumph over death. One of the most eloquent of Paul’s reflections on this is found at a climactic point in his Letter to the Romans:

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For 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. (Rom 8:31-39).

Paul’s View of History

Paul’s conviction that God was saving the world through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ was the lens through which the Apostle viewed all of reality—not only his own personal destiny but that of the world itself. Implicit in Paul’s writings is a view of history drawn from the Jewish Scriptures but now centered around Christ. The account of human origins portrayed in Genesis marks the starting point for Paul: God’s creation of the universe, with the formation of the human being, male and female, at its apex. The human is unique because alone among the creatures God fashioned, the human is created “in the image and likeness” of God (Gen 1:26), able to respond to God in love and also having responsibility for creation itself. The idyllic beginning of human history takes a tragic turn with the sin of Adam and Eve and introduces a heritage of violence and alienation, spelled out in the stories of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, the fratricide of Cain against his brother Abel, and climaxing in the flood that threatens to destroy all of creation. God relents because of Noah’s innocence and God initiates a covenant with Noah and humanity, promising to restore the world and to never destroy creation again.

This basic account sets the stage for Paul’s view of history. In the opening chapters of his Letter to the Romans, Paul describes the lingering plight of humanity. Gentiles could have found God in the beauty of the natural world, but their vision was clouded by the legacy of sin (see Rom 1:18-25). God’s chosen people, the Jews, were blessed by the gift of the Law God

entrusted to Moses. The law gave the Jews moral awareness of God's will but for them, too, the power of sin prevented them from true obedience to God's law. The end result is that all of humanity—both Gentile and Jew—is in the grip of sin: “What then? Are we (i.e., the Jews) better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin...” (Rom 3:9).

“Sin” for Paul was not confined to individual immoral actions but was conceived of as a “power,” a legacy of infidelity, injustice, and violence that holds all humanity in its grip. Paul's famous soliloquy in Romans 7 illustrates this point:

For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of the flesh, sold into slavery under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do what is good, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with my mind I am a slave to the law of God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin.

Paul speaks here not in autobiographical terms about his own experience as such but as a spokesperson for all humanity that finds itself under the power of sin and unable to break free.

For Paul, the turning point in this history of sin's domination of humanity comes with the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus experiences the withering power of death but through the power of God breaks the grip of death and becomes the pattern of the movement from death to life for all who believe in him. Paul's comparison of the two “Adams” elaborated in Romans makes this point:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned...—sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. Yet death exercised dominion from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who is a type of the one who was to come. But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Rom 5:12-19).

The liberation from the grip of sin and death effected through the death and resurrection of Jesus also sets the pattern for the future of humanity. Paul's vision of the future is eloquently

stated in chapter 8 of Romans. Paul foresees that the power of God's Spirit unleashed in the world through the death and resurrection will ultimately lead to the full redemption of all creation. This extended vision of the future comes as the summit of Paul's review of human history--its plight because of sin and its liberation through the death and resurrection of Christ:

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies...

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For 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.

Thus, the pattern of Jesus' own destiny—through the power of God overcoming death and transformed into abundant and everlasting life—becomes the pattern for the ultimate future of those who believe in him. Humanity now lives "in the meantime"—that is, between the radical experience of being set free from the power of sin and the enjoyment of full life in the future with God. The residue of sin's power in the world causes lingering struggle and the need for moral vigilance but, in Paul's view, the fundamental issue is settled.

The Fate of Israel

For Paul, the gathering of the nations to Christ belongs to this “meantime;” this is the very purpose and urgency of his own God-given commission given to him from the first moment he encountered the Risen Christ (see his deduction in Rom 10:14-17). The will of God, Paul declares, is that all who believe will be saved: “The Scripture says, ‘No one who believes in him will be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the lord shall be saved.’” (Rom 10:11-13).

Yet Paul was faced with the realization that most of his fellow Jews, God’s chosen people Israel, seemed not to respond to the call of the gospel as Paul had. This prompts one of the most agonizing reflections in all of Paul letters. Despite his ardent love for Christ, he says he would be willing “to be accursed and cut off from Christ” for the sake of his own people, “my kindred according to the flesh” (see Rom 9:1-5). Wrestling with this paradox takes up the whole of chapters 9-11 of Paul’s letter. Perhaps, he muses, the resistance of Israel to faith in Christ enabled the mission to the Gentiles to flourish. Or, conversely, the positive response of the Gentiles to faith in Christ may have been intended to make Israel jealous and entice Israel to come in. In any case, Paul is convinced that all Israel will be saved “for the gifts and the calling God [to Israel] are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). Paul’s final solution is the realization that the ultimate destiny of both Jews and Gentiles rests with God’s infinite mercy:

Just as you [i.e., the Gentiles] were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience [i.e. Israel], so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all. O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

Thus, the panorama of Paul’s view of history is complete. Its starting point is in God’s creation of the universe with the human being, male and female, as its crowning moment. But the first ancestors, Adam and Eve, fall prey to the power of sin and death with dire consequences for all human history. After the devastating primeval flood, the Bible’s view of human history stretches from Adam through Abraham and the patriarchs and then to Moses. Moses is God’s chosen liberator, leading the people out of slavery in Egypt and receiving from God the gift of the Law to his people Israel, a consequence of the covenant God forges with Israel at Sinai. The law brings moral awareness but the Israelites, too, like the Gentiles, fail to respond with righteousness before God and humanity, Jew and Gentile, remain under the power of sin. That stranglehold is radically broken by God, who out of love for humanity, sends a “second Adam, a “new creation” (see Gal 6:15), whose experience of death and resurrection defeats the abiding power of death and become the source of salvation for all who believe in Jesus Christ. Now through faith and the experience of being united with Christ’s dying and rising in baptism, the followers of Jesus, both Gentile and Jew, have a destiny with God. As daughters and sons of God they will share in the glory of God.⁵

Beyond Paul: Colossians, Ephesians, the Pastoral Letters

⁵For Paul salvation experienced through faith and not the works of the law, was anticipated in the experience of Abraham, who believed in God and was obedient, prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law and therefore becomes a prototype of the Christians who are saved by faith; see Gal 3:6-9; Rom 4:9-12.

As noted earlier, modern biblical scholarship has called into question whether Paul himself was the author of some of the letters traditionally assigned to him or whether they were written in his name by a later disciple of Paul.⁶ The goal here is not to delve into the details of that debate. Rather, our focus will be on the portrayal of Christ in these letters, the ultimate rationale for their inclusion in the New Testament canon and the basis for their being considered “sacred” writings.

Colossians

Both Colossian and Ephesians have a strong Christological focus and show continuity, as well as development, in comparison with Paul’s undisputed letters. One striking feature of both texts is their portrayal of what could be called the “cosmic” Christ. The author of Colossians, for example, seem to quote a pre-existing Christian hymn that affirms the exaltation of the Risen Christ above all elements of the universe as well as his being the “head” of his body, the church:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him (Col 1:15-22).

The reference to Christ as the pattern of creation itself echoes the prologue of John’s Gospel that also refers to Jesus, the Word of God, as the one “through whom all things came into being” (John 1:3).⁷ Colossians extends that lordship of Christ to “all things in heaven and on earth... visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers” (Col 1:16). Greco-Roman culture was absorbed by cosmic speculation and astrology, convinced that the universe was filled with intelligent beings who controlled the movement of the stars and planets and determined the course of human destiny. In asserting the rule of Christ over these powers of the universe, Christian faith was countering the kind of fatalism that dominated popular culture. Christ’s rule, in contrast to that of the cosmic powers, was benign and an expression of God’s love for the world.

In that spirit, the Colossian hymn also affirms that the Risen and Exalted Christ is the “head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18). Here interpreters note a difference from Paul’s reflections on the church as the “body of Christ” (see, for example, 1 Cor 12:12-31). For Paul, the metaphor of the “body of Christ” expresses the mutual dependence of the members with each other, and particularly with the most vulnerable members. Colossians, on the other hand, emphasizes Christ’s “headship” over the body. The cosmic Christ, who is “before all things and in him all things hold together,” is the universal reconciling power in the universe. His cosmic power is not one of domination or fear but “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Col 1:19-20).

⁶This list includes Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians and the Pastoral epistles 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. See above, pp. xx.

⁷ See above, p. xx.

Based on faith in Christ's all-embracing power to reconcile the world, the author urges the Christians of Colossae to put away fear and to avoid useless cosmic speculations that seem to be the message of other competing religious movements preying on them (see Col 2:8-23). Instead, they should concentrate on the figure of Christ:

So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all! As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Here, as in most of the New Testament writings, the author's immediate purpose is not to elaborate an abstract theology but to declare that faith in Christ and Christ's God-given power can deliver the Christians from baseless fear and lead them to a life of virtue and holiness.⁸ Christ's mission of cosmic reconciliation should be reflected in the mutual love and care of the Christians among themselves.

Ephesians

Many contemporary scholars believe that Ephesians was not composed as a letter to a specific community. The reference to "the saints who are *in Ephesus*" is missing in several ancient manuscripts. The original purpose of this New Testament text may have been to serve as a summary or synthesis of major elements of Paul's message and used as a kind of circular letter among various churches. In any case, its Christology has strong similarities to that of Colossians. In Ephesians, too, the cosmic dimension of Christ's power is emphasized:

God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. (Eph 1:20-23).

⁸ See below, Chapter 6, pp. xx.

Similar to Colossians, the letter to the Ephesians emphasizes the reconciling power of Jesus' death and resurrection. Ephesians illustrates this all-encompassing reconciling power by appealing to a classic example of human alienation, namely the enmity or separation between Jews and Gentiles: The Jews were God's chosen people with whom God had forged a covenant; the Gentiles, by contrast were "aliens...having no hope and without God in the world," a pessimistic view of the Gentiles that echoes Paul's even more dire view of the Gentiles' plight in his letter to the Romans, "...for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened...(See Paul's full indictment of the Gentiles in Rom 1:18-32). Ephesians goes on to describe the reconciling impact of Christ's death and resurrection on this classic alienation:

So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands—remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. or he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

The metaphor of "those who were far off" echoes the words of Isaiah the prophet in speaking of the "nations" or Gentiles as "far off," as distinct from the Israelites who were "near" (Isa 57:19). The death (and resurrection) of Christ overcomes the power of death that had flooded the world with alienation and enmity and creates instead peace and reconciliation. The author of Ephesian uses the striking image of a "dividing wall" that had stood between Jews and Gentiles. Many commentators believe that the "dividing wall" the author has in mind was the barrier in the Jerusalem temple precincts that separated Gentiles from the interior sacred space where only Jews were permitted entry. Now that symbolic barrier is "broken down" in order to create "one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace" and reconciling both groups to God "in one body through the cross."

Through this fundamental reconciliation, the author views the church as a community of reconciliation, a universal sign of God's reconciliation of the world:

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. (Eph 2:19-22)

Paul is portrayed in the letter as one entrusted with this message of reconciliation—what Ephesians refers to as a "mystery hidden for ages in God" but now revealed in order that "through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:7-13).

Thus both Colossians and Ephesians expand or at least accentuate the horizon of the role of Christ reflected in Paul's undisputed letters. The death and resurrection of Christ that broke

the power of death and led to abundant new life also has an impact on the universe itself—disarming the alien powers that create enmity and threaten humanity itself. This act of universal reconciliation also amplifies the mission of the church, the Body of Christ. The mutual love and reconciliation among its members—both Jews and Gentiles—become a sign of what the world’s destiny is to be. Thus the author eloquently prays in Ephesians:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Eph 3:14-21).

The Pastoral Letters

We turn briefly to the last set of letters in the New Testament traditionally attributed to Paul. Many scholars today question whether Paul, in fact, wrote these letters or whether they were the work of later authors writing in Paul’s name. All three of these so-called “Pastoral” letters are addressed to individuals, Timothy and Titus, who were trusted companions of Paul on his missionary journeys and cited both in Acts and in Paul’s own letters. The contents of the Pastoral letters seem to reflect a later stage in the development of the early church, a prime reason for assigning a date beyond the lifetime of Paul himself. As the early Christian community moved beyond the first generations of the followers of Jesus, concern arose about important institutional issues, such as the requirements for leadership and appropriate community structures, and the need to maintain the authentic teaching and traditions of the church in the face of doctrinal errors. All three of these letters, particularly 2 Timothy which is more autobiographical in tone, portray Paul as handing on to Timothy and Titus his mantle as apostle and urging them to persevere in their ministry.

There are important affirmations in these letters about the identity and mission of Jesus Christ, including snatches of early Christian hymns and credal statements. For example, 1 Tim 2:5 affirms Jesus as “the one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself a ransom for all.” Another poetic quotation sums up the impact of Jesus’ universal mission: “He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.” (1 Tim 3:16).

Yet the overall content of the three letters are mostly concerned with refuting errors and urging Paul’s successors to give proper attention to the leadership and stability of the church. Paul’s exhortation in 2 Tim 4:1-5 is typical:

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

As the purported author, Paul emphasizes his apostolic vocation, admitting as he had done in other letters, that before his conversion he had been a persecutor of the church, an admission that Paul turns into a proclamation of Christ's mission of salvation:

I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the foremost. But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life. To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Tim 1:12-17).

Several times in the Pastorals, Paul points to his own experience to bolster the vocations of his young successors:

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim 3:10-17).

The author signals the end of Paul's life, as the apostle anticipates his receiving the "crown of righteousness" that the Lord has reserved for him:

As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing. (2 Tim 4:6-8).

Thus the Pastoral Letters throw the spotlight on Paul's own example of what it means to be an apostle, one whose life is spent in proclaiming Christ, an emphasis which confirms the rationale for the inclusion of Paul's writings in the canon and their sacred character..

Conclusion:

Why were the letters of Paul circulated widely in the early Christian community, and early on considered "sacred" writing to be included in the nucleus of the New Testament canon? The reason is the same as why the Four Gospels quickly became foundational sacred texts of the early Christian community. Although different in style and context, the Gospels and Paul's letters were powerful, compelling portrayals of Jesus Christ, the center of Christian faith. Each set of texts viewed Christ through the lens of his death and resurrection, the heart of the mission of Jesus and, in the perspective of Christian faith, the act that redeemed the world. And both sets of text mediated for the believing Christian an encounter with the sacred.

Our focus to this point has been on the portrayal of Christ in both the Gospels and Paul. Still to be considered is the expected impact of this portrayal on the lives of the followers of Jesus. A fundamental conviction of the New Testament, and indeed of the Bible as a whole, is that the encounter with the divine leads to a life of holiness.