1 Paul's Self-Presentation

As the book of Acts tells it, upon his entry into a new city, the apostle Paul routinely made his way to the synagogue, where he encountered Jews as well as non-Jews who had been attracted to some aspects of Jewish life and worship.

Luke calls these non-Jewish sympathizers or adherents of the synagogue people "who fear God" (13:16), "worshipers of God" (16:14; 18:7), and "devout Greeks" (17:4). The example of the centurion Cornelius, "a devout man who feared God with all his household; he gave alms generously to the people [that is, to the Jewish community] and prayed constantly to God" (Acts 10:1-2), and the similar scene in Luke 7, where Jews ask Jesus to act on behalf of a centurion who "loves our people and . . . built our synagogue for us" (7:5), have given rise to the hypothesis that first-century synagogues in the Diaspora included a semiofficial class of non-Jewish adherents called "God-fearers," a hypothesis to which we will return in chapter 5.

Acts also depicts Paul speaking in public, perhaps in the city square (the agora: 14:8-18; 17:17); in Athens, at a gathering place for philosophical debate on the Hill of Mars in Athens (the Areopagus: 17:19-34); in Corinth, in the house of a God-fearer next door to the synagogue (18:7); and in Ephesus, in a lecture hall, apparently sponsored by a patron (19:8-10). His regular practice in Acts, however, was to begin in the synagogue of a city.

We see a different picture from Paul's own letters, where he addresses his hearers as having "turned to God from idols" in response to his preaching (1 Thess 1:10; compare 1 Cor 6:9-11; Rom 6:16-19). He is clearly not addressing Jews. This is only one of several differences between Acts and what Paul says about his work (see chapter 2), but it raises a question. If, during the initial presentation of his message, Paul could not rely on his audience already sharing certain premises with him—belief and reverence for only one god, the god of the Jews; respect for Jewish scriptures; and

the abandonment of idol worship—then how did he make his first connection with them? Even if some in his audience had attended a synagogue but had not committed themselves to it, how would they have perceived him?

Because we normally encounter Paul today as we *read* his letters in published English translations of the Bible, it is easy to imagine him as a *writer* addressing readers in his own time. We will return to the topic of Paul as a writer of letters in chapter 2. We know, however, that Paul probably dictated his letters, more or less precisely, to an *amanuensis*—a skilled scribe, such as Tertius (Rom 16:22)—then dispatched the letter with a member of his apostolic team, who would then read the letter aloud to the assembled recipients (many of whom may have been illiterate). Letter carriers were expected not just to read the written words but to "perform" them in order to convey the author's meaning as completely as possible.[1] It is just as appropriate, then, to speak of Paul's *hearers*.

Our concern in this chapter is with the way Paul presented himself to others. How did he introduce himself to his hearers, and what would his hearers—especially his non-Jewish hearers—have made of him?

On "Jews" and "Gentiles": Throughout the book we will refer to "non-Jews." The New Revised Standard Version and other English translations—as well as a majority of scholars—use the word Gentiles to translate the Greek word *ethnē* (sg. *ethnos*). But *ethnos* means a "people," not an individual, and Paul never uses the singular *ethnos* to mean a non-Jewish person (see Rom 10:19, where he uses the word to refer to Israel as a people). The plural is often translated "peoples" or "nations," and Paul seems often to use it to refer to individuals from the peoples other than Israel. The capitalized English word *Gentile* does not correspond to any specific identity in the ancient world.[2]

Slave of Jesus Christ, Called an Apostle

Paul opens his letter to the Romans—a congregation he did not found—by identifying himself this way:

> Paul, slave of Christ Jesus, called an apostle, separated to the gospel of God, which was promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures concerning his son, who came from the seed of David according to the flesh, who was designated son of God in power by the Spirit of holiness on the basis of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship for the obedience of faith among all the nations

> on behalf of his name, among whom you are, even you—those called Jesus Christ's; to all who are in Rome, loved by God, called to be holy: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom 1:1-7)

Here Paul begins his most carefully constructed self-introduction with his name, the phrase "slave of Christ Jesus," and then an enigmatic two-word phrase, literally, "called apostle." What could he expect his audience to hear in those terms?

He did not mean that he was only "called" an apostle and was not a real one. The question is not an idle one. We know that Paul was not recognized by all Jesus-followers as a legitimate apostle, as the extended, passionate defense of his apostolic status in 2 Cor 10:1—12:13 makes clear, and as shorter claims to this status confirm (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8-10; Gal 2:9; 1 Thess 2:3-12). Some readers think they detect other cracks in the apostolic persona. Note how Paul does not repeat the word *apostle* when paralleling his ministry with Peter's (Gal 2:8) and how he admits that for some people he is *not* an apostle (1 Cor 9:2). Paul is ever aware of how differently he operates in comparison with the rest of the apostles (1 Cor 9:4-18; 2 Cor 11:7-11; 12:13; 1 Thess 2:5-9; 2 Thess 3:6-10). On the other hand, he clearly expects some congregations to recognize the title *apostle* in general (see Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 4:9) and even when he does not use the title itself, he expects hearers to acknowledge his authority—for example, to "command" them to do their "duty" (Phlm 8). With some important exceptions (to which we return in chapter 6), later church tradition has resoundingly affirmed Paul's authority as an apostle—even "the apostle."[3]

"Apostle is Paul's most common self-designation."[4] Related to the Greek verb *apostellein*, "to send," the term, like its Latin equivalent *legatus* (or the Hebrew *šālîaḥ*), is used for those who are sent by others—in this case, by Jesus Christ—and carry the authority of the one(s) doing the sending.[5] The Hebrew term was later sometimes used for someone sent by a religious authority to exercise that authority in a specific way over others. Acts 9:1-2 seems to portray Saul, before he became known as the apostle Paul, fulfilling such a function for the high priest in Jerusalem. Later, Paul claims not to care how authoritative the leaders of the church in Jerusalem are and insists that *Christ* "sent" him as apostle to the nations (Gal 2:6, 8-9). It is his being "called" as an apostle *by Christ* that alone validates his apostleship; thus at other points in his letters Paul emphasizes that he does not come on his own initiative but that he was "sent" by Jesus.[6] Paul's coming to a congregation is therefore a momentous event: he claims to come with the authority of Jesus, which may involve judgment on the congregation.[7]

Paul is clearly invested in the title and role of apostle. He defends that role against opposition (2 Cor 10:1—12:13). Further, although Paul can claim that the status of the Jerusalem apostles meant nothing to him (Gal 2:6) and that they only "*seemed* to be pillars" (Gal 2:9), the larger argument makes sense only if Paul and his hearers assume that those apostles carried real authority. Though he was not, like the Jerusalem apostles, called as a follower of Jesus, Paul nevertheless claims and adapts the term *apostle* to fit and to authorize his own ministry. He declares that he not only enjoys the approval of the Jerusalem apostles and collegiality with them but also that

he exercises a divinely given independence from them in his dealings with his communities (1 Cor 4:3-5).

The word *apostolos* seems to have played a unique role as a technical term in early Christianity, but the concepts of being "sent" from God and a servant or "slave" of God were not unique to that movement.

1. Israel's prophets as "called" and "sent" (Septuagint)

Although the Greek term *apostolos* appears only rarely in Jewish scripture, Israel's prophets are often depicted as being "called" and "sent" (Greek *apestalmenos*, a cognate of *apostolos*) by God. Note also that Paul's speech about God having "set him apart from birth" (Gal 1:15) echoes the third text below.

> Then [the Lord] sent one of the seraphs to me, and in his hand he held a coal, which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs, and he touched my mouth and said: "See, this has touched your lips and your wrongs are forgiven and your sins are cleansed away."
>
> And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go to this people?"
>
> And I said, "See, here I am; send me [*aposteilon me*]!"
>
> And he said, "Go and say to this people:
> 'Listen intently, and do not comprehend;
> look intently, but do not see.'
> For the heart of this people has become thick,
> and they hear poorly with their ears,
> and they have shut their eyes,
> so that they may no longer see with their eyes
> and hear with their ears,
> or understand with their heart and turn
> that I might heal them."
>
> (Isaiah 6:6-10 LXX)
>
> The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me:
> he has sent me [*apestalken me*] to bring good news to the oppressed,
> to heal the broken-hearted,
> to proclaim release to captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to announce the favorable time of the Lord
> and the day of recompense,
> to comfort all who mourn. . . .
>
> (Isaiah 61:1-2 LXX)
>
> Now the word of the Lord came to me saying,
> "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,

and before you came forth from the womb I made you holy;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations."

Then I said, "Ah, sovereign Lord! See, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the Lord said to me,

"Do not say, 'I am only a boy';
for to all to whom I send you [*exaposteilō se*], you will go,
and whatever I command you, you will speak.
Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you," says the Lord.

(Jeremiah 1:4-8 LXX, trans. Elliott)

2. The philosopher as "sent" by God (Epictetus)

The language of being "sent" by a god was used beyond the bounds of Judaism. Asked how one should consider the prospect of entering upon life as a Cynic, the first-century philosopher Epictetus insisted first that one should think of the decision not as one's own initiative but as a response to a divine order: "for in this great city [that is, the world], there is a lord of the household who assigns tasks." He explains that the Cynic must not be distracted by any feelings save those that spring from moral resolve and that the Cynic life is a life lived under public scrutiny. The Cynic must be utterly committed to the "right use of the imagination":

Then, thus prepared, the one who is a Cynic in truth is not satisfied with these things but must know that [he or she] has been sent from God as a messenger [*angelos apo tou Dios apestaltai*], first to convince human beings concerning good and evil—that they have been deceived and rather seek the reality of good and of evil where it is not to be found, and fail to recognize it where it truly is; second, to act as a scout, as did Diogenes when taken away to Philip after the battle of Chaeroneia. For the Cynic is a scout regarding which things are friendly to human beings and which are hostile.

Later in the same discourse, Epictetus describes the message the Cynic must declare to others, holding oneself up as an example:

And how does it happen that one who has nothing—someone naked and homeless, without shelter, possessions, servant, or even a city—do conduct themselves serenely? Behold: God has sent you someone to show you, by deed, how it is done.

(Arrian, *Discourses of Epictetus* 3.22.23-24, 45-46; trans. Reasoner)

"Servant" (or Slave) of Christ

In Israel's scriptures, Moses (Exod 14:31) and the prophets are repeatedly described (as are other leaders including Joshua and David) as God's "servants" whom God sent to Israel. Jeremiah uses the phrase frequently (Hebrew *'ebed;* Greek *pais,* pl. *paides:* Jer 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 33:5; 42:15; 51:4 LXX). The Second Isaiah apparently refers to himself by the same phrase (Isa 49:5-6; LXX using both *doulos* and *pais*).

The description of the prophets as "servants of God" became stereotyped in later Jewish writings. Paul uses the Greek term *doulos* to describe himself as a "slave" of Christ.

Citizens of ancient Athens or the Roman Empire perceived actual slaves as inferior beings—a necessity in slaveholding societies, as Orlando Patterson observes.[8] The grim reality of the life of most slaves and their recurrence as stock characters in Greek and Roman literature, including the New Testament, has been amply described in recent studies by J. Albert Harrill and Jennifer Glancy.[9] A passage from Aristotle is typical of this attitude.

3. The slave's inferiority (Aristotle)

> It is thought that what is just is something that is equal, and also that friendship is based on equality, if there is truth in the saying "Amity is equality." And all constitutions are some form of justice; for they are partnerships, and every partnership is founded on justice, so that there are as many forms of justice and of partnership as there are of friendship, and all these forms border on each other and have their differences closely related. But since the relations of soul and body, craftsman and tool, and master and slave are similar, between the two terms of each of these pairs there is no partnership; for they are not two, but the former is one and the latter a part of that one, not one itself; nor is the good divisible between them, but that of both belongs to the one for whose sake they exist. For the body is the soul's tool born with it, a slave is as it were a member or tool of his master, a tool is a sort of inanimate slave.
>
> (Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1241b.12-24, trans. Rackham, LCL)

Dale B. Martin reminds us, however, that the slaves of wealthy and powerful citizens could themselves exercise some of the considerable authority of their masters and enjoy far more secure and comfortable circumstances than most of the free poor. He notes that "the enslaved leader" could serve as a theme in a certain sort of populist rhetoric and at last suggests that "within early Christianity, *slave of Christ* signified authority by analogy to the authority of the managerial slave."[10] Paul could have played, he concludes, on that use of the term.

We should also mention here one possible explanation for the claim made in Acts 21:39 that Paul was a citizen of Tarsus, in Cilicia, and the claim in 22:25-29 that he was a Roman citizen as well. Centuries later Jerome passed along the story (though he does not identify its source) that Paul's parents were removed to Cilicia after their home region, Gischala, was conquered by Rome. If his parents were carried off as slaves but then they or Paul were manumitted by a Roman citizen of Tarsus, Paul would have received citizenship. (This might also explain his Roman name, *Paulus*, of which the Greek *Paulos* is the equivalent.)[11] We cannot draw an unequivocal conclusion but note that if Paul were indeed a citizen, it is all the more remarkable that he never refers to his citizenship in his letters but instead repeatedly adopts the title "slave."

The Figure of the Philosopher

One proposal for how we should imagine Paul making his initial contact with an audience is the model of the philosopher or teacher of virtue. The ancients spoke of "schools" of Stoic and Cynic philosophers, traditions in which teachers passed on their doctrines to their students in succession. There were formal schools, like the Stoa in Athens (from which the Stoics, or *stōikoi,* took their name), or the Stoic school in Tarsus; but more often, individuals who had studied with a teacher—and some who had not—presented themselves as itinerant teachers of philosophy for hire. Cynics were notorious for such "freelance" philosophizing.[12]

> The Greek word *kynikoi* (**"Cynics"**) comes from *kynos*, "dog," and refers to a "doglike" life lived in defiance of social convention—for example, doing things in public that "respectable" people do privately.

4. The Virtues of a philosopher (Dio Chrysostom)

Some of the characteristics of the genuine philosopher—on whose services the welfare of a city depends—are listed by Dio Chrysostom (c. 40–120 c.e.), in the course of recommending himself as just such a philosopher to the Alexandrians. Noteworthy are the variety of ways Dio imagines philosophers may present themselves and seek to be supported; Dio's own apparent ambition to be supported by the city itself; and the way he seeks to distinguish himself from others (in part, by claiming to be called by "some deity" to philosophize).

> But you have no such critic, neither chorus nor poet nor anyone else, to reprove you in all friendliness and to reveal the weaknesses of your city. Therefore, whenever the thing does at last appear, you should receive it gladly and make a festival of the occasion instead of being vexed; and even if vexed, you should be ashamed to call out, "When will the fellow stop?" or "When is a juggler coming on?" or "Rubbish!" or some such thing. For, as I have said, that sort of entertainment you always have in stock and there is no fear that it will ever fail you; discourses like this of mine, which make others happier and better and more sober and better able to administer effectively the cities in which they dwell, you have not often heard—for I do not care to say that you would not listen to them.
>
> And perhaps this situation is not of your making, but you will show whether it is or not if you bear with me today; the fault may lie rather at the door of those who wear the name of philosopher. For some among that company do not appear in public at all and prefer not to make the venture, possibly because they despair of being able to improve the masses; others exercise their voices in what we call lecture-halls, having secured as hearers men who are in league with them and tractable. And as for the Cynics, as they are called, it is

Fig. 1.2. *An unnamed Cynic philosopher. Statue, second century* C.E. *Museo Capitolino, Rome. Photo: Yair Haklai.*

true that the city contains no small number of that sect, and that, like any other thing, this too has had its crop—persons whose tenets, to be sure, comprise practically nothing spurious or ignoble, yet who must make a living—still these Cynics, posting themselves at street-corners, in alleyways, and at temple-gates, pass around the hat and play upon the credulity of lads and sailors and crowds of that sort, stringing together rough jokes and much tittle-tattle and that low badinage that smacks of the marketplace. Accordingly they achieve no good at all, but rather the worst possible harm, for they accustom thoughtless people to deride philosophers in general, just as one might accustom lads to scorn their teachers, and, when they ought to knock the insolence out of their hearers, these Cynics merely increase it.

Those, however, who do come before you as men of culture either declaim speeches intended for display, and stupid ones to boot, or else chant verses of their own composition, as if they had detected in you a weakness for poetry. To be sure, if they themselves are really poets or orators, perhaps there is nothing so shocking in that, but if in the guise of philosophers they do these things with a few to their own profit and reputation, and not to improve you, that indeed is shocking. For it is as if a physician when visiting patients should disregard their

> treatment and their restoration to health, and should bring them flowers and courtesans and perfume.
>
> But there are only a few who have displayed frankness [*parrhēsia*] in your presence, and that but sparingly, not in such a way as to fill your ears therewith nor for any length of time; nay, they merely utter a phrase or two, and then, after berating rather than enlightening you, they make a hurried exit, anxious lest before they have finished you may raise an outcry and send them packing, behaving in very truth quite like men who in winter muster up courage for a brief and hurried voyage out to sea. But to find a man who in plain terms, and without guile, speaks his mind with frankness, and neither for the sake of reputation nor for gain makes false pretension, but out of good will and concern for his fellow-men stands ready, if need be, to submit to ridicule, and the disorder and uproar of the mob—to find such a man is not easy, but rather the good fortune of a very lucky city, so great is the dearth of noble, independent souls and such the abundance of toadies, mountebanks, and sophists.
>
> In my own case, for instance, I feel that I have chosen that role, not of my own volition, but by the will of some deity. For when divine providence is at work for men, the gods provide, not only good counselors who need no urging, but also words that are appropriate and profitable to the listener.
>
> (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 32.11, trans. Cohoon and Crosby, LCL)

5. Self-restraint as the mark of the good citizen (Musonius Rufus)

In Paul's time, one of the most current themes among popular philosophers was that of self-restraint or self-mastery (*enkrateia*), which was perceived as the virtue most seemly in rulers and also in those who aspired no higher than to rule themselves. As Stanley K. Stowers notes, Paul's contemporaries regarded self-mastery as distinguishing the civilized from the barbarian. Slaves and women as well were seen as incapable of proper self-control (and naturally required the "rule" of a superior, more reasonable male).[13]

Further, by practicing disciplines of self-control regarding food and sex and maintaining proper household decorum, elite males from subordinated peoples could "claim a place among the ruling classes of the empire." Augustus made self-mastery an important theme of his new order and "socially mobile" individuals sought to display self-mastery as the means to advancing themselves. Although Jews could not participate in the imperial cult (an important medium of social integration and assimilation for subjected peoples), "they could ally themselves with philosophy and present themselves as a uniquely self-mastered people."[14] Stowers considers Philo of Alexandria an important example of this claim to self-mastery. He argues that in Romans (and other letters as well), one of Paul's purposes is to compete with rival teachers by showing that his gospel provides the means to achieving self-mastery.

The Stoic Musonius Rufus addresses the importance of self-control for a king. As Stowers shows, however, such arguments would have been appealing to those with more moderate ambitions as well.

> In the next place it is essential for the king to exercise self-control over himself and demand self-control of his subjects, to the end that with sober rule and

> seemly submission there shall be no wantonness on the part of either. For the ruin of the ruler and the citizen alike is wantonness. But how would anyone achieve self-control if he did not make an effort to curb his desires, or how could one who is undisciplined make others temperate? One can mention no study except philosophy that develops self-control. Certainly it teaches one to be above pleasure and greed, to admire thrift and to avoid extravagance; it trains one to have a sense of shame, and to control one's tongue, and it produces discipline, order, and courtesy, and in general what is fitting in action and in bearing. In an ordinary man when these qualities are present they give him dignity and self-command, but if they be present in a king they make him preeminently godlike and worthy of reverence.
>
> (Musonius Rufus, *Fragment* 8, *That Kings Also Should Study Philosophy*, trans. Lutz)

6. The self-restraint of the philosopher (Athenaeus)

Might Paul have presented himself in terms associated with popular philosophers? In 1 Cor 9:27 he wrote that he punished and enslaved his body, language that probably suggested self-restraint or self-denial with regard to food. From the ascetic through the connoisseur and on to the glutton, various subcultures within the Greek and Roman worlds exhibited a full variety of approaches to the consumption of food and wine. In 1 Cor 6:13, Paul seems to quote a saying that some knew in the Corinthian church—"Food is for the stomach and the stomach for food"—before correcting it ("but . . ."). In Phil 3:18-19, Paul describes some rivals as enemies of Christ whose "god is their belly," and in Rom 16:18 he similarly describes some who are "enslaved not to our Lord Christ but to their own belly."

This caricature of worshiping or serving one's own belly seems to have had antecedents in Greek literature. It occurs in a compilation of anecdotes known as *The Learned Banqueters*, attributed to Athenaeus (late second or early third century C.E.). The phrase is used in an exchange in which a colleague (or teacher?) accuses the Cynic Cynulcus of drinking too much at dinners; Cynulcus seems to return the criticism in kind. Later in the compilation Cynulcus is challenged to come up with the literary source for the phrase.

> "This is what you Cynics do, Cynulcus. When you drink—or, rather, when you drink too much—you prevent pleasant conversation in the same way pipe-girls and dancing-girls do, and you live in the style this same Plato refers to, when he says in his *Philebus* [21c]: 'not the life of a human being, but that of a jellyfish or one of the shellfish that live in the sea.'" Cynulcus got angry and said: "Glutton! Worshipper of your own belly!"
>
> . . .
>
> "These, then, are the citations I have ready at hand for you at the moment, Cynulcus. But tomorrow or *enēphi*—because Hesiod [*Op*. 410] refers this way to the day after tomorrow—I will fodder you with blows, unless you tell me in what author the phrase 'Worshipper of your own belly' is attested."

> Cynulcus was silent, and Ulpian said: "Well, my dog, I myself will tell you this too; Eupolis [fr. 187] refers this way to flatterers, in the play by the same name."[15]
>
> (Athenaeus, *Learned Banqueters* 3.97c, 100b, trans. Olson, LCL)

7. The Philosopher's denial of eloquence (Socrates)

In the Corinthian assembly Paul encountered individuals who considered his oratorical performance inadequate ("his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible," 2 Cor 10:10). Earlier Paul had defended the simplicity of his speech as a deliberate decision not to depend on "lofty words or wisdom" (1 Cor 2:1-5). This claim should not deceive us into thinking that the apostle was untrained or incapable of well-crafted rhetoric, however. Similar disavowals of eloquence were a mainstay of the orator's repertoire, as we see in one of the best-known speeches in Hellenistic culture: Socrates' defense as he stood accused of the capital charge of "corrupting" the youth of Athens.

> How you, men of Athens, have been affected by my accusers, I do not know; but I, for my part, almost forgot my own identity, so persuasively did they talk;

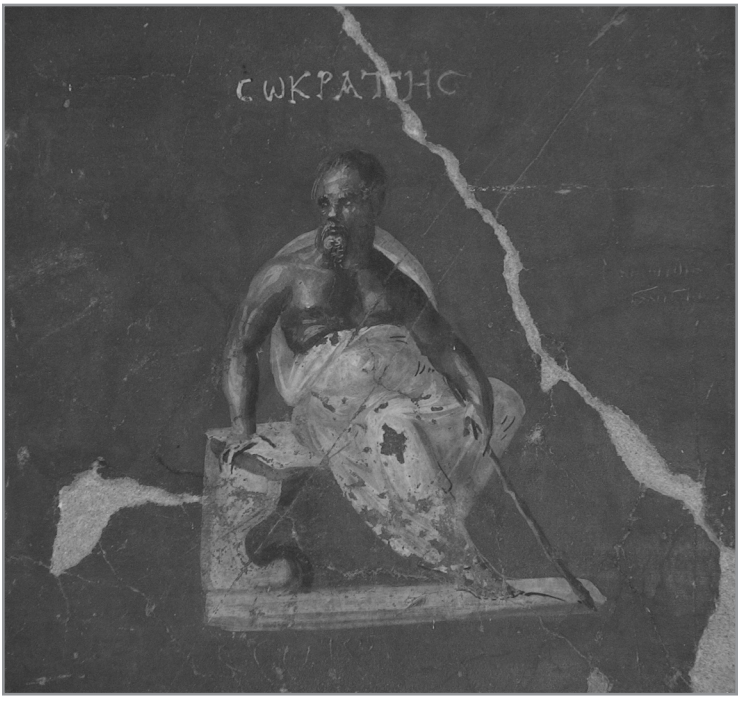

Fig. 1.3. *The philosopher Socrates: Fresco from a home in Roman Ephesus, first to fifth century* C.E. *Museum of Ephesus. Photo: P. Vasiliadis.*

and yet there is hardly a word of truth in what they have said. But I was most amazed by one of the many lies that they told—when they said that you must be on your guard not to be deceived by me, because I was a clever speaker. For I thought it the most shameless part of their conduct that they are not ashamed because they will immediately be convicted by me of falsehood by the evidence of fact, when I show myself to be not in the least a clever speaker, unless indeed they call him a clever speaker who speaks the truth; for if this is what they mean, I would agree that I am an orator—not after their fashion.

Now they, as I say, have said little or nothing true; but you shall hear from me nothing but the truth. Not, however, men of Athens, speeches finely tricked out with words and phrases, as theirs are, nor carefully arranged, but you will hear things said at random with the words that happen to occur to me. For I trust that what I say is just; and let none of you expect anything else. For surely it would not be fitting for one of my age to come before you like a youngster making up speeches. And, men of Athens, I urgently beg and beseech you if you hear me making my defense with the same words with which I have been accustomed to speak both in the marketplace at the bankers' tables, where many of you have heard me, and elsewhere, not to be surprised or to make a disturbance on this account. For the fact is that this is the first time I have come before the court, although I am seventy years old; I am therefore an utter foreigner to the manner of speech here.

Hence, just as you would, of course, if I really were a foreigner, pardon me if I spoke in that dialect and that manner in which I had been brought up, so now I make this request of you, a fair one, as it seems to me, that you disregard the manner of my speech—for perhaps it might be worse and perhaps better—and observe and pay attention merely to this, whether what I say is just or not; for that is the virtue of a judge, and an orator's virtue is to speak the truth.

(Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 1, trans. Fowler, LCL)

8. A Critic protests the abundance of self-styled Cynics (Lucian)

Dio Chrysostom was not alone in offering critical comments regarding the abundance of philosophers (see above). The phenomenon was widespread enough to evoke sarcasm from observers. In one of his satirical essays, Lucian of Samosata (c. 120–80 c.e.) protested to Zeus the number of philosophers claiming to speak in the name of God. Note the characteristic appearance of such "public" philosophers (and compare Jesus' instructions to his disciples in Matt 10:9-10; Mark 6:9; Luke 10:4—and Luke 22:35-36!—along with 2 Tim 4:13). Lucian seems particularly vexed that the philosophers are drawing the wrong class of people to themselves.

But at present, do you not see how many short cloaks and staves and wallets there are? On all sides there are long beards, and books in the left hand, and everybody preaches in favor of you; the public walks are full of people assembling in companies and in battalions, and there is nobody who does not want to be thought a scion of Virtue. In fact, many, giving up the trades they had before, rush after the wallet and cloak, tan their bodies in the sun to Ethiopian hue, make themselves extemporaneous philosophers out of cobblers or carpenters, and go about praising you and your virtue. Consequently, in the words of the

> proverb, it would be easier for a man to fall in a boat without hitting a plank than for your eye to miss a philosopher wherever it looks.
>
> (Lucian, *Double Indictment* 6, trans. Malherbe)

9. A Student writes to his father about the lack of good teachers

In a first-century papyrus letter from Roman Egypt, a son writes to his father, who is supporting the son and a number of his friends as they pursue their educations. Recently they have gotten into some trouble at a theater, and one former friend has been arrested and sent back home. The son complains that he has not made much progress. He has not yet found a scholar (*philologos*) worthy of his allegiance; meanwhile he has hoped at least to sign on with a tutor (*kathēgētēs*), as his friends have, but finds that too many who advertise themselves offer only inferior education. The letter gives us a glimpse into the availability of self-styled "scholars" and tutors who offered their services to young men of ambition.

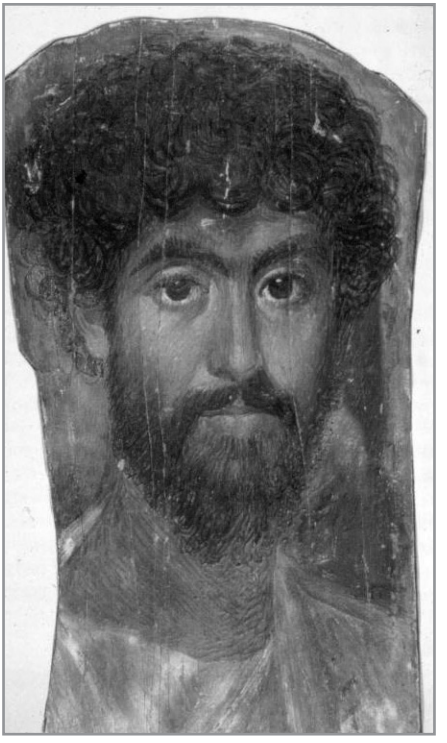

Fig. 1.4. *Funerary portrait of a young man from Fayum, Egypt, c. 160 C.E. Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo. Photo in the public domain.*

Neilos to Theon, his lord and father, very many greetings . . .

You have released me from my present despondency by making it plain that the business about the theater was a matter of indifference to you. For my part, I've lost no time in sailing downstream to find distinguished . . . and I have achieved something in return for my eagerness. I was looking for a scholar and for Chaeremon the tutor and Didymus the son of Aristocles, as I thought that with them I, too, might still meet with success, but found them no longer in the city; instead (I found only) trash, in whose hands most pupils have taken the straight road to having their talent spoiled.

I have written to Philoxenus and his friends telling them that they, too, must leave the matter in the hands of the esteemed . . . so that I, after rejecting Theon, may find a teacher as soon as possible, for I myself formed a bad opinion of him . . . as possessing a completely inadequate training. When I informed Philoxenus of your view he began to be of the same opinion, saying that it was on account of a shortage of sophists . . . was in the same condition as the city, but he said that Didymus, who, it appears, is a friend of his and has a school, would be sailing down and would take more care than the others. He persuaded the sons of Apollonius son of Herodes to go to enroll (in the school of Didymus).

And after this they, too, together with Philoxenus, have been searching until now for a more stylish tutor since the scholar to whom they used to go has died. As for myself, if only I had found some decent tutor, I would pray never to set eyes on Didymus, even from a distance—what makes me despair is that this fellow who used to be a mere provincial sees fit to compete with the rest.

However, knowing as I do that apart from paying useless and excessive fees there is no good to be had from a tutor, I am depending on myself. If you have any opinions on the matter, write to me soon. As Philoxenus also says, I have Didymus always ready to spend his time on me and do everything to help within his capabilities, and by hearing the orators declaiming, of whom Posidonius is one, I shall, with the help of the gods, do well for myself.

The cause of my despondency about this, which is making me neglect my health, is that those who have not yet succeeded ought not to concern themselves with these matters, especially when there are none who are bringing in any money. For at that time the useful Heraclas—curse him!—used daily to contribute some obols, but now, what with his being imprisoned by Isidorus, as he deserved, he's escaped and gone back, I think, to you. Be assured that he would never hesitate to intrigue against you, for, of all things, he felt no shame at gleefully spreading reports in the city about the incident in the theater and telling lies such as would not come even from the mouth of an accuser and that too when, so far from suffering what he deserves, he's been released and behaves in every respect like a free man. All the same, if you are not sending him back, you could at any rate hand him over to a carpenter—for I'm told that a young fellow makes two drachmas a day—or put him to some other employment at which he'll earn more money; his wages can then be collected and in due course sent to us, for you know that Diogas, too, is studying. While you are sending the little one, we will look about for more spacious rooms in a private house; for in order to be near to Dionysius we've been living in rooms much too small.

> We received the basket containing exactly the articles you mentioned and the vessels together with the half-*cadus* jar in which we found 22 *choes* instead of 18. To each of the people of whom you wrote I have sent a half-*cadua* of lentils accompanied by a letter. I have received the six measures and a full *coion* of vinegar and 126 lbs. of salted meat and contents of the *cadus* and the 30 baked loaves.
>
> Farewell. [dated] Choiak 4.
>
> (*P.Oxy.* 2190, trans. Winter, slightly modified)[16]

Philosophy in the Workplace

In order to avoid the impression that they were mere performers for hire, some philosophers worked with their hands to support themselves and thus to show that they were genuine.[17] Paul repeatedly refers to his practice of supporting himself through manual labor as a sign of his genuineness as an apostle (1 Cor 4:12; 9:4-18; 2 Cor 11:7-11; 12:13; 1 Thess 2:5, 9); in 2 Thess 3:6-10 Paul's self-support is represented as an example to others. His trade—Acts 18:3 identifies Paul as a tentmaker (or leatherworker, or theater set-maker: the word *skēnopoios* is ambiguous)[18]—allowed him some independence from would-be patrons. That strategy apparently gave offense to potential patrons in the Corinthian assembly, to judge from Paul's defensive response in 1 Corinthians 9.

10. A Stoic recommends manual labor (Musonius Rufus)

The first-century Stoic Musonius Rufus considered it an advantage to a philosopher's students if they should see him

> at work in the fields, demonstrating by his own labor the lesson which philosophy inculcates—that one should endure hardships, and suffer the pains of labor with his own body, rather than depend upon another for sustenance.
>
> (Musonius Rufus, *Fragment* 11, trans. Lutz)

Fig. 1.5. *Sign advertising a tailor's shop in Pompeii, first century* C.E. *Photo: Alinari/Art Resource, New York.*

11. A rabbi recommends self-support (R. Gamaliel)

The Mishnah also recommended the practice of self-support; R. Gamaliel is Gamaliel III (early third century).

> Rabban Gamaliel the son of R. Judah the Patriarch said: "Excellent is the study of the Law together with worldly occupation, for toil in them both puts sin out of mind. But all study of the Law without [worldly] labor comes to naught at the last and brings sin in its train. And let all them who labor with the congregation labor with them for the sake of heaven, for the merits of their fathers supports them and their righteousness endures forever. And as for you, [God says,] I count you worthy of great rewards as though you [yourselves] had done it."
>
> (*m. 'Abot* 2.2, trans. Danby, modified)

12. A Critic ridicules workplace philosophizing (Lucian)

To others, however, the idea that philosophy and the virtuous life could be taught by mere artisans and manual laborers was laughable. Here the second-century writer Lucian of Samosata poses as Philosophy addressing her father, Zeus, and decrying the Cynics as menials who turn themselves into philosophers to make an easy buck.

> There is a vile race upon the earth, composed for the most part of serfs and menials, creatures whose occupations have never suffered them to become acquainted with philosophy; whose earliest years have been spent in the drudgery of the fields, in learning those base arts for which they are most fitted—the fuller's trade, the joiner's, the cobbler's—or in carding wool, that housewives may have ease in their spinning, and the thread be fit for warp and woof.
>
> Thus employed, they knew not in their youth so much as the name of Philosophy. But they had no sooner reached manhood, than they perceived the respect paid to my followers; how men submitted to their blunt speech, valued their advice, deferred to their judgment, and cowered beneath their censure; all this they saw, and held that here was a life for a king. The learning, indeed, that befits a philosopher would have taken them long to acquire, if it was not utterly out of their reach. On the other hand, their own miserly handicrafts barely rewarded their toil with a sufficiency. To some, too, servitude was in itself an oppression: they knew it, in fact, for the intolerable thing it is.
>
> But they bethought them that there was still one chance left; their sheet-anchor, as sailors say. They took refuge with my lady Folly, called in the assistance of Boldness, Ignorance, and Impudence, ever their untiring coadjutors, and provided themselves with a stock of brand-new invectives; these they have ever ready on their tongues; 'tis their sole equipment; noble provision, is it not, for a philosopher? Nothing could be more plausible than the philosophic disguise they now assume, reminding one of the fabled ass of Cyme, in Aesop, who clothed himself in a lion's skin, and, stoutly braying, sought to play the lion's part; the beast, I doubt not, had his adherents. The externals of philosophy, as you know, are easily aped: it is a simple matter to assume the cloak and wallet, walk with a stick, and bawl, and bark, and bray, against all comers. They know that they are safe; their cloth protects them. Liberty is thus within their grasp: no need to ask their master's leave; should he attempt to reclaim them, their

sticks are at his service. No more short commons for them now, no more of crusts whose dryness is mitigated only by herbs or salt fish: they have choice of meats, drink the best of wines, and take money where they will, *shearing the sheep*, as they call it when they levy contributions, in the certainty that many will give, from respect to their garb or fear of their tongues.

They foresee, of course, that they will be on the same footing as genuine philosophers; so long as their exterior is conformable, no one is likely to make critical distinctions. They take care not to risk exposure: at the first hint of a rational argument, they shout their opponent down, withdraw into the stronghold of personal abuse, and flourish their ever-ready cudgels. Question their practice, and you will hear much of their principles: offer to examine those principles, and you are referred to their conduct. The city swarms with these vermin, particularly with those who profess the tenets of Diogenes, Antisthenes, and Crates. Followers of the Dog, they care little to excel in the canine virtues; they are neither trusty guardians nor affectionate, faithful servants: but for noise and greed and thievery and wantonness, for cringing, fawning cupboard-love,—there, indeed, they are perfect.

Before long you will see every trade at a standstill, the workmen all at large: for every man of them knows that, whilst he is bent over his work from morning to night, toiling and drudging for a starvation wage, idle impostors are living in the midst of plenty, commanding charity where they will, with no word of thanks to the giver, and a curse on him that withholds the gift. Surely (he will say to himself) the golden age is returned, and the heavens shall rain honey into my mouth.

(Lucian, *Runaways* 12-17, trans. Fowler and Fowler)

13. A Later critic scorns teaching in workplaces (Celsus)

In the late second century, the pagan critic Celsus ridiculed Christians. His scorn provides indirect confirmation of the picture of manual laborers like Paul teaching the virtuous life in their workshops—a notion that Celsus found ridiculous. (We have sections of Celsus's treatise only because Origen quoted it extensively in his rebuttal, *Against Celsus*.)

In private houses also we see wool-workers, laundry-workers, and the most illiterate and bucolic yokels, who would not dare to say anything at all in front of their elders and more intelligent masters. . . . (Children, they say,) should leave father and their schoolmasters, and go along with the women and little children who are their play-fellows to the wool-dresser's shop, or to the cobblers or the washerwoman's shop, that they may learn perfection. And by saying this they persuade them.

(Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.55, trans. Malherbe)

Attitudes toward Manual Labor and "Weakness"

One reason for the scorn of "workplace philosophizing" is apparently the contempt in which members of the upper class held the labor of those who were compelled by

necessity to work for a living. Such attitudes would influence how elite members of Roman society in a city like Corinth looked upon someone like Paul.

Debate continues regarding Paul's own economic and social status and the status of the congregations he addressed. Against an older consensus that these assemblies were made up of a cross-section of Roman society, including wealthier and poorer individuals, more recent studies have argued that Paul and his congregations would have come from the great majority of poor people.[19] The following texts make it probable that Paul's self-presentation as working with his own hands would have been enough to draw scorn from the upper classes.

14. A Cynic view of holding down a job (Dio Chrysostom)

Someone like Lucian could caricature the Cynics' claim of indifference toward everyday employment. The Cynic Dio Chrysostom insisted that not being tied down to a single job was a mark of true freedom, for the Cynic

> goes about as neither farmer nor trader nor soldier nor general, nor as shoemaker or builder or physician or orator, nor as one engaged in any other customary occupation, but on the other hand comes and goes in this strange fashion and puts in an appearance in places where impulse or chance may lead him.
>
> (Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses* 80.1, trans. Malherbe)[20]

15. An Epicurean view of employment (Philodemus)

Philodemus of Gadara (first century B.C.E.) expressed a common sentiment among the privileged landowners in traditional agricultural society. Living off the exploitation of others' hard labor was ignoble, hardly better than living off one's own labor. But making a living from "farming"—that is, enjoying estates worked by others—was noble and provided the necessary leisure for philosophy. We encounter a similar romanticization of rural life on the part of those who never plowed a field or milked a cow in the early Principate.

> To derive one's means from the breeding of horses is ridiculous, from the exploitation of mines by servile labor unenviable, from those two sources by working oneself, pure madness. Miserable also is the lot of the farmer who works with his own hands. "But," says he, "to live off the land while others farm it—that is truly in keeping with wisdom. For then one is least entangled in business, the source of so many annoyances; there is indeed found a becoming way of life, a withdrawal into leisure with one's friends, and for those who moderate their desires, the most honorable source of revenue."
>
> (Philodemus, *On Household Management* 23, trans. Malherbe)

16. Worthy and unworthy occupations (Cicero)

A century before Paul, the orator Cicero, one of the wealthiest and most powerful men in Republican Rome, set down his assessment of worthy and unworthy occupations. Least worthy—equivalent to slavery—are occupations that simply allow one to make a living, for example by providing the food on Cicero's own table. Most worthy

are those occupations that allow one to become wealthy and retire to a comfortable estate. (Note that Cicero's recommendation of "agriculture" refers not to working land but to owning the land on which others work.)

> Now in regard to trades and other means of livelihood, which ones are to be considered becoming to a gentleman and which ones are vulgar, we have been taught, in general, as follows. First, those means of livelihood are rejected as undesirable which incur people's ill-will, as those of tax-gatherers and usurers. Unbecoming to a gentleman, too, and vulgar are the means of livelihood of all hired workmen whom we pay for mere manual labor, not for artistic skill; for in their case the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery. Vulgar we must consider those also who buy from wholesale merchants to retail immediately; for they would get no profits without a great deal of downright lying; and verily, there is no action that is meaner than misrepresentation. And all mechanics are engaged in vulgar trades; for no workshop can have anything liberal about it. Least respectable of all are those trades which cater for sensual pleasures: fishmongers, butchers, cooks, and poulterers, and fishermen, as Terence says. Add to these, if you please, the perfumers, dancers, and the whole corps de ballet.

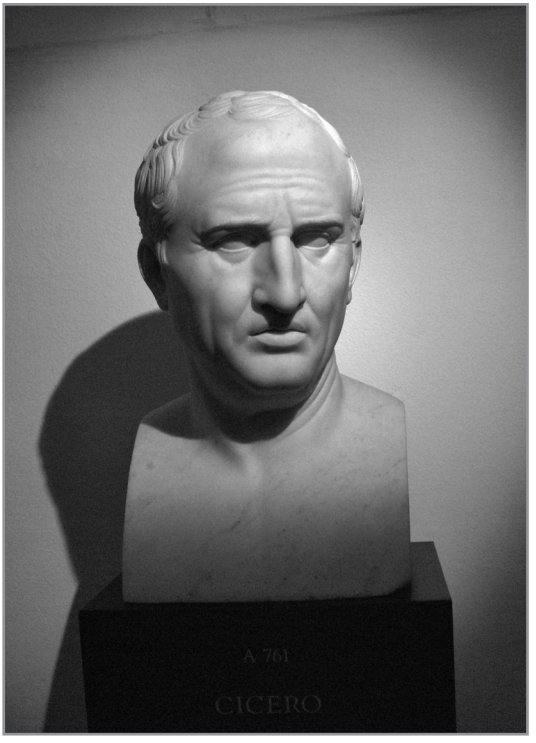

Fig. 1.6. *M. Tullius Cicero. Nineteenth-century copy of a first-century Roman bust. Photo in the public domain.*

> But the professions in which either a higher degree of intelligence is required or from which no small benefit to society is derived—medicine and architecture, for example, and teaching—these are proper for those whose social position they become. Trade, if it is on a small scale, is to be considered vulgar; but if wholesale and on a large scale, importing large quantities from all parts of the world and distributing to many without misrepresentation, it is not to be greatly disparaged. Nay, it even seems to deserve the highest respect, if those who are engaged in it, satiated, or rather, I should say, satisfied with the fortunes they have made, make their way from the port to a country estate, as they have often made it from the sea into port. But of all the occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture, none more profitable, none more delightful, none more becoming to a freeman.
>
> (Cicero, *On Duties* 1.150-51, trans. Miller, LCL)

17. The indignity of manual labor (Seneca)

In an essay written to a friend concerning the value of "liberal studies," Paul's contemporary Seneca—himself fabulously wealthy—reveals the prejudice that his own class, "free-born gentlemen," should be above having to work for a living and that preparation for actual work is the basest form of education. His assumption that those who have prepared themselves for labor will be ill-prepared for reflecting on truth, beauty, and honor may have been a prejudice that Paul would have faced from any wealthy individuals in his audience.

> You have been wishing to know my views with regard to liberal studies. My answer is this: I respect no study, and deem no study good, which results in money-making. Such studies are profit-bringing occupations, useful only in so far as they give the mind a preparation and do not engage it permanently. One should linger upon them only so long as the mind can occupy itself with nothing greater; they are our apprenticeship, not our real work. Hence you see why "liberal studies" are so called; it is because they are studies worthy of a free-born gentleman. But there is only one really liberal study—that which gives a man his liberty. It is the study of wisdom, and that is lofty, brave, and great-souled. All other studies are puny and puerile. You surely do not believe that there is good in any of the subjects whose teachers are, as you see, men of the most ignoble and base stamp? We ought not to be learning such things; we should have done with learning them. . . .
>
> "What then," you say, "do the liberal studies contribute nothing to our welfare?" Very much in other respects, but nothing at all as regards virtue. For even these arts of which I have spoken, though admittedly of a low grade—depending as they do upon handiwork—contribute greatly toward the equipment of life, but nevertheless have nothing to do with virtue. And if you inquire, "Why, then, do we educate our children in the liberal studies?" it is not because they can bestow virtue, but because they prepare the soul for the reception of virtue. Just as that "primary course," as the ancients called it, in grammar, which gave boys their elementary training, does not teach them the liberal arts, but prepares the ground for their early acquisition of these arts, so the liberal

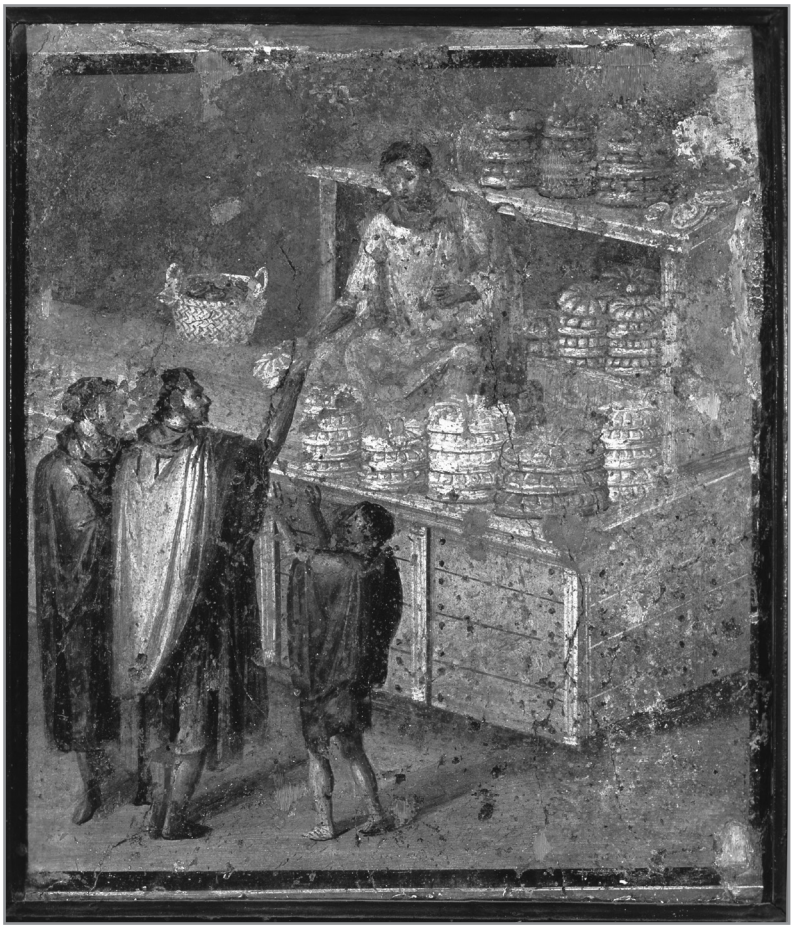

Fig. 1.7. *A baker sells bread on the public square. First-century-C.E. fresco from Pompeii. Photo: Fotografica Foglia; Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. Art Resource, New York.*

arts do not conduct the soul all the way to virtue, but merely set it going in that direction.

Posidonius divides the arts into four classes: first we have those which are common and low, then those which serve for amusement, then those which refer to the education of boys, and, finally, the liberal arts. The common sort belong to workmen and are mere hand-work; they are concerned with equipping life; there is in them no pretense to beauty or honor. . . . However, those alone are really liberal—or rather, to give them a truer name, "free"—whose concern is virtue.

(Seneca, *Epistle* 88, *On Liberal and Vocational Studies*, trans. Gummere, LCL)

The Indignity of Appearing "Weak"

At least from the time of the late republic and on into the early empire, Roman society explicitly noticed and valued social strength. Terms for social strength include *influence* and *power* or their cognates in the selections that follow. With the exception of Rom 15:1, where the term *strong* seems to refer to a specific group who felt free to eat meat and drink wine (Rom 14:2, 21), Paul frequently identifies himself as weak (see 1 Cor 4:10; 9:22; 2 Cor 6:4-10; 11:16-33; 12:1-10; 13:4; Gal 4:13-14). Such self-presentation might have seemed scandalous to people in a society that placed such value on social strength, as two letters from Seneca demonstrate.

18. The importance of avoiding discomfort (Seneca)

> Let us, however, as far as we can, avoid discomforts as well as dangers, and withdraw to safe ground, by thinking continually how we may repel all objects of fear. If I am not mistaken, there are three main classes of these: we fear want, we fear sickness, and we fear the troubles which result from the force of the stronger person. And of all these, that which shakes us most is the dread which hangs over us from our neighbor's strength.
>
> (Seneca, *Epistle* 14.3-4, trans. Gummere, LCL, modified)

19. The importance of avoiding contempt (Seneca)

> Contempt remains to be discussed. He who has made this quality an adjunct of his own personality, who is despised because he wishes to be despised and not because he must be despised, has the measure of contempt under his control. Any inconveniences in this respect can be dispelled by honorable occupations and by friendships with men who have influence with an influential person; with these men it will profit you to engage but not to entangle yourself, lest the cure may cost you more than the risk.
>
> (Seneca, *Epistle* 105.5, trans. Gummere, LCL)[21]

20. On being intimidated by the powerful (Pliny)

The risk involved in engaging with socially powerful people can be seen in the way the younger Pliny, Roman governor of Bithynia, later described his decision to continue to defend a client before an impressive body of judges—including friends of Caesar—despite being warned in a dream to give it up. (Note that Paul also had contacts with people in Caesar's household, most probably socially powerful slaves who worked for the emperor [Phil 4:22].)

> I had undertaken to act on behalf of Junius Pastor when I dreamed that my mother-in-law came and begged me on her knees to give up the case. I was very young at the time and I was about to plead in the Centumviral Court before the most powerful citizens and even before friends of Caesar.[22] Any one of these considerations could have shaken my resolve after such a depressing dream, but I carried on, believing that "the best and only omen is to fight for your country" [*Iliad* 12.243]. For my pledged word was as sacred to me as my country or as

> anything dearer than that. I won my case, and it was that speech which drew attention to me and set me on the threshold of a successful career.
>
> (Pliny, *Epistle* 1.18.3, trans. Radice, LCL, modified)

In another letter Pliny comments on the challenge of adjudicating legal cases against socially powerful people, in this case a deceased proconsul who was being tried posthumously along with the man's living accomplices.

21. The weight of the powerful in court (Pliny)

> It looked as though we should run short of time and lose our breath and voice if we bundled so many accusations and defendants all together, so to speak, and then the large number of names and charges might exhaust the attention of the magistrates and possibly leave them in confusion. Moreover, the combined influence of the individuals concerned might procure for each the effect of the whole, and, finally, the most powerful might make scapegoats of the humble, and so escape at their expense. Privilege and self-interest are most likely to triumph when they can be concealed behind a mask of severity.
>
> (Pliny, *Epistle* 3.9.9, trans. Radice, LCL, modified)

22. The "Weakness" of the many who observe Torah (Horace)

"Weakness" could also be associated with particular ethnicities. Horace, writing during the reign of the emperor Augustus, associates weakness with the religious sensitivities of those who practice Jewish observances. In a satire he describes being accosted by an overly talkative acquaintance. When a friend approaches, he tries to signal that he wishes to be rescued from conversation, but the second acquaintance puts him off, claiming respect for the Jewish Sabbath.

> Cruelly arch, he laughs, and pretends not to take the hint: anger galled my liver. "Certainly, [said I,] you said that you wanted to communicate something to me in private."
>
> "I remember it very well; but will tell it you at a better opportunity; today is the thirtieth Sabbath. Would you affront the circumcised Jews?"
>
> I reply, "I have no scruple [on that account]."
>
> "But I have. I am something weaker, one of the multitude. You must forgive me: I will speak with you on another occasion." And has this sun arisen so disastrous upon me! The wicked rogue runs away.
>
> (Horace, *Satire* 1.9.68-72)[23]

23. Upper-class perceptions of an imprisoned Christian leader (Lucian)

If Paul made a great deal of presenting himself as a "slave of Christ," he also emphasized his multiple imprisonments for the sake of Christ (2 Cor 6:5; 11:23; Phil 1:12-18; Phlm 1; compare Eph 3:1; 4:1; 6:20). In Paul's day, imprisonment was not itself a form of punishment, as it often is today. Imprisonment functioned rather as a necessary preliminary to standing trial. One would be imprisoned only until one could be

tried in court. The court's verdict might be release, beating and then release, forced labor, exile, or execution, but not more imprisonment.

Paul's self-presentation as prisoner and the care that some of the assemblies showed to him while he was imprisoned (Phil 2:25; 4:10, 18; compare Col 4:18) is consistent with the teaching elsewhere that followers of Jesus should care for the imprisoned (Matt 25:36-45; Mark 13:11; Luke 21:12; Heb 10:34; 13:3; Rev 1:9; 2:10). That expectation became so normative that it could serve as the stereotypical target of satire, as in this biting account from the second century C.E. Lucian of Samosata describes a charlatan, Proteus (or Peregrinus, "Pilgrim"), who masqueraded as a Christian missionary in order to garner support from gullible communities (and thus avoid prosecution for murdering his father). The extract reveals Lucian's contempt for such solicitude toward the imprisoned.

> It was then that [Proteus] learned the wondrous lore of the Christians, by associating with their priests and scribes in Palestine. And—how else could it be?—in an instant he made them all look like children, for he was prophet, cult-leader, head of the synagogue, and everything, all by himself. He interpreted and explained some of their books and even composed many, and they revered him as a god, made use of him as a lawgiver, and set him down as a protector, next after that other, to be sure, whom they still worship, the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world.
>
> Then at length Proteus was arrested for this and thrown into prison, which itself gave him no little reputation as an asset for his future career and the charlatanism and notoriety-seeking that he loved. Well, when he had been imprisoned, the Christians, regarding the incident as a calamity, left nothing undone in the effort to rescue him. Then, as this was impossible, every other form of attention was shown him, not in any casual way but with due diligence, and from the very break of day aged widows and orphan children could be seen waiting near the prison, while their officials even slept inside with him after bribing the guards. Then elaborate meals were brought in, and sacred books of theirs were read aloud, and excellent Peregrinus—for he still went by that name—was called by them "the new Socrates."
>
> Indeed, people came even from the cities in Asia, sent by the Christians at their common expense, to help and defend and encourage the hero. They show incredible speed whenever any such public action is taken; for in no time they lavish their all. So it was then in the case of Peregrinus; much money came to him from them by reason of his imprisonment, and he procured not a little revenue from it. The poor wretches have convinced themselves, first and foremost, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time, in consequence of which they despise death and even willingly give themselves into custody; most of them. Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they are all brothers of one another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living under his laws. Therefore they despise all things indiscriminately and consider them common property, receiving such doctrines traditionally without any definite evidence. So if any charlatan and trickster, able to profit by opportunity, comes among them, he quickly acquires sudden wealth by imposing upon simple folk.

> However, Peregrinus was freed by the then governor of Syria, a man who was fond of philosophy. Aware of his recklessness and that he would gladly die in order that he might leave behind him a reputation for it, he freed him, not considering him worthy even of the usual punishment of scourging.
>
> (Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 11-14, trans. Harmon, LCL, modified)

The "Obedience of Faith among the Nations"

Another striking aspect of Paul's self-presentation is that he regularly sounds echoes of what we might consider the *political* language of Roman magistrates and the rhetoric of civic forums. Beyond his use of the term *ekklēsia*, discussed above, scholars have long noted that the Greek term *euangelion*, normally translated "gospel" or "good news" (see Rom 1:1, 16-17; 2:16; 15:19) was also used in connection with the emperor and especially in the celebration of the wondrous benefits that Augustus had brought to the world. As we shall see further in chapter 3, the modern distinction of "political" and "religious" language does not accord with the way these themes were blended in the Roman world.

24. The Priene inscription

In an inscription from Priene in Asia Minor,[24] the leaders of various cities in the province decree that the birthday of Augustus shall be regarded as a holiday and celebrated at the same time that terms of office begin. Although it is known as "the Priene Inscription," copies have been found also in Apamea, Eumeneia, and Dorylaeum. Note the exalted language about the birth of Augustus as the start of a new creation for the world; note also the use of the term *euangelion*, here in the plural, to refer to the "good news" regarding Augustus's reign.

> It seemed good to the Greek cities in Asia, on the recommendation of the high priest Apollonius, son of Menophilos from Arcadia, since providence, in divinely ordering our existence, has shown esteem and a lavish outlay has embellished the good—perfection—onto life by displaying Augustus, whom virtue has filled for the benefit of humankind, while graciously giving us and those after us a Savior who has ended war, setting things right in peace, and since Caesar when revealed surpassed the hopes of all who had anticipated the good news [*euangelia*],[25] not only going beyond the benefits of those who had preceded him, but rather leaving no hope of surpassing him for those who will come, because of him the birthday of God began good news [*euangelia*] for the world.[26]

25. The Emperor Gaius (Caligula) as false herald (Philo)

Some measure of the way "religious" and "political" themes could overlap can be derived from the way Philo of Alexandria (20—54 C.E.) discusses the emperor Gaius's descent into cruelty and madness. Here he describes Gaius's predilection for appearing in public in the figure of one or another of the Greek gods Hermes, Apollo, or Ares. Philo considers the emperor's imposture as Hermes particularly offensive

because the true duty of the "interpreter of the gods" is to proclaim benefits to all humanity; but Gaius became, in effect, an antievangelist, a false herald (*kēryx*).

> So great a frenzy possessed him, so wild and delirious an insanity, that leaving the demigods below he proceeded to advance upwards and armed himself to attack the honors paid by their worshippers to the deities held to be greater and divine on both sides [that is, by humans and gods alike], Hermes, Apollo, and Ares. To take Hermes first, he arrayed himself with herald's staffs, sandals and mantles, a grotesque exhibition of order in disorder, consistency in confusion, reason in derangement. . . .
>
> Then those who saw these things were struck with amazement at the strange contradiction, marveling how one whose actions were the opposite of those whose honors he purposed to share as their equal did not think fit to practice their virtues and yet at the same time invested himself with their insignia each in turn. Yet surely these trappings and ornaments are set as accessories on images and statues as symbolically indicating the benefits which those thus honored provide for the human race.
>
> Hermes is shod with sandals like outstretched wings, why? Is it not because it befits the interpreter [*hermēneus*] and spokesman [*prophētēs*] of things divine,

Fig. 1.8. *The emperor Gaius (Caligula), marble bust, c. 40 C.E. Museo Palazzo Massimo, Rome. Photo: Neil Elliott.*

whence also he gets his name of Hermes, that when he is the harbinger of good [*ta agatha diangellein*], since not even a wise man, much less a god, makes himself the announcer of evil, he should be very swift-footed, traveling with well-nigh the speed of wings in the zeal which brooks no delay. The news of things profitable should be carried quickly, bad news slowly if it is not permitted to leave it untold.

Again Hermes assumes the herald's staff as an emblem of covenants of reconciliation, for wars come to be suspended or ended through heralds establishing peace; wars where no heralds are admitted create endless calamities both for the assailants and the defenders. But for what useful purpose did Gaius assume the sandals? Was it that everything of ill report and evil name, instead of being buried in silence, as it should be, might be noised abroad with impetuous speed and resound on every side? And yet what need was there for this activity in locomotion? Standing where he was, he rained miseries untold one after another as from perennial fountains on every part of the inhabited world. And what need of the herald-staff had he whose every word and deed was not for peace but filled every house and city throughout Greece and the outside world with intestine wars! No, let him shed Hermes, let him purge himself of his lying claim to a title so ill-fitting, the impostor!

(Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 93-94, 98-102, trans. Colson, LCL)

26. The submission of nations and "gifts of the peoples" (Virgil)

As we shall see in chapter 3, the Greek term *pistis*, like the Latin *fides*, has a broader range than we normally mean by "faith." "Faithfulness" and "loyalty" are better translations. The term was regularly used euphemistically to describe relationships of loyalty between the Roman Empire and the peoples it had conquered.

Paul's particular language about securing "the obedience of faith among the nations" (Rom 1:5) or, more simply, "the obedience of the nations" (Rom 15:18), along with his reference to his "priestly service" in bringing "the offering of the nations" to God (Rom 15:16), might well have struck echoes in his contemporaries' ears of language more customarily used by or about the emperor. One may compare, for example, the claims Augustus made about himself in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, the "achievements" or "works" of the divine Augustus (see chapter 3). One should also compare Virgil's description of the great shield that Venus gave her son, Aeneas, the fabled ancestor of the Roman people. On the shield, Vulcan had depicted scenes prophesying the future of Aeneas's descendants, including the Battle of Actium (at which Octavius would defeat Mark Antony), Augustus's subsequent triumphs, and his acceptance of the tribute of conquered nations.

But [Augustus] Caesar, entering the walls of Rome in triple triumph, was dedicating to Italy's gods his immortal votive gift—three hundred mighty shrines throughout the city. The streets were ringing with gladness and games and shouting; in all the temples was a band of matrons, in all were altars, and before the altars slain steers covered the ground. He himself, seated at the snowy threshold of shining Phoebus, reviews the gifts of nations and hangs them on the proud portals. The conquered peoples move in long array, as diverse

> in fashion of dress and arms as in tongues. Here Mulciber had portrayed the Nomad race and the ungirt Africans, here the Leleges and Carians and quivered Gelonians. Euphrates moved now with humbler waves, and the Morini were there, furthest of mankind, and the Rhine of double horn, the untamed Dahae, and Araxes chafing at his bridge. Such sights [Aeneas] admires on the shield of Vulcan, his mother's gift, and, though he knows not the events, he rejoices in their representation, raising up on his shoulder the fame and fortunes of his children's children.
>
> (Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.715-31, trans. Fairclough, LCL)

Paul's "Autobiography"

Paul's letters were written to established assemblies of followers of Jesus. They nevertheless give us some evidence—even if limited and indirect—of what Paul's initial presentation to an audience of potential adherents might have looked and sounded like. Though personal details in the letters are far sketchier than in the dramatic narratives in Acts, Paul did make aspects of his own biography a part of his proclamation.

27. Tarsus (Strabo)

It is Acts that identifies Paul as a "man of Tarsus" (9:11; 21:39; 22:3); Paul himself never mentions the city in his letters (though he does tell the Galatians that after receiving God's "revelation" of Christ he went into "the areas of Syria and Cilicia" (Gal 1:21, of which Tarsus was the capital). We have testimonies to the wealth of Tarsus from the fourth century B.C.E. The Seleucid ruler Antiochus IV made it a Greek city-state in 171 B.C.E.; Mark Antony rewarded the city for its allegiance by giving it independence and tax-free status in 42 B.C.E., a status that Octavian reaffirmed after he defeated Antony in 31 B.C.E. Strabo praised the city for its educational resources.

> The people at Tarsus have devoted themselves so eagerly, not only to philosophy, but also the whole round of education in general, that they have surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of philosophers. But it is so different from other cities that there the men who are fond of learning are all natives, and foreigners are not inclined to sojourn there; neither do these natives stay there, but they complete their education abroad; and when they have completed it they are pleased to live abroad, and but few go back home. . . . Further, the city of Tarsus has all kinds of schools of rhetoric; and in general it not only has a flourishing population but also is most powerful, and thus keeps up the reputation of the mother-city.
>
> (Strabo, *Geographica* 14.5.13, trans. Reasoner)

A Pharisee

In his letter to the Philippians Paul lists reasons he might have to boast, including being "a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of

Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee" (3:5). The Pharisees were, at different times in the Hellenistic era, a powerful party involved in Jerusalem politics. By the Roman era, however, their influence seems to have waned, though they were something of a "loyal opposition" to the power of the Sadducees and the families that controlled the high priesthood. Our sources—Josephus, the New Testament, and later rabbinic literature—offer tantalizing clues that we continue to struggle to fit together. One scholar has written that "recent research on the Pharisees has paradoxically made them and their role in Palestinian society more obscure and difficult to describe"; even more enigmatic is the question how Diaspora Jews—and their non-Jewish neighbors—would have perceived Paul's claim to the role.[27]

Both Josephus and the Mishnah describe the Pharisees in contrast to the Sadducees—Josephus, in terms of their differing beliefs; the Mishnah, in terms of their opposite rulings regarding aspects of Torah observance.

28. Pharisees and Sadducees (Josephus)

Josephus describes three "schools" (*haireseis*) of Judaism in order to disparage a fourth "school" or "fourth philosophy," that of the Zealots, as a betrayal of genuine Jewish principles. In the course of these descriptions he contrasts the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The reference in this extract to "Fate" (*heimarmenē*) might be an effort to represent apocalyptic beliefs in terms of Hellenistic philosophy; Josephus's reference to a Pharisaic belief in the transference of souls (metempsychosis) is otherwise unattested.

> Of the two first-named schools, the Pharisees, who are considered the most accurate interpreters of the laws and hold the position of the leading sect, attribute everything to Fate [*heimarmenē*] and God; they hold that to act rightly or otherwise resets, indeed, for the most part with human beings, but that in each action Fate cooperates. Every soul, they maintain, is imperishable, but the soul of the good alone passes in to another body, while the souls of the wicked suffer eternal punishment.
>
> The Sadducees, the second of the orders, do away with Fate altogether, and remove God beyond, not merely the commission, but the very sight, of evil. They maintain that human beings have the free choice of good or evil, and that it rests with each person's will whether one follows the one or the other. As for the persistence of the soul after death, penalties in the underworld, and rewards, they will have none of them.
>
> (*Jewish War* 2.162-65, trans. Thackeray, LCL, modified)

29. Pharisees and Sadducees (*m. Yadayim*)

Notice the sorts of concerns that distinguished Pharisees and Sadducees according to this passage from the Mishnah: particular rulings concerning cleanness and uncleanness and concerning liability for damages.

> The Sadducees say, We cry out against you, O Pharisees, for you say, "The Holy Scriptures render the hands unclean," [and] "The writings of Hamiram

> [probably Homer] do not render the hands unclean." Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai said, "Have we naught against the Pharisees save this!—for lo, they say, 'The bones of an ass are clean, and the bones of Johanan the High Priest are unclean.'" They said to him, "As is our love for them so is their uncleanness—that no man make spoons of the bones of his father or mother." He said to them, "Even so the Holy Scriptures: as is our love for them so is their uncleanness; [whereas] the writings of Hamiram which are held in no account do not really render the hands unclean.
>
> The Sadducees say, "We cry out against you, O Pharisees, for you declare clean an unbroken stream of liquid" [that is, uncleanness cannot travel "up" the stream]. The Pharisees say, "We cry out against you, O Sadducees, for you declare clean a channel of water that flows from a burial ground." The Sadducees say, "We cry out against you, O Pharisees, for you say, 'If my ox or my ass have done an injury they are culpable, but if my bondman or my bondwoman have done an injury they are not culpable'—if, in the case of my ox or my ass (about which no commandments are laid upon me) I am responsible for the injury that they do, how much more in the case of my bondman or my bondwoman (about whom certain commandments are laid upon me) must I be responsible for the injury that they do!" They [the Pharisees] said to them [the Sadducees], "No!—as you argue concerning my ox or my ass (which have no understanding) would you likewise argue concerning my bondman or my bondwoman which have understanding?—for if I provoke him to anger he may go and set fire to another's stack of corn, and it is I that must make restitution!"
>
> (*m. Yadayim* 4.6-7, trans. Danby, alt.)

A Persecutor of the *Ekklēsia*

Paul writes to the Galatians that they have no doubt heard about his "earlier life in Judaism," that he was "violently persecuting" the *ekklēsia* of God "and trying to destroy it" (Gal 1:13). Luke writes that Paul attended the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and then set about "ravaging" the *ekklēsia*, "entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison" (8:3). Luke emphasizes Paul's personal antipathy to the followers of Jesus: "Still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord," he "went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus" authorizing him to bring any followers of Jesus back "bound to Jerusalem" (9:1-2).

Why did Paul persecute the early *ekklēsiai*? Paula Fredriksen has evaluated different explanations that have been offered by interpreters and finds many of them historically improbable. It is unlikely, for example (though it is the view of "an almost universal consensus"), that Paul persecuted Jewish Christians "because they challenged religious principles fundamental to Judaism." Fredriksen finds little or no basis for the assumptions that these believers abandoned the observance of Torah; rather "everything we know about Jesus' original disciples indicates that they kept the Law."[28]

Neither would belief in a risen messiah who had been crucified have constituted a religious offense (despite Paul's argument in Gal 3:13, a "snarled passage"

that Fredriksen considers only an impromptu argument directed to a specific situation).[29] The inclusion of non-Jews alongside Jews, even at table fellowship, might have appeared distasteful to individual Jews but was hardly a religious offense, as the widespread acceptance of non-Jews in synagogue life—and traveling to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices in the temple—attest.[30]

Fredriksen argues instead that it was the social and political volatility of the message proclaimed by these Jewish believers that caused alarm: "The enthusiastic proclamation of a messiah executed very recently as a political insurrectionist—a crucified messiah—combined with a vision of the approaching End preached also to Gentiles—this was dangerous. If it got abroad, it could endanger the whole Jewish community."[31] This concern for the precarious stability of Diaspora Jewish communities motivated Paul's efforts to suppress the messianic movement.

Most likely Paul was implementing the synagogue discipline based on Deuteronomy 25 and described in the Mishnah tractate *Makkot*, "Stripes" (or "lashes")—a discipline to which he himself was later subjected (2 Cor 11:24, on Roman civil punishment, 11:25). Although interpreters have offered different explanations for what offense a Jewish court might have found in the proclamation of Jesus, the most likely (and least theologically prejudicial) explanation is that proclaiming as messiah one known to have been executed by Rome would have sounded a politically incendiary note that jeopardized the already precarious situation of Jewish populations in Roman cities (on which see further chapter 4).[32]

30. Synagogue discipline (*m. Makkoth*)

The Mishnah tractate *Makkot*, "Stripes," lays out the reasons for imposing stripes as a disciplinary penalty, the limitations on the penalty, and the ultimate goal of restoration to the Jewish community.

> These are they who are to be scourged: he that has [sexual] connection with his sister, his father's sister, his mother's sister, his wife's sister, his brother's wife, his father's brother's wife, or a menstruant; a High Priest who married a widow, a common priest who married a woman who was divorced or who had performed *halitzah* [see Deut 25:7-9], an Israelite that married a bastard or a *Nethinah*, or the daughter of an Israelite that married a bastard or a *Nathin* [temple slave]. If a woman was a widow and also divorced [and a High Priest married her], he is thereby culpable on two counts. If a woman was divorced and had also performed *halitzah* [and a common priest married her], he is culpable only on one count. . . .
>
> [These also are to be scourged:] an unclean person who ate Hallowed Things, or who entered the Temple while he was unclean, or who ate the fat or the blood, the Remnant, or the Refuse [of the offerings], or [an offering] that was become unclean; or who slaughtered [an offering] or offered it outside the Temple; or who ate at Passover what was leavened, or who ate or did any act of work on the Day of Atonement.

(Other ritual offenses follow.)

How many stripes do they inflict on a man? Forty save one, for it is written, "By number forty" [Deut 25:2-3]; [that is to say], a number near to forty. R. Judah says: He suffers the forty stripes in full. And where does he suffer the added one? Between the shoulders. . . .

How do they scourge him? They bind his two hands to a pillar on either side, and the minister of the synagogue lays hold on his garments—if they are torn they are torn, if they are utterly rent they are utterly rent—so that he bares his chest. A stone is set down behind him on which the minister of the synagogue stands with a strap of calf-hide in his hand, doubled and re-doubled, and two [other] straps that rise and fall [are fastened] thereto.

The hand-piece of the strap is one handbreadth long and one handbreadth wide; and its end must reach to his navel [the navel of the man being struck on the shoulder]. He gives him one third of the stripes in front [on the chest] and two-thirds behind [on the bared shoulder]; and he may not strike him when he is standing or when he is sitting, but only when he is bending low, for it is written, "The judge shall cause him to lie down" [Deut 25:2]. And he that smites, smites with his one hand with all his might. . . .

All they who are liable to Extirpation, if they have been scourged are no longer liable to Extirpation, for it is written, "And thy brother seem vile unto thee" [Deut 25:3] when he is scourged then he is thy brother. So R. Hanina b. Gamaliel. Moreover R. Hanina b. Gamaliel said: "If he that commits one transgression thereby forfeits his soul, how much more, if he performs one religious duty, shall his soul be restored to him!" R. Simeon says: "From the same place we may learn [the like], for it is written, 'Even the souls that do them shall be cut off'; and it says, 'Which if a man do he shall live by them' [Lev 18:5]; thus to him that sits and commits no transgression is given a reward as to one that performs a religious duty." R. Simeon the son of Rabbi says: "Lo, it says, 'Only be sure that thou eat not the blood, for the blood is the life . . .' [Deut 12:23]; if a man keeps himself apart from blood (which man's soul abhors) he receives a reward, how much more, if he keeps himself apart from robbery and incest (which a man's soul longs after and covets), shall he gain merit for himself and his generations and the generations of his generations to the end of all generations!"

R. Hananiah b. Akashya says: "The Holy One, blessed is he, was minded to grant merit to Israel; therefore hath he multiplied for them the Law and commandments, as it is written. 'It pleased the Lord for his righteousness' sake to magnify the Law and make it honorable' [Isa 42:21]."

(*m. Makkot* 3.1-3, 10-12, trans. Danby, modified)[33]

Witness of the Heavenly Christ

At the heart of Paul's self-understanding as an apostle was a visionary experience: "Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?" (1 Cor 9:1). Christ's appearance qualified Paul to take his place among the other apostles: "Last of all . . . he appeared also to me" (1 Cor 15:8). This visionary experience was, for Paul, a divine revelation (an *apokalypsis*): "God . . . was pleased to reveal [*apokalyptein*] his son to me" (Gal 1:15-16).

Although Acts repeatedly depicts this "revelation" as a terrestrial experience—that is, Paul saw a bright light and heard a voice while traveling along the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-9; 22:6-11; 26:12-18)—Paul himself never gives such an account

in his own letters. Instead, in 2 Corinthians 12, in the midst of a heated argument regarding "visions and revelations" (*optasias kai apokalypseis*), he speaks obliquely of "a person in Christ" who "was caught up to the third heaven" and "heard things that are not to be told" (NRSV). A number of scholars have shown that elements of Paul's language here fit very well with what we know from somewhat later texts as a rich tradition of visionary experience in Hellenistic and later rabbinic Judaism.

This tradition was fueled by tantalizing biblical descriptions of righteous mortals who had been taken up into heaven, like Enoch (Gen 5:24) or Elijah, who was whisked heavenward on a "chariot of fire" (2 Kgs 2:11); of heavenly visions in which human beings were allowed to behold the very presence of God seated upon a heavenly throne (Isa 6:1-2); or of a figure in human form ("like a son of man") similarly enthroned and empowered by God (the Ancient of Days, Dan 7:13-14) or even identified with "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD" (Ezek 1:26-28). This Jewish visionary tradition also owed much to Hellenistic cosmological speculation.[34]

Much of what would come to be called the *merkavah* tradition of Jewish mysticism (from the chariot, *merkābâ*, in 2 Kings 2 and from the exotic description of a wheeled conveyance for the "living creatures" in Ezekiel 1, later identified as a chariot) is found in writings later than Paul's period. But the constellation of elements—heavenly ascent, visions of paradise, the heavenly worship given to God by angels, and perhaps of greatest importance for understanding Paul, the transformation of the seer through participation in the divine being and the heavenly throne room—are

Fig. 1.9. *The prophet Ezekiel's vision of restored bodies and a restored ark of the covenant. Fresco from the synagogue at Dura Europos, Syria, c. 239 C.E. Josephus's mention of Pharisaic interest in "fate" may refer to apocalyptic traditions concerning a future life beyond death. Photo: Art Resource, New York.*

already present in the Enoch literature, the book of *Jubilees*, and the "angelic liturgy" texts (the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* [4Q400–407; 11Q17] found at Qumran).

Paul does not identify the vision described in 2 Corinthians 12 with his own first vision of the risen Christ. Indeed, the implication is that Paul experienced several ecstatic encounters with Christ over the course of his apostolic career. But it is nevertheless possible that the first "revelation" of Christ to Paul was one such event.[35] Though Paul's visionary experience is unlike those described in other Jewish texts, in that he identifies the heavenly being to whom dominion shall be given as the crucified Jesus, the vocabulary and imagery Paul uses seem to place him within a broader mystical-apocalyptic tradition as our earliest first-person testimony to it.

31. Angelic worship (*Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice*)

Though fragmentary, a number of texts from Cave 4 at Qumran, dated to the first century B.C.E., give evidence of keen interest among some Second-Temple Jews in the heavenly world described in prophetic visionary accounts. These texts describe ongoing angelic worship of God, presumably going on at the same time sacrifices are offered on earth—though the language of an "inner Temple" might suggest that the texts provide an access to heavenly worship distinct from the sacrifices in the (earthly) temple. Note the references to heavenly chariots and a "throne-chariot." These texts are of tremendous importance for interpreting language about angelic worship in 1 Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians, and other early Christian texts as well. Missing text, in brackets, has been reconstructed on the basis of patterns seen in the same or other fragments; "gods" translates the Hebrew *'lwhym*.

> [To the Master. Song of the holocaust of the] first [Sabba]th, on the fourth of the first month.
>
> Praise [the God of . . .] the "gods" [*'ĕlōhîm*] of supreme holiness; in [his] divine [kingship, rejoice. For he has established] supreme holiness among the everlastingly holy, the Holy of Holies, to be for him the priests of [the inner Temple in his royal sanctuary], ministers of the Presence in his glorious innermost Temple chamber. In the congregation of all the gods [*'ĕlîm*] of [knowledge, and in the congregation of all the ["gods" of] God, he engraved his precepts for all the spiritual works, and [his glorious] judgments [for all who lay the foundations of] knowledge, the people (endowed with) his glorious understanding, the "gods" who are close to knowledge . . . of eternity and from the fountain of holiness to the sanctuary of supreme [holiness] . . . prie[sts] of the inner Temple, ministers of the Presence of the [most] holy King . . . his glory. They shall grow in strength decree by decree to be seven [eternal councils. For he fo]unded them [for] himself as the most [holy, who minister in the h]oly of holies . . . do not endure [those who per]vert the way. There is [n]othing impure in their sanctuaries. He engraved for them [precepts relating to ho]ly gifts; by them, all the everlastingly holy shall sanctify themselves. He shall purify the [luminously] pure [to repa]y all those who render their way crooked. Their expiations shall obtain his goodwill for all those who repent from sin . . . knowledge among the priests of the inner Temple, and from their mouth (proceed) the teachings of the holy with the judgments of [his glory] . . . his [gra]ces for everlasting

merciful forgiveness. In his zealous vengeance . . . he has established for himself as priests of the inner Temple, the most holy . . . of gods, the priests of the highest heights who are near [to . . .]

(4Q400 frg. 1.1, trans. Vermes)

. . . His glorious chariots. When they go . . . they do not turn aside . . . but advance straight . . .

For the Mas[ter. Song of the holocaust of] the twelfth [S]abbath [on the twenty-first of the third month.]

[Praise the God of . . . w]onder, and exalt Him . . . of glory in the te[nt of the God of] knowledge. The [cheru]bim prostate themselves before Him and bless. As they rise, a whispered divine voice [is heard], and there is a roar of praise. When they drop their wings, there is a [whispere]d divine voice. The cherubim bless the image of the throne-chariot above the firmament, [and] they praise [the majes]ty of the luminous firmament beneath His seat of glory. When the wheels advance, Angels of holiness come and go. From between His glorious wheels, there is as it were a fiery vision of most holy spirits.

About them, the appearance of rivulets of fire in the likeness of gleaming brass, and a work of . . . radiance in many-colored glory, marvelous pigments, clearly mingled. The spirits of the living "gods" [*'ĕlîm*] move perpetually with the glory of the marvelous chariot(s). The whispered voice of blessing accompanies the roar of their advance, and they praise the Holy One on their way of return. When they ascend, they ascend marvelously and when they settle, they stand still. The sound of joyful praise is silenced and there is a whispered blessing of the "gods" in all the camps of God.

And the sound of praise . . . from among all their divisions . . . and all their numbered ones praise, each in his turn.

(4Q405 frg. 20, col. 2, 21-22, trans. Vermes)

32. Heavenly revelations given to Enoch

Genesis declares that Enoch "walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him" (5:24). That cryptic statement became the headwaters for a torrent of Jewish tradition in the Hellenistic age that claimed Enoch first as its champion, then as a medium of revelation. In *Jubilees* (mid-second century B.C.E.) Enoch is described as taken up into heaven, where he received revelation in the company of the angels for "six jubilees" (three hundred years). He also offered priestly service in a miraculously preserved Garden of Eden. He thus serves in the text as an exemplar of right observance and, as the first author of a divinely inspired text (he "wrote a testimony" and "deposited" it "upon the earth," 4:18-19), becomes a heavenly accreditation for the judgments and opinions presented in the book.

And [Enoch] saw what was and what will be in a vision of his sleep as it will happen among the children of men in their generations until the day of judgment. He saw and knew everything and wrote his testimony and deposited the testimony upon the earth against the children of men and their generations. . . .

And he was therefore with the angels of God six jubilees of years. And they showed him everything which is on earth and in the heavens, the dominion of

the sun. And he wrote everything, and bore witness to the Watchers, the ones who sinned with the daughters of men because they began to mingle themselves with the daughters of men so that they might be polluted. And Enoch bore witness against all of them. And he was taken from among the children of men, and we led him to the garden of Eden for greatness and honor. And behold, he is there writing condemnation and judgment of the world, and all of the evils of the children of men. And because of him none of the water of the Flood came upon the whole land of Eden, for he was put there for a sign and so that he might bear witness against all of the children of men so that he might relate all of the deeds of the generations until the day of judgment. And he offered the incense which is acceptable before the Lord in the evening (at) the holy place on Mount Qater. For the Lord has four (sacred) places upon the earth: the garden of Eden and the mountain which you are upon today, Mount Sinai, and Mount Zion, which will be sanctified in the new creation for the sanctification of the earth. On account of this the earth will be sanctified from all sin and from pollution throughout eternal generations.

(*Jubilees* 4:19, 21-26, trans. Wintermute)

33. Enoch's heavenly journey and transformation (*1 Enoch* 70-71)

The explosion of Enochic literature (and of an "Enochic movement") sometime between the mid-second century B.C.E. and the early first century C.E. shows the interest in Judea in finding revelatory figures—mortals who had ascended into the heavens to receive knowledge and wisdom—in the Torah as well as the prophetic writings. The book we call *1 Enoch* is available in its entirety only in Ethiopic translation (in more than forty manuscripts), but much earlier fragments in Aramaic, Greek, and Latin are known to us. The numerous Aramaic fragments from Qumran, which include every section except the "Similitudes" (chapters 37–71), show the popularity of the Enochic library in the late second and early first century B.C.E. Although we cannot establish that the Similitudes were already extant in Paul's day, they show the combination of features that marked what would come to be called the *merkavah* tradition: interest in the heavenly "chariot," the angelic host, the revelation of secret knowledge, and the transformation into a heavenly being of the mortal who is taken up into heaven and receives revelation.

And after this, while he was living, his name was raised
into the presence of that son of man
And into the presence of the Lord of Spirits
from among those who dwell on the earth.
He was raised on the chariots of the wind,
and his name departed <from among them.>

[Enoch's account] And from that day, I was not reckoned among them; and he set me between two winds, between the North and the West, where the angels took cords to measure for me the place of the chosen and the righteous. And

there I saw the first fathers and the righteous, who were dwelling in that place from of old.

And after that, my spirit was taken away,
and it ascended to heaven.
And I saw the sons of the holy angels,
and they were stepping on flames of fire;
And their garments were white, as were their tunics,
and the light of their faces was like snow.
And I saw two rivers of fire,
and the light of that fire shone like hyacinth,
and I fell on my face before the Lord of Spirits.
And the angel Michael, one of the archangels, took me by my right hand and raised me up,
and he brought me out to all the secrets;
and he showed me all the secrets of mercy,
and he showed me all the secrets of righteousness.
And he showed me all the secrets of the ends of heaven and all the treasuries of the stars,
and all the luminaries emerge from there before the holy ones.
And he took my spirit—even me, Enoch—to the heaven of heavens,
and I saw there, as it were, <a house> built of hailstones,
and between those stones were tongues of living fire.
And my spirit saw <in that light> a circle that encircled that house of fire,
from its four sides (came) rivers full of living fire,
and they encircled that house.
And around it were Seraphim and Cherubim, and Ophanim,
and those who do not sleep,
but guard the throne of his glory.
And I saw angels that could not be counted,
thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand;
they were surrounding that house.
And Michael and Raphael and Gabriel and Phanuel,
and the holy angels who (are in) the heights of heaven,
were going in and out of that house.
And out of that house came
Michael and Raphael and Gabriel and Phanuel
and many holy angels without number.
And with them was the Head of Days,
and his head was white and pure as wool,
and his apparel was indescribable.
And I fell on my face,
and all my flesh melted,
and my spirit was transformed.

(*1 Enoch* 70–71, trans. Nickelsburg and VanderKam)

34. Enoch in paradise (*2 Enoch*)

Another Enoch text, *2 Enoch,* similarly cannot be dated with any certainty earlier than the late first century.[36] Nevertheless, it is at least intriguing because, as Paul does in 2 Corinthians 12, it locates paradise in "the third heaven."

> And those men took me from there, and they brought me up to the third heaven, and set me down [there]. Then I looked downward, and I saw Paradise. And that place is inconceivably pleasant. And I saw the trees in full flower. And their fruits were ripe and pleasant-smelling, with every food in yield and giving off profusely a pleasant fragrance.
>
> And in the midst (of them was) the tree of life, at that place where the Lord takes a rest when he goes into paradise. And that tree is indescribable for pleasantness and fine fragrance, and more beautiful than any (other) created thing that exists. And from every direction it has an appearance which is gold-looking and crimson, and with the form of fire. And it covers the whole of Paradise. And it has something of every orchard tree and of every fruit. And its root is in Paradise at the exits that leads to the earth. . . .
>
> And there are three hundred angels, very bright, who look after Paradise; and with never-ceasing voice and pleasant singing they worship the Lord every day and hour. And I said, "How very pleasant is this place!"
>
> And those men said to me . . . "This place, Enoch, has been prepared for the righteous,
> who suffer every kind of calamity in their life
> and who afflict their souls,
> and who avert their eyes from injustice,
> and who carry out righteous judgment,
> and who give bread to the hungry,
> and who cover the naked with clothing,
> and who lift up the fallen,
> and who help the injured and the orphans,
> and who walk without a defect before the face of the Lord,
> and who worship him only: even for them this place has been prepared as an eternal inheritance."
>
> (*2 Enoch* 8–9, trans. Andersen)

35. Moses as recipient of heavenly revelation (Philo)

Philo of Alexandria wrote a little earlier than Paul. Relying in part on creative interpretation of the Greek scriptures, he could describe Moses as having been taken up into heaven, set at God's side, and shown unutterable mysteries, being himself transformed into a divine being, a "god" (*theos*).

> And so, as [Moses] abjured the accumulation of lucre, and the wealth whose influence is mighty among men, God rewarded him by giving him instead the greatest and most perfect wealth. That is the wealth of the whole earth and sea and rivers, and of all the other elements and the combinations which they form. . . . For if, as the proverb says, what belongs to friends is common, and the prophet is called the friend of God [Exod 33:11], it would follow that he shares

also God's possessions, so far as it is serviceable. . . . Again, was not the joy of his partnership [*koinōnia*] with the Father and Maker of all magnified also by the honor of being deemed worthy to bear the same title? For he was named god [*theon*, Exod 7:1 LXX] and king of the whole nation, and entered, we are told, into the darkness where God was [Exod 20:21], that is, into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal and archetypal essence of existing things. Thus he beheld what is hidden from the sight of mortal nature and, in himself and his life displayed for all to see, he has set before us, like some well-wrought picture, a piece of work beautiful and godlike, a model for those who are willing to copy it.

(Philo, *Life of Moses* 155-59, trans. Colson, LCL, adapted)

36. The assumption of Moses (Philo)

There is also another proof that the mind is immortal, which is of this nature: There are some persons whom God, advancing to higher degrees of improvement, has enabled to soar above all species and genera, having placed them near himself; as he says to Moses, "But stand thou here with me" [Deut 5:31]. When, therefore, Moses is about to die, he is not added to one class, nor does he forsake

Fig. 1.10. *Moses and the burning bush. Fresco from the synagogue at Dura Europos, Syria, c. 239 C.E. Photo: Art Resource, New York.*

another, as the men before him had done; nor is he connected with "addition" or "subtraction," but "by means of the word of the Cause of all things, by whom the whole world was made" [Deut 34:5]. He departs to another abode, that you may understand from this that God accounts a wise man as entitled to equal honor with the world itself, having both created the universe, and raised the perfect man from the things of earth up to himself by the same word.

But when [God] gave him the use of all earthly things and suffered him to dwell among them, he assigned to him not such a power as he might exercise in common with an earthly governor or monarch, by which he should forcibly rule over the passions of the soul, but he appointed him to be a sort of god, making the whole of the body, and the mind, which is the ruler of the body, subjects and slaves to him; "For I give thee," says he, "as a god to Pharaoh" [Exod 7:1].

But God is not susceptible of any subtraction or addition, inasmuch as he is complete and entirely equal to himself. In reference to which it is said of Moses, "That no one is said to know of his tomb" [Deut 34:6]; for who could be competent to perceive the migration of a perfect soul to the living God? Nor do I even believe that the soul itself while awaiting this event was conscious of its own improvement, inasmuch as it was at that time becoming gradually divine; for God, in the case of those persons whom he is about to benefit, does not take him who is to receive the advantage into his counsels, but is accustomed rather to pour his benefits ungrudgingly upon him without his having any previous anticipation of them.

(Philo, *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain* 8-9, trans. Yonge)

37. The Dangers of visionary speculation (the Mishnah)

In the midst of a discussion of the Festal Offering, the Mishnah tractate *Ḥagigah* sounds a cautionary note regarding controversial, lurid, or dangerously speculative topics, including Ezekiel's fantastic vision of a heavenly chariot (*merkavah*) in Ezekiel 1, from which the Jewish tradition of *merkavah* mysticism derives its name.

J. W. Bowker points out that the concern the rabbis express here is halakhic: that is, it has to do with the risk of approaching the holy God in a state of impurity. It is not a "doctrinal" concern: figures as "orthodox" as Yohanan ben Zakkai are also attested as the recipients of such visions. On the other hand, Alan F. Segal has argued that speculation about a second "power" in heaven ultimately was rejected as unacceptable by the rabbinic tradition.[37]

The forbidden degrees [of sexual contact: Lev 18:6-23] may not be expounded before three persons, nor the Story of Creation before two, nor the Chariot [that is, Ezekiel 1] before one alone, unless he is a Sage who understands of his own knowledge. Whoever gives his mind to four things, it were better for him if he had not come into the world: what is above? What is beneath? What was beforetime? And what will be hereafter? And whoever takes no thought for the honor of his Maker, it were better for him if he had not come into the world.

(*m. Ḥagigah* 2.1, trans. Danby, modified)

38. Concerns about specific biblical texts (the Mishnah)

Similarly, the tractate *Megillah* discourages the public interpretation of certain potentially controversial or provocative passages, including Ezekiel's vision, in worship.

> The story of Reuben [Gen 35:22] is read out but not interpreted; the story of Tamar [Gen 38:10-30] is read out and interpreted. The first story of the calf [Exod 2:1-20] is read out and interpreted, and the second [Exod 32:21-25] is read out but not interpreted. The Blessing of the Priests [Num 6:24-26] and the story of David [2 Sam 11:2-17] and of Amnon [2 Sam 13:1-39] are read out but not interpreted. They may not use the chapter of the Chariot [Ezekiel 1] as a reading from the Prophets; but R. Judah permits it. R. Eliezer says: "They do not use the chapter 'Cause Jerusalem to know' [Ezek 16:1] as a reading from the Prophets."
>
> (*m. Megillah* 4.10, trans. Danby, modified)

39. A revelatory dream from the Hellenistic world (Hippocrates)

Dreams or revelatory visions (see Acts 16:9) were commonplace in Hellenistic literature. Here Hippocrates, a physician from the age of Socrates, describes the beginning of such a revelation, occasioned by the god Asclepius and mediated by the goddess Truth.

> In that night . . . I had a dream, from which, I believe, nothing dangerous will come. But I woke up terrified, for I thought I saw Asclepius himself, and he came near to me. . . . But Asclepius did not look as he usually does in pictures, gentle and mild, but his gestures were wild and quite terrible to behold. Dragons followed behind him . . . but the god stretched out his hand to me, and I took it and asked him to heal me and not to leave me. However, he said, "At the moment you need nothing from me, but this goddess . . . will lead you. . . ." So I turned around and saw a large woman, with a simple hairdo, splendidly clothed. Pure light streamed forth from the pupils of her eyes, like lightning from stars. And the god withdrew from me, but the woman grasped my hand. . . . As she then turned around, I said, "Please tell me who you are and how I should address you." She replied, "'Truth' . . . which you see appearing: 'shine.'"
>
> (Hippocrates, *Letter* 15, trans. Boring)

40. A Roman general dreams of his destiny (Cicero)

The Roman world also knew its portentous visions of heaven and of the future. In the sixth book of his *De Republica*, Cicero narrates the dream of the Roman general Publius Cornelius Scipio (185–129 b.c.e.), which Cicero places some two years before his decisive defeat of Carthage (in 146).

Note the "revelatory" character of the dream, in Cicero's telling. Scipio's grandfather, the general Scipio Africanus, assures Scipio of his own impending military conquests and of the glorious future of the Roman people but also warns him that he will be required to assume the responsibilities of dictator of Rome and reverse the reforms of Tiberius Gracchus, which Cicero considered odious. Cicero apparently

recognizes the popularity of the Gracchian reforms, however, allowing the protests of his implied readers almost to interrupt his narration and awaken Scipio from his dream! It is, at last, a vision of the infinite expanse of the heavens that gives Scipio the assurance he needs to perform his duty. The narration begins as Scipio has been welcomed by the Numidian king, who had been given his throne by Scipio's own grandfather.

> At a later hour, after an entertainment of royal magnificence, we prolonged our conversation far into the night, while the old man talked to me about nothing else but Africanus, rehearsing not only all that he had done, but all that he had said. When we parted to go to our rest, sleep took a stronger hold on me than usual, on account both of the fatigue of my journey and of the lateness of the hour.
>
> In my sleep, I suppose in consequence of our conversation . . . Africanus appeared to me, with an aspect that reminded me more of his bust than of his real face. I shuddered when I saw him. But he said: "Preserve your presence of mind, Scipio; be not afraid, and commit to memory what I shall say to you.
>
> "Do you see that city, which was brought through me into subjection to the Roman people, but now renews its old hostility, and cannot remain quiet,"—and he showed me Carthage from a high place full of stars, shining and splendid,—"against which you, being little more than a common soldier, are coming to fight? In two years from now, you, as Consul, will overthrow this city, and you will obtain of your own right the surname which up to this time you hold as inherited from me. When you shall have destroyed Carthage, shall have celebrated your triumph over it, shall have been Censor, and shall have

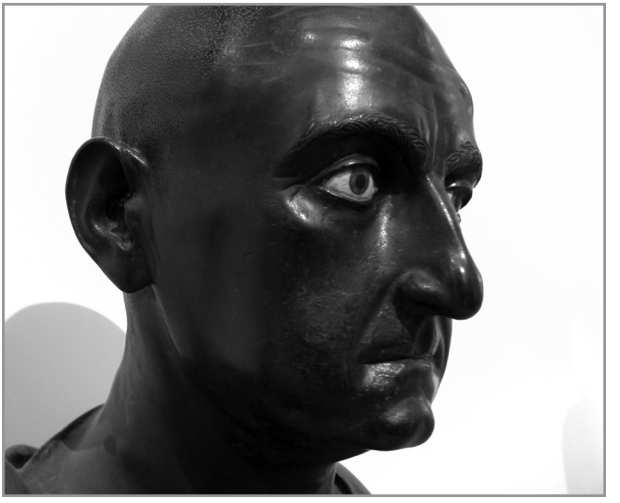

Fig. 1.11. *Bust of Scipio Africanus, the victorious general who appeared to his grandson in a dream; first century* C.E.*, excavated from Herculaneum. Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples. Photo in the public domain.*

> traversed, as an ambassador, Egypt, Syria, Asia, and Greece, you will be chosen a second time Consul in your absence, and will put an end to one of the greatest of wars by extirpating Numantia. But when you shall be borne to the Capitol in your triumphal chariot after this war, you will find the State disturbed by the machinations of my grandson [that is, Tiberius Gracchus].
>
> "In this emergency, Africanus, it will behoove you to show your country the light of your energy, genius, and wisdom. But I see at that time, as it were, a double way of destiny. For when your age . . . shall have completed for you in the course of nature the destined period, to you alone and to your name the whole city will turn; on you the Senate will look, on you all good citizens, on you the allies, on you the Latini. You will be the one man on whom the safety of the city will rest; and, to say no more, you, as Dictator, must re-establish the State, if you escape the impious hands of your kindred."
>
> Here, when Laelius had cried out, and the rest of the company had breathed deep sighs, Scipio, smiling pleasantly upon them, said, "I beg you not to rouse me from sleep and break up my vision. Hear the remainder of it."

Africanus continues to address his grandson:

> "But that you, Africanus, may be the more prompt in the defense of the State, know that for all who shall have preserved, succored, enlarged their country, there is a certain and determined place in heaven where they enjoy eternal happiness; for to the Supreme God who governs this whole universe nothing is more pleasing than those companies and unions of men that are called cities. Of these the rulers and preservers, going hence, return hither."
>
> Here I, although I had been alarmed, not indeed so much by the fear of death as by that of the treachery of my own kindred [that is, Tiberius Gracchus], yet asked whether Paulus, my father, and others whom we supposed to be dead were living. "Yes, indeed," he replied, "those who have fled from the bonds of the body, like runners from the goal, live; while what is called your life is death. But do you see your father Paulus coming to you?" When I saw him, I shed a flood of tears; but he, embracing and kissing me, forbade my weeping.
>
> Then as soon as my tears would suffer me to speak, I began by saying, "Most sacred and excellent father, since this is life, as Africanus tells me, why do I remain on the earth, and not rather hasten to come to you?"

Scipio's father explains that it is every noble soul's duty to perform its proper obligations on earth before it may be released in death.

> "But, Scipio, like this your grandfather, like me, your father, cherish justice and that sacred observance of duty to your kind, which, while of great worth toward parents and family, is of supreme value toward your country. Such a life is the way to heaven, and to this assembly of those who have already lived, and, released from the body, inhabit the place which you now see,"—it was that circle that shines forth among the stars in the most dazzling white,—"which you have learned from the Greeks to call the Milky Way."
>
> And as I looked on every side I saw other things transcendently glorious and wonderful. There were stars which we never see from here below, and all the stars were vast far beyond what we have ever imagined. The least of them

was that which, farthest from heaven, nearest to the earth, shone with a borrowed light. But the starry globes very far surpassed the earth in magnitude. The earth itself indeed looked to me so small as to make me ashamed of our empire, which was a mere point on its surface."

(Cicero, *De republica* 6.1-9, trans. Peabody)

Arabia

Paul declares that after his vision of the risen Christ he did not consult with other apostles but "went away at once into Arabia" (Gal 1:17). We know nothing else of this period; but in his account of Moses' life, Philo ascribes special significance to Moses' sojourn in Arabia ("Midian," Exod 2:15).

41. Moses' sojourn in Arabia (Philo)

When those in authority [in Egypt] who suspected the youth's [Moses'] intentions, knowing that he would remember their wicked actions against them and take vengeance when the opportunity came, had thus once got a handle, they poured malicious suggestions by the thousand from every side into the open ears of his grandfather, so as to instill the fear that his sovereignty might be taken from him. . . .

While such talk was in circulation, Moses retired [*hypanechōrēsen*] into the neighboring country of Arabia, where it was safe for him to stay, at the same time beseeching God to save the oppressed from their helpless, miserable plight, and to punish as they deserved the oppressors who had left no form of maltreatment untried, and to double the gift by granting to himself that he should see both these accomplished. God, in high approval of his spirit, which loved the good and hated evil, listened to his prayers, and very shortly judged the land and its doings as became His nature. But, while the divine judgment was still waiting, Moses was carrying out the exercises of virtue with an admirable trainer, the reason within him, under whose discipline he labored to fit himself for life in its highest forms, the theoretical and the practical. He was ever opening the scroll of philosophical doctrines, digested them inwardly with quick understanding, committed them to memory never to be forgotten, and straightway brought his personal conduct, praiseworthy in all respects, into conformity with them; for he desired truth rather than seeming, because the one mark he set before him was nature's right reason, the sole source and fountain of virtues.

(Philo, *Life of Moses* 1.46-48, trans. Colson, LCL)

Paul at Corinth

One fixed point on which scholars attempt to construct at least the skeleton of a chronology of Paul's life is the so-called Gallio inscription at Delphi. According to Acts, Paul was brought before Gallio when the latter was proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12-17). The inscription, in which the Emperor Claudius greets the city of Delphi and, in the course of settling a civic affair about which we have no other information,

refers to the proconsul Gallio, allows us to date Paul's appearance before him to the year 51.

42. The Gallio inscription

> Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus Pontifex Maximus, in his tribunician power year twelve, acclaimed emperor the twenty-sixth time, father of the country . . . sends greetings to the city of Delphi. I have long been zealous for the city of Delphi and favorable to it from the beginning, and I have always observed the cult of the Pythian Apollo, but with regard to the present stories, and those quarrels of the citizens of which a report has been made by Lucius Junio Gallio, my friend and proconsul of Achaia . . . will still hold the previous settlement.
>
> (Gallio inscription, trans. Foakes-Jackson and Lake)

Paul's Death in Rome

In what may well have been the last of his letters known to us, Paul declares to the Romans his plans to come to Rome and be sent by them on his way farther west, to Spain (Rom 15:23-24). According to Acts, Paul did travel to Rome, but in Roman custody in the wake of mob violence in Jerusalem (Acts 21–28). He was to make his appeal to Caesar himself (25:10-12). But Acts does not tell this story; it ends instead with Paul waiting for that hearing, in Roman custody, and having relative freedom to preach to Jews and non-Jews "without hindrance" (28:30-31). The implication of the phrase that Paul "lived two whole years" in Rome is that the author of Acts is aware, and expects the reader to be aware, of Paul's death in Rome, but the narrative's silence on that point has long been a puzzle in scholarship.[38] We will return in chapter 6 to early Christian traditions about Paul's death by execution in Rome. Here we present accounts of the "great fire" in Rome in 64 c.e., which the emperor Nero made the pretext for a particularly vicious persecution of "Christians." (This is apparently the earliest occasion in which Christians were distinguished as such by the empire.)

43. The Great Fire in Rome (Tacitus)

Writing decades later, the historian Tacitus gave free rein to the popular suspicion that Nero himself was responsible for the fire, recounting rumors that arsonists both stoked the flames and prevented others from extinguishing them and detailing the extravagance of Nero's building projects on the ruins of the burned part of the city.

> A disaster followed, whether accidental or treacherously contrived by the emperor, is uncertain, as authors have given both accounts, worse, however, and more dreadful than any which have ever happened to this city by the violence of fire. It had its beginning in that part of the circus which adjoins the Palatine and Caelian hills, where, amid the shops containing inflammable wares, the conflagration both broke out and instantly became so fierce and so rapid from the wind that it seized in its grasp the entire length of the circus. For here there were no houses fenced in by solid masonry, or temples surrounded by walls,

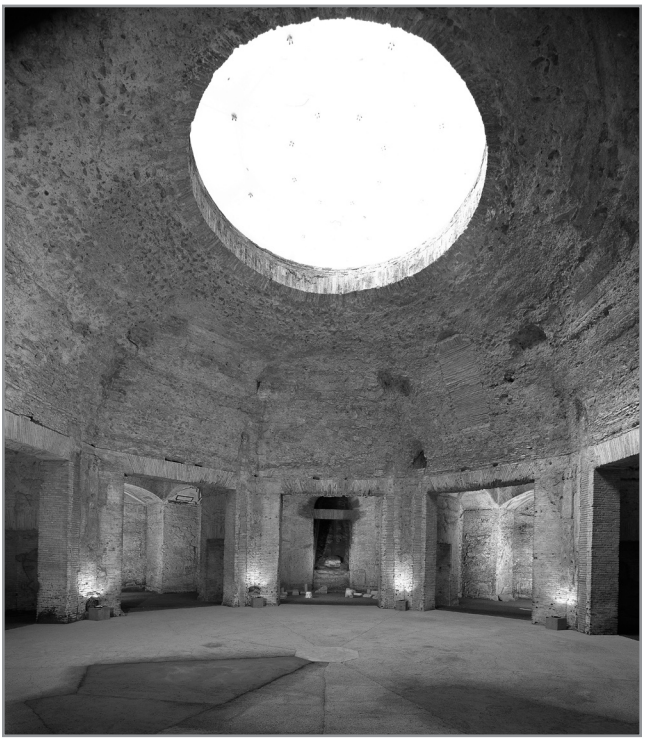

Fig. 1.12. *The ruins of the octagonal room in the Domus Aurea, Nero's palace on the Palatine Hill, 54–68* C.E. *Photo: Luciano Romano Grafiluce; Scala/Art Resource, New York.*

or any other obstacle to interpose delay. The blaze in its fury ran first through the level portions of the city, then rising to the hills, while it again devastated every place below them, it outstripped all preventive measures; so rapid was the mischief and so completely at its mercy the city, with those narrow winding passages and irregular streets, which characterized old Rome.

(Tacitus describes the enormity of suffering and death caused by the fire.)

And no one dared to stop the mischief, because of incessant menaces from a number of persons who forbade the extinguishing of the flames, because again others openly hurled brands, and kept shouting that there was one who gave them authority, either seeking to plunder more freely, or obeying orders.

Nero at this time was at Antium, and did not return to Rome until the fire approached his house, which he had built to connect the palace with the gardens of Maecenas. It could not, however, be stopped from devouring the palace, the house, and everything around it. However, to relieve the people, driven out homeless as they were, he threw open to them the Campus Martius and the public buildings of Agrippa, and even his own gardens, and raised temporary

> structures to receive the destitute multitude. Supplies of food were brought up from Ostia and the neighboring towns, and the price of corn was reduced to three sesterces a peck. These acts, though popular, produced no effect, since a rumor had gone forth everywhere that, at the very time when the city was in flames, the emperor appeared on a private stage and sang of the destruction of Troy, comparing present misfortunes with the calamities of antiquity. . . .
>
> Nero meanwhile availed himself of his country's desolation, and erected a mansion in which the jewels and gold, long familiar objects, quite vulgarized by our extravagance, were not so marvelous as the fields and lakes, with woods on one side to resemble a wilderness, and, on the other, open spaces and extensive views.

(Nero sought to ingratiate himself to the people by promising an extensive rebuilding program, to include public parks and new housing; he also sought "means of propitiating the gods" through sacrifices.)

Fig. 1.13. *An amethyst depicting Nero in the guise of Apollo, holding a lyre, first century* C.E. *The emperor's flair for theatrical and musical self-promotion was notorious. Cabinet des médailles de la Bibliothèque nationale de France. Photo in the public domain.*

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the propitiations of the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the conflagration was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace.

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.

Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

(Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38-39, 42-44, trans. Church and Brodribb)

44. Nero's "punishment" of Christians (Suetonius)

Suetonius does not describe the fire, although his reference to new buildings implies it. Neither does he connect the "punishment" of Christians to the fire but lists it among a number of police measures carried out by Nero.

He [Nero] devised a new form for the buildings of the city and in front of the houses and apartments he erected porches, from the flat roofs of which fires could be fought; and these he put up at his own cost. He had also planned to extend the walls as far as Ostia and to bring the sea from there to Rome by a canal.

During his reign many abuses were severely punished and put down, and no fewer new laws were made: a limit was set to expenditures; the public banquets were confined to a distribution of food; the sale of any kind of cooked viands in the taverns was forbidden, with the exception of pulse and vegetables, whereas before every sort of dainty was exposed for sale. Punishment was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition. He put an end to the diversions of the chariot drivers, who from immunity of long standing claimed the right of ranging at large and amusing themselves by cheating and robbing the people. The pantomimic actors and their partisans were banished from the city.

(Suetonius, *Nero* 16, trans. Rolfe, LCL)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How might a Jewish contemporary have heard Paul's self-description as an "apostle" of Jesus Christ? How might a non-Jew have heard it?
2. What would contemporaries have made of Paul's emphasis on supporting himself by manual labor? How would different life circumstances affect the way others regarded this aspect of Paul's work?
3. In what ways did Paul's self-presentation resemble that of self-styled "philosophers"? What expectations might such a resemblance have inspired in his hearers?
4. How would others have heard Paul's language about his own weakness and about the weakness of the crucified Christ?
5. In what ways might contemporaries have heard Paul's claim to work for the "obedience" or "faithful obedience" of the nations?
6. In what ways might our own social and cultural assumptions regarding what is "political" and what is "religious" affect our understanding of Paul and his world?
7. How important are Paul's references to his own visionary experiences? How should people understand these visionary experiences today?
8. Nero appears to have attacked Christians because they were a convenient target, the objects of popular suspicion, rather than because of specific beliefs. What questions does that raise for you regarding the way we should understand the origins of the Christian religion?

FOR FURTHER READING

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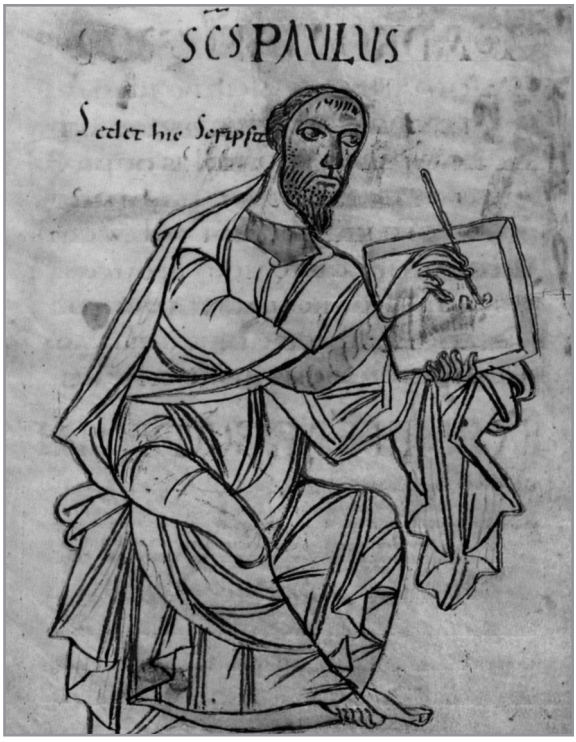

Fig. 2.1. *"Saint Paul: Here he sits and writes." Illustration from a ninth-century manuscript of Paul's letters from the Monastery of Gallen. Württembergische Landesbibliothek Stuttgart, HB II 54. Photo in the public domain.*