

# Galatians 1:1–9

## The Beginning of Paul's Argument

### Literary and Historical Context of the Letter

This section marks the beginning of Paul's argument (in both senses of the word). It opens with an interestingly modified form of the standard epistolary greeting (1: 1–5; see Betz 1979: 37, 44–6; Stowers 1986: 20–4). As is usual, it gives the name of the writer and his companions, the names of the addressees and a salutation: each of these sections is used to develop points germane to the argument of the letter. Unusually, the salutation concludes not with a thanksgiving but with a doxology. Seemingly, there was not much to give thanks for. Verses 6–9 go on to set out Paul's main charge against the Galatians, that they have rapidly abandoned the faith to which he had introduced them, and to pronounce a curse on anyone who preaches a gospel other than the true gospel which they have received (from him). Chrysostom refers to the opening simply

as a ‘*prooimion*’, a term of wide usage, referring to the prelude of a piece of music or the preamble or preface of a poem or speech (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 13.1, translating *prooimion* as *exordium*). According to Plumer (Augustine 2003: 126, see n. 9), Augustine refers to the opening vv. 1–5 as a *salutatio* and vv. 6–11 as an *exordium*. Evidence of a close rhetorical analysis of Galatians among the Fathers is hard to find, and this may indicate that they would not have thought such analysis appropriate to Paul’s writings (Cooper 2000).

The precise setting and occasion of Paul’s letter is not easy to determine, though the broad outlines are clear. Paul has recently founded the congregations to which he is writing. However, as Paul sees it, they have suddenly, under the influence of other teachers, started to abandon the faith that he taught them, which did not require strict obedience to the Law of the Old Testament, and to embrace a Law-observant form of Christianity. Who were Paul’s opponents who had disturbed (unsettled, confused, frightened) ‘his’ Galatians (1:7; 5:10)? Paul associates them with the opposing party at Jerusalem, the ‘pseudo-apostles’ (2:4–5; 2 Cor 11:13; Marcionite Prologues in Harnack 1996: 127\*–128\*), with the ‘men from James’ (2:12) and with the group who sided with Peter in the controversy at Antioch (2:11–14), referred to in the narrative in Acts 15 as the ‘men who came down from Judaea’. They were, on that reckoning, people who saw the preservation of the observance of the Law as essential for the maintenance of the true faith. For, as the fourth-century Latin commentator Ambrosiaster argued, they taught that ‘believers from the Gentiles, unless they were circumcised according to the law of Moses and judaised, could not be saved’. Thus they turned the gospel into ‘shifting traditions, that they might be Jews under the name of Christ’ (Ambrosiaster 1969: 9; cf. Luther 1953: 63, 66; *LW* 26.53, 55).

Until the nineteenth century, interpreters were largely unanimous that those who were leading the Galatians astray were seeking to persuade the Galatians to embrace Judaism. Ignatius (*Magn.* 10.3) writes: ‘It is monstrous to speak of Jesus Christ and to practise Judaism. For Christianity did not believe in Judaism, but Judaism in Christianity, wherein every tongue believed and was gathered unto God’ (Lightfoot 1912: 145). Paul’s reference to the Galatians having been called *in grace*, v. 6, is generally taken to be an allusion to the fact that the Galatians were exchanging a gospel of grace for one of salvation through ‘the law of works’ (*lex factorum*; so e.g. Ambrosiaster 1969: 8). The change made by the Galatians is described as one from the spiritual to the carnal (Augustine 2003: 129; Lombard, PL 192.97A). Aquinas (1966: 12; 1953: 568) contrasts the temporal and carnal goods of the old law with the celestial, spiritual and eternal goods of the new law. The Galatians make void (*evacuare*) the *glory* (Augustine’s variant reading of v. 6) *of Christ*, by so valuing the circumcision of the flesh and other such works of the Law that they hold that they are salvific (Augustine 2003: 129). Such views were strongly affirmed by the Reformers.

However, the Reformers disagreed about the role of the Law in the new life of faith in Christ, Calvin and his followers arguing, against Luther, that it had a continuing role in instructing and encouraging believers. The relation of emergent Christianity to its Jewish matrix was given fresh attention with the rise of historical criticism and its greater interest in the development of religious beliefs and communities. Baur and his school attempted to set Paul's dispute with the 'false apostles' within the wider parameters of theological tendencies in the early church: there were two parties, the Petrine and the Pauline, with opposed views about the importance of observation of the Law. For Baur, the Petrine party was divided between the apostles, who reluctantly agreed to the Pauline mission to the Gentiles, and the more rigorist Jewish Christians who opposed Paul's Law-free gospel and who were not reined back by the Jerusalem apostles (Baur 1876: 105-45, 250-7, esp. 253-5). Hilgenfeld emphasized the unity of the Petrine party more than Baur. The opponents must have 'based the authority of this other gospel, which Paul condemns in 1:8, 9, specifically on the authority of the first apostles, as those who had been instituted by Christ himself' (Hilgenfeld 1852: 42). Paul knew that 'he shared the same foundation as his older colleagues in office, but only this foundation: for he no longer, like them, passes on the old with the new, righteousness of the law with the righteousness of faith, Jewish particularism with Christian universalism; he asserted the newness and independence of Christianity without any national Jewish limitations' (Hilgenfeld 1852: 64). Such views were questioned by Lightfoot on the basis of Acts 15 with its account of the 'going forth' of the believers who had been formerly Pharisees from the apostles. For Lightfoot this is a group committed to circumcision which has no apostolic authority for its actions (Lightfoot 1865: 276-346).

While all these commentators saw Paul as engaged in controversy with those who wished to contain the emergent community within the bounds of Judaism, they were in turn questioned, first by those who thought that Paul was fighting on two fronts (Lütgert 1919), against Law-observant Jewish Christians on the one hand and enthusiastic libertines on the other, then by those who believed that the opponents' concern with the Law was derived from Gnostic beliefs about certain aspects of the Law only (Schmithals 1972a). There is, however, little or no evidence of Gnosticism in Galatians, and more recent scholarship inclines to the view that the 'opponents' were Jewish Christian missionaries, engaged in mission to the Gentiles on their own account and coming into conflict with Paul because of their engagement in the same field (Martyn 1997b: 117-26). Some have thought that the opponents were in fact less than whole-hearted followers of the Law, who saw circumcision as a kind of mystical rite, but were otherwise not interested in the Law as such (Crownfield 1945). Others (e.g. Barclay 1988: 68-72) have suggested that the Galatians themselves

may have felt a strong attraction to the Law. As Gentiles who had renounced the mores of the pagan world, they would have felt the need to replace them with a clearly defined code such as that offered by the Law (see Longenecker 1990: lxxxviii–c for a full discussion of the debate). All of this remains somewhat speculative. However, if we assume that Paul's letter, to a degree at least, meets and therefore reflects the theological positions and arguments of his opponents, then it seems difficult to deny that the opponents were strong proponents of the Law, whatever their more detailed emphases. This for Paul was tantamount to preaching *another gospel*, which was no gospel at all (1:6–7).

More recent debates among scholars have focused on the nature of Paul's understanding of the relationship between the gospel he preached and the Judaism of his time. To what extent did Paul continue to consider himself a Jew *and therefore* obligated to follow Jewish customs? To what extent did he make a break with Judaism? In this enquiry, critical scholarship has particularly scrutinized the constructions of Judaism which underlay much historical work on Paul, notably in the Lutheran tradition (Sanders 1977). Lutheran readings of Paul, it is argued, have tended to project on to the Judaism of Paul's day the theological characteristics of the Catholic piety against which Luther battled, 'works-righteousness'. Sanders rejected portrayals of first-century Judaism as a religion of 'self-redemption', arguing that it was centred on God's covenantal grace to Israel ('covenantal nomism'). Entry to the covenant ('getting in') depended on God's free election; continuance within the covenant ('staying in') depended on Israel's obedience to the covenantal Law, which also provided means for dealing with transgressions of the Law. Paul abandoned such a religion in favour of a Christianity which stressed participation in Christ, a new religious relationship wherein obedience to the Law was replaced with a new relationship with Christ, whereby the believer dies to sin and lives in hope of resurrection (Sanders 1977: 549). Dunn, while basing his understanding of contemporary Judaism on Sanders's work, has suggested that Paul was not making a complete break with Judaism and the Law, but rather attacking a nationalistic understanding of the Law, particularly associated with circumcision and the observation of purity rules about food (Dunn 1990: 183–264).

Since the nineteenth century, there has also been much debate among scholars (see e.g. Lightfoot 1865: 1–34) about whether the congregations were to be found in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia (Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) which, according to Acts, Paul visited on his first and second missionary journeys (Acts 13–14; 16:1–18:23), or whether, as had been almost universally held until then, they were located in the northern part in towns like Ancyra, Pessinus and Tavium, where Gallic invaders settled in the late third century BCE, an area which Paul visited only on the second and subsequent journeys (Acts 16:6; 18:23). The debate, which is well summarized by

Longenecker (1990: lxi–lxxii) is finely balanced. As Lietzmann, after reviewing the contemporary linguistic evidence, remarked: ‘A review of the sources undoubtedly speaks more for the north Galatian theory, but I know that a few new facts (discovery of inscriptions, etc.) could completely change the picture’ (Lietzmann 1910: 228).

Nevertheless, although it is almost impossible to reach secure judgements on this topic, careful, balanced scholars like Lightfoot and Lagrange (Lagrange 1918) invested huge amounts of time in the debate and saw its resolution as of great importance to their readings of the letter. They were strangely fascinated by the topic of national characteristics and made much of ancient writers’ views of the Gallic peoples in northern Galatia, which they believed were consonant with Paul’s portrayal of his addressees as foolish, fickle and impetuous (1:6; 3:1). Their motivations in this were varied. Lightfoot wished to combat Baur’s view (Baur 1878: 44–183) that first-generation Christianity was polarized between Peter and Paul, between a Law-observant and a Law-free Christianity, for which fundamental division Galatians was a prime witness. He wished, by contrast, to show that Galatians was more a witness to fickleness and a certain type of religiosity (‘passionate and ritualistic’, Lightfoot 1865: 15), and that the errors of the Galatians were a special rather than a typical case of the divisions of the early church (Lightfoot 1865: 26), albeit ones which were carried on by a variety of heretical groups, Marcionites, Montanists, and even the wonderfully named Passalorynchites and Artotyrites, ‘the one so-called from their placing the forefinger on the nose while praying, the other from their offering bread and cheese at the Eucharist’ (Lightfoot 1865: 31, n. 3 citing Jerome, *ad Gal 2*, praef. p. 430, ed. Vallarsi). Lagrange’s interests are more overtly nationalistic. Writing from Paris in 1917, he draws analogies between the Galatians and the French, with their ‘mobility’, their past glories, then their apparent separation from God, and their present spirit of sacrifice ‘always aflame with love of Jesus Christ, always penetrated with the true spirit of religion which is sacrifice’, with that of ‘these sons of ancient Gaul . . . One can imagine all that Paul says to the Galatians,’ he concludes, ‘being said as easily to French people!’ (Lagrange 1918: v). Much scholarly effort and historical zeal is expended in this wild chase for the national/cultural characteristics of the Galatians. Nevertheless, the question as to what extent Paul’s opponents stand for a particular tradition within Christianity is an important one, as is the further question, to what extent Paul’s counter-arguments themselves generate a further distinct tradition of Christianity, such as that noticed by Jerome above. By reacting strongly against those who insisted on Law observance, Paul may have encouraged a wider reaction against the Law and, as in the case of Marcion, against the ‘god of this world’.

## Main Themes: 1:1–9

A number of major issues are raised in this opening passage which have occupied subsequent interpreters: (1). Paul's claim to be an apostle and his insistence on the truth of his Gospel; (2). the understanding of evil and salvation suggested in v. 4.\*

### 1 Paul's Apostolic Authority

#### *Patristic interpretation*

Paul introduces himself as an apostle 'not from men nor through men but through Jesus Christ and God the Father'. Theodore (1880: 311.21–2) and Chrysostom (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 13.2), with their keen interest in the original context of the letter, see here an attempt on Paul's part to counter charges by his opponents that he was a follower of the Jerusalem apostles. While this view is generally accepted, there is less agreement about the meaning of Paul's claims. Is he claiming to be the equal of the apostles or, indeed, in some sense to be set apart from them and endowed with greater authority? The latter view creates two problems for mainstream/official interpretation: on the one hand, it concedes too much to Marcion, who had also sharply distinguished Paul who had the 'word of truth' (see the Marcionite prologue in Souter 1912: 188) from the apostles who had distorted the gospel; on the other hand, it may concede too much power and authority to those who appeal to their own inspiration and empowerment by the Spirit and so pose a threat to church order and hierarchical control. A number of interpreters then take the view that Paul is claiming to be on a par with the apostles. Pelagius asserts that Paul was not an apostle by 'human presumption, as his opponents asserted, nor through the agency of other apostles, as Aaron was through Moses, but by the Lord himself like Moses and all the apostles and prophets' (Souter 1922: 306–7). Chrysostom agrees that Paul's call was like Peter's, but adds that it was from the risen Lord (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 13.2). There are others who explore this kind of difference more fully and more dangerously. Victorinus asserts that Paul did not learn anything from Christ as man, but from Christ who was in man, 'for Christ is both God and a human being'. Paul's revelation from the heavenly Christ was unambiguously from God and not from Christ as

\* A further issue is doctrinal uniformity/conformity and the tolerance of difference, in vv. 6–9; for details, see <<http://www.bbibcomm.net>>

a human being, which is how some of the heretics understand him (Victorinus 2005: 251). Augustine, more boldly, distinguishes those who are sent by men, who are liars, those sent through men, who may speak the truth because the truthful God can commission people through the agency of men, and those sent by God, who speak the truth. And he goes on to distinguish the apostles who were sent by the man Jesus from the apostle Paul 'who was sent through Jesus Christ now wholly God after his resurrection' (Augustine 2003: 127). He does admittedly underline the fact that both the earlier apostles and Paul were truthful; but still the distinction remains and is available for exploitation.

At the extreme end of this spectrum in the early period is the figure of Marcion, who believed that the apostles had distorted the tradition which they had received from Jesus and that it was only Paul's letters and Luke's Gospel which provided (albeit in the somewhat expurgated version which Marcion made of them) the true account of the message which Jesus brought from the unknown God. Similarly, the Gnostics maintained that the apostles had 'intermingled the things of the law with the words of the Saviour; and that not the apostles alone, but even the Lord himself, spoke as at one time from the Demiurge, at another from the intermediate place, and yet again from the Pleroma, but that they themselves, indubitably, unsulliedly, and purely, have knowledge of the hidden mystery' (Irenaeus *AH* 3.2.2; *ANF* 1.415). Irenaeus comments: 'this is indeed to blaspheme their Creator after a most impudent manner! It comes to this, therefore, that these men do now consent neither to Scripture nor to tradition.' Marcion in v. 1, as Jerome tells us (*PL* 26.337), omitted the phrase 'and through God the Father' and spoke of Jesus's raising himself from the dead; otherwise he would have seemed to have accepted the unity of the creator God of the Law and the unknown God of mercy, who was revealed by Jesus Christ.

### *Thomas Aquinas*

These themes are developed in the Middle Ages and then surface critically in the claims and counter-claims of the various factions at the time of the Reformation. Thomas Aquinas, the Dominican friar-preacher, sees Paul as insisting on the authority which stems from his office as a preacher in order to crush the stupid and proud Galatians. Aquinas follows Augustine in distinguishing Paul's commission by the risen Christ from the apostles' by Jesus in mortal flesh. And he adds a little barb for those in positions of ecclesiastic authority (from whom he had had on occasion to suffer) that on papal bulls Peter is on the left (the side which represents the present life) and Paul, who was called by the risen Christ, on the right (representing the future life, which is heavenly and spiritual, Aquinas 1966: 6; 1953: 7).



PLATE 1 The seal (Latin: *bullā*) which was attached to Papal bulls or edicts, showing the heads of Paul and Peter with a cross between them. Paul is on Peter's right hand. The saints' names are abbreviated SPA and SPE. Courtesy Canterbury Archaeology Trust, photo Andrew Savage.

### *Reformation readings*

This identification of the Christian preacher with Paul is challenged by Luther, who insists that God 'callesh in two manner of ways: by means and without means. He calleth us all to the ministry of his Word at this day, not immediately by himself, but by other means; that is to say, by man.' This is directed against the 'fantastical spirits . . . which either lurk in corners and seek places where they may pour out their poison . . . or else they resort thither where the Gospel is planted already'. He accepts that preachers may be called by others, but distinguishes the apostles and Paul from all others, in that they were called by Jesus Christ and God the Father. He, Luther, by contrast with the apostles but like the bishops who were called by the apostles, has a mediated calling, and is happy to be appointed by 'the prince or other magistrate'. So Paul is reclassified, now again as one of the apostles. It is particularly important for Luther that such a mediated calling is localized, not universal: 'it is not lawful for me to leave my appointed place as a preacher and go unto another city where I



am not called, and there preach' (Luther 1953: 33-4; *LW* 26.18). This position was not altogether acceptable to the Reformed, those in the Calvinist tradition. Luther's Elizabethan English translators omitted the passages just quoted. Calvin presents a more nuanced account: when Paul says that he is not called 'from men', he is speaking of the sense of vocation which is proper to 'all true ministers in Christ'; when he says that he is not called through men, then he is speaking of the 'highest order in the church', of the apostolate. One problem here is that in Acts 13 Paul is commissioned by the church at Antioch. Calvin and others recognize the problem: Paul 'did not want to exclude entirely the calling of that Church but merely to show that his apostleship rested on a greater and previous choice'. Even in his case, 'the solemn rite of ordination was afterwards added' (Calvin 1965: 8-9). So too here, there is no room for self-styled apostles of the free spirit operating without the official sanction of the church.

By contrast, for the Anabaptists, the mark of true apostles is that they 'have preached to us the true gospel, and beside this no other may be preached (Gal 1:9)' (Philips 1957: 257). The same argument, in an ethical mode, could be turned against the Lutheran authorities by Hutterites like Paul Glock. Objecting that Christ had not commanded his disciples 'to force people to faith or infant baptism and put them in prison', he concludes, 'since I see you acting other than Christ your master or the apostles your predecessors, I will follow you less than him'. For, as he insists, 'the disciples of Christ evidenced their office of apostleship with good works' (Glock 2001: 356). Similarly, Pilgram Marpeck asserts that the 'physical voice of Christ' is still channelled through 'men and the Scriptures'. Where this physical voice of Christ 'is believed sincerely our spirit is free and the drawing of the Father revealed'. It is this Spirit of Christ which 'possesses all power and authority, even unto the end of the world. . . . Such authority is committed to all true believers by Christ . . . Not all are apostles, not all are prophets, not all perform miracles, not all are teachers (1 Cor 12:29). But none of these gifts of faith will be lacking to the believers in their need.' Such authority is not committed to any human institution, 'to any creature in heaven or on earth, nor will it ever be. The Lord alone remains in power and glory forever. Therefore, Paul says (1 Cor 1:31): "Whoever glories let him glory in the Lord," and it is not he who lives, but Christ who lives in him (Gal 2:20)' (Klaassen and Klaassen 1978: 76-8). This last passage nicely conveys the tension within Anabaptism between a belief in the gift of the Spirit to all true believers and a strong desire to test the spirits in order to discern who are the true apostles who speak with the 'physical voice of Christ'. Institutional authority should play no part in this process of discernment; the fundamental question was whether a preacher's doctrine and works agreed with Scripture and with Christ.

Clearly, such radical doctrine runs counter to traditional views of the apostolic succession of bishops, as expressed by Jerome, *ep.* 58 (NPNF<sup>2</sup> 6.121) that bishops ‘hold the rank which these [the apostles] once held’. It should be noted, however, that he made the same claim for presbyters. Hooker took a similar position, but allowed that the apostles might be held to have no successors at all, in that they ‘were sent as special chosen eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ, from whom immediately they received their whole embassage, and their commission to be the principal first founders of an house of God, consisting as well of Gentiles as of Jews’ (Hooker 1885: ii.339). Puritans like Perkins, appealing to ‘the propertie of an Apostle to be called immediatly by Jesus Christ,’ denied the doctrine of apostolic succession unequivocally, and *a fortiori* denounced the ‘falshood that the Pope of Rome succeeds Peter in Apostolicall authoritie, and in the infallible assistance of the spirit, when he is in his Consistory’ (Perkins 1989: 5). Perkins insists, specifically against the Anabaptists, nevertheless, that ‘wheras Paul in the very forefront of his Epistle, begins with his owne calling, I gather, that every minister of the Gospel ought to have a good and lawful calling.’ Such a calling is of God, and the church’s authority is no more than a ‘ministerie or service, whereby it doeth testifie, declare, and approve whom God hath called’. It therefore becomes important for him to set out the distinguishing marks of a true calling: that ‘must be manifest to their owne consciences, and the consciences of their hearers’. Knowledge that they are thus called depends on three things:

the first is the testimony of their consciences, that they entred not for praise, honour, lucre, but in the feare of God, with a desire to glorifie him, and to edifie the Church. The second is a facultie to do that to which they have a desire and will. In this facultie are two things, knowledge of God and his wayes, and aptnes to deliver that which they know. The third is the Ordination of the Church, which approves and gives testimony of their wil and abilitie. (Perkins 1989: 3–4)

Significantly, there is nothing here about any spiritual experience of being called as such: the emphasis is on purity of will and ability to do the job.

### *Nineteenth-century readings*

Lightfoot does not engage directly in these controversies, but writes an extended historical note. For him the term ‘apostle’ has its roots in Jewish usage and signifies primarily a messenger. He doubts whether the term in early times was restricted solely to the Twelve and Paul. Barnabas is included along with Paul in the Lucan account of ‘his consecration to the office’ (Acts 13:2–3). Paul’s

language in Gal 2:9 and 1 Cor 9:5 supports this view. The question, then, is what were the limits on this extension of the term. For Lightfoot the apostles 'comprised the *first order* in the Church', first both temporally as constituting with the prophets the foundation on which the church was built and first in terms of spiritual superiority over the prophets. What characterized the apostles was two things: first, that they had seen Christ and been a witness of the resurrection; second that they manifested the 'signs of an apostle' (2 Cor 12:1-2), both 'moral and spiritual gifts - patience, self-denial, effective preaching' and 'such powers as we call supernatural, "signs, wonders and mighty deeds"'. Such marks clearly allow for a relatively wide application of the term, and this use is to be found in the Apostolic Fathers and later church writers (Lightfoot 1865: 89-97).

As his later essay on the Christian ministry shows (Lightfoot 1903), Lightfoot clearly distinguishes apostles as itinerants ministering to the church as a whole from bishops who emerged under the direction of the apostles from the presbyterate and who had a localized ministry. While he regarded the three-fold ministry as 'the completeness of the Apostolic ordinance and the historical backbone of the Church' (Lightfoot 1903: xii), he saw this as a practical development which in no way supported the kind of sacerdotalism which had later developed in the church, 'which is in the fullest sense free, comprehensive, universal. . . . It has no sacred days or seasons, no special sanctuaries, because every time and every place alike are holy. . . . Each individual holds personal communion with the Divine Head. To Him immediately he is responsible, and from Him directly he obtains pardon and draws strength' (Lightfoot 1903: 181). Similar views can be found in Hooker who, however, is at pains to stress the continuity between the role of the apostles and the bishops to whom the apostles gave episcopal authority (Hooker 1885: ii.326-482, esp. 336-9).

Against all this concern with identifying the character and marks of the true Christian preacher must be set Kierkegaard's dry entry in his Journal headed 'An apostle in our day':

If I try to think of one in our day I think of him abstaining altogether from preaching in order, if possible, to draw attention to what it means to exist, preaching by giving self-denial existential expression, the imitation of Christ. And moreover how could he compete verbally with all these artists in rhetoric who now preach—and forget entirely about living.

A man is castrated in order to make him into a singer who can take higher notes than any normal man can take: and so with these preachers: from a Christian point of view they are castrati, are deprived of their real manhood which is 'the existential'—but they can take notes higher and more fascinating than any true Christian. (Kierkegaard 1938: 424)

Or again:

Had St. Paul an official position? No. Had he any means of livelihood? No. Did he make a lot of money? No. Did he marry and have children? No. But in that case St. Paul cannot have been a serious man! (Kierkegaard 1938: 215)

## 2 The Understanding of Evil and Its Overcoming

The long-drawn-out struggle between emerging Christian orthodoxy and various forms of dualism is one of the most important in the development of the culture of Christian East and West. Paul's reference in v. 4 to 'this present evil age' would be a contested site for many centuries. Was he using the phrase metonymically, to refer to the evil deeds which were done in it by men and women (so e.g. Jerome, PL 26.338; Chrysostom, NPNF<sup>1</sup> 13.5), or was he referring to the dark powers who rule over this present age and will ultimately be destroyed? Such a reading might be suggested by passages in the deutero-Pauline letters (Eph 2:2; 6:12); it was strongly taken up by Gnostics, Marcionites and Manichaeans, all of whom saw the world in different ways as being under the sway of forces opposed to the good God. So strong was the orthodox reaction to dualist readings of any sort that it was not till the discovery and dissemination of apocalyptic writings beginning in the nineteenth century that commentators again began to take seriously Paul's engagement here with myths of the demonic rule over the world. For Wrede, Gal 1:4 becomes the prime text for an apocalyptic reading of Paul. 'Redemption for Paul, to put it briefly yet concisely, is redemption from this whole present world. Any other way of putting it, for example, redemption from sin, would be too narrow' (Wrede 1904: 56).

### *Dualist readings*

It is not easy to find direct examples of dualist readings of this passage, though the sensitivity with which it is read by more orthodox commentators, carefully guarding against dualist interpretations, is a fair indication that such readings were well known. Jerome on 1:4 says that 'the heretics usually take this as an opportunity to assert that there are two creators, one of light and the world to come, another of darkness and the present age' (PL 26.338; Harnack, 1996: 263\*, thinks he is quoting Origen). But, as Harnack argues, this runs against Tertullian's account of Marcion, who, according to him, distinguishes the just creator God of the Law who is the God of the Jews, from the good God of the

gospel and Christianity (*Marc.* 4.6) but does not claim that the one was a God of darkness and the other one of light (*Marc.* 2.29). Readings of similar passages in Paul provide further clues as to the way this passage was read in dualist circles. Thus Faustus, in a passage in which he defends himself against the charge that the Manichaeans believe in two gods (arguing that they believe not in two gods, but in two opposed principles, good and evil, one which they call God and the other *hulē*), cites 2 Cor 4:4, where Paul refers to the ‘god’ of this world who has blinded the minds of them that believe not. Paul ‘calls him God, because he would be so called by his worshippers; adding that he blinds their minds, to show that he is not the true God’ (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 4.264; *Faust.* 21.1). Augustine in reply follows Irenaeus (*AH* 3.7.1; ANF 1.420), in taking the phrase ‘of this world’ to relate to the unbelievers rather than God, further evidence that there is here a well-established tradition of combating dualist interpretations of these kinds of statement in Paul’s letters.

### *Patristic readings*

This impression of a care to guard against dualist readings is confirmed by Eusebius of Emesa, a semi-Arian of the fourth century. By speaking of the present age as evil, Paul indicates that evil is not unbegotten (*agenēton*) but rather temporary (*proskairon*), relating to the Galatians’ having allowed themselves to be persuaded to observe the Law in an untimely way (*akairois*; Staab 1933: 47). But this is not the only phrase that concerns him: Paul’s use of the strong word *exelētai* (take out, carry off) is not without its problems, as it can easily suggest that the human predicament is such (because human beings are in bondage to overpowering forces of evil) that dramatic action on the part of God alone can bring rescue. Eusebius wants to assert both that such rescue was beyond the power of the Law and the prophets, and that nevertheless the divine action still involves the human will. Paul does not say ‘snatched us’ but ‘gave himself for our sins to rescue us out of the present evil age’, indicating that ‘we’ in some way participate in the process (Staab 1933: 47; Wiles 1967: 104 n. 3).

Theodore is similarly concerned to deny that this verse should be taken to mean that ‘nature is either something evil or malign’, for an ‘age’ is not a nature (*physis*) that can be known as to its *hypostasis*, but rather a period of time. So Theodore distinguishes different ages, the first state when men and women were immortal, which was lost by sin; the present age, in which, because they can sin, men and women need the Law; and the coming age, when this arrangement (*diataxis*) will not be required ‘because we will be protected from all sin by the grace of the spirit’ (Theodore 1880: 5, 7). In the present age the weakness of our nature drags us down, but Christ by dying and rising grants us to partic-

ipate in his resurrection and so frees us from the life of this present age (*bios*), and establishes us in the hope of the coming life of immortality, impassibility and sinlessness, something which the Law could not have offered us (Theodore 1880: 8). Thus Christ's death and resurrection are seen as a means of combating the sinfulness and mortality of human nature brought about by the fall; participation in Christ's risen life is the means of overcoming the human plight and attaining immortality and impassibility; a dualist cosmology is replaced by a salvation-historical one.

Similar themes can be found in Ambrosiaster, who defines the evil of the present age as its failure to give due reverence to its creator and redeemer (Ambrosiaster 1969: 8.2–4), and defines salvation as being rescued by faith in Christ (*fides Christi*) from the Law and being justified as sons of God by a second birth (Ambrosiaster 1969: 7.7–9). However, this is interestingly combined with more dualist accounts of the human predicament and its resolution when he speaks of the human race being held 'in the state of the devil' (*in condicione diaboli*) and of Christ's bringing back to his father the booty of the souls whom he has plundered from hell, something that the law could not do (Ambrosiaster 1969: 7.9–14). With Augustine and Chrysostom the standard view emerges that the *present world* is understood to be *evil* because of the evil people who live in it' (Augustine 2003: 129). Similarly, Chrysostom: 'the evil world refers to evil actions and a moral principle' (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 13.5, where he brings a few somewhat homespun arguments against dualism: evil cannot be the cause of good, but the present life is full of prizes and rewards; murderers would deserve a crown as rescuing us from evil; dualism cannot explain the existence of natural virtue). This view is firmly established in the medieval Western church (Lombard, PL 192.96B; Aquinas 1966: 9; 1953: 14).

### *Reformation readings*

This dominance of the forensic view of evil over more dualist views begins to be unsettled in the outgoing Middle Ages. Erasmus, for all his humanism and good reason, still regards the human condition as one of bondage: 'after we had fallen back into another's power by our own sin, we have once again been claimed as his own, and as it were, reborn, for we have been made heavenly creatures though formerly of the earth, and have been rendered spiritual though formerly carnal' (Erasmus 1984: 98). Luther's view is far less restrained: Paul calls this present age evil because everything in it is 'subject to the malice of the devil reigning over the whole world'. The world is the 'kingdom of the devil', and all who are in the world (referring to 1 Jn 5:19) 'are the captive members of the devil, constrained to serve him and do all things at his pleasure'. So

long as one is in the kingdom of Satan, and not in the kingdom of Christ, then all one's works, however religious, are 'but the slavish instruments of the devil' (Luther 1953: 53-4; *LW* 26.40).

Calvin, who follows the lines of Luther's commentary here quite closely, preserves the latter's sense of the futility of all human efforts, but ultimately draws back from his strong cosmological dualism. 'World' here signifies 'the corruption which is in the world', and he cites 1 Jn 5:19, 'the whole world lieth in the evil one', and Jn 17:15, which are (both) taken to refer to the power of the evil one. However, he sees the term 'world' as having a different sense in this context, where it refers to people's separation from the kingdom of Christ and their living to themselves. 'For so long as a man lives to himself he is altogether condemned.' It is in this latter sense that the world is called evil, to indicate that the corruption stems from sin and not from God's creation. But such corruption is total (as total as if it were the result of our bondage to the devil?): 'there is nothing in us but unmixed wickedness (pure malice). We are of the world, and until Christ rescues us from it, the world reigns in us and we live unto it' (Calvin 1965: 12). Even Calvin cannot avoid hypostasizing the world, if he is to underscore the totality of human corruption. Whatever account the Reformers offered of human failure, their insistence was clear: it was total and undermined all human claims to religious, moral and other forms of excellence. It represented a total rejection of all claims that excellence and virtue could be achieved in public life. This can be seen very clearly in Perkins: 'And whereas Paul calls this world an evil world, he doeth it to signify that there is nothing in men but sinne, till they be regenerate, yea that civill vertues, and civill life, that are excellent in the eyes of men, are no better then sinnes before God. It is the error of the Papists, that men may thinke and do some thing that is morally good without grace' (Perkins 1989: 14). For Barth the choice for the Galatians is between Paul's preaching of justification, which is a way which leads to confrontation with the world and a way which involves accommodation with the evil age (*arge Welt*), a way which he characterizes (characteristically) as 'a Christianity built into the system of human self-justification, a domesticated Christianity which has been turned into a "religion"'. The choice here is 'Christ or not-Christ' or indeed – he notes approvingly – as Luther 'boldly but surely not incorrectly has it, between Christ and Belial' (Barth 1956: 642).

### *The modern period*

Whereas Calvin channels interpretation of the notion of evil in the epistle in a broadly forensic direction, which was subsequently dominant in both Lutheran and Calvinist interpretations, historical-critical studies in the nineteenth cen-

ture began to reverse this. Scholars increasingly saw the need to interpret Paul's letters in the light of contemporary beliefs about the nature of evil and God's plans for overcoming it contained in the apocalyptic literature of the turn of the era. These are writings which record visions and auditory revelations given to seers (often identified with figures from the age of the Patriarchs) which reveal God's (otherwise) hidden purposes for his world. In such writings the world is frequently portrayed as under the sway of demonic powers which can be broken only by divine intervention, often culminating in some final cosmic battle, preceded by a time of great suffering. Meyer (1892: 13) translated *aiōn anestos* as 'the period of time which is already in the act of setting in, the evil time which has already begun, that is, the time immediately preceding the *parousia*, the time, that is, of the messianic woes.' In this way 'the present age' is to be understood specifically as the last part of 'this age'. However, while most historical critics agreed in seeking a broadly apocalyptic sense for the expression, Hilgenfeld, Lightfoot and others took the phrase as equivalent to *aiōn houtos*, referring, that is, to 'the present world-age (*Weltzeitalter*) as a whole' (Hilgenfeld 1852: 113, citing *Ps. Clem. Hom.* 3.7, 12, 19, 20, 22, etc.). This is called evil, 'not in virtue of the corruption reigning among people', but because of 'the suprahuman powers reigning in it' (*in ihm herrschenden übermenschlichen Potenzen*; Hilgenfeld 1852: 114, referring to 2 Cor 4:4, 1 Jn 5:19, followed closely by Lightfoot 1865: 72). Bousset too sees here the influence of 'late Jewish theology', and argues that Paul modifies Jewish expectations of a future liberation by 'linking it causally' with the liberation from sin which had occurred in Jesus's death. As a consequence, believers experience 'in the possession of the Spirit a first part of that invisible world in the middle of the misery of this world (Gal 4:6; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Rom 8:23)'. In this way the contrast between a present and future world yields to that between two worlds, one above the other, a higher, spiritual one and lower, visible world. Together with his emphasis on redemption, Paul thus adapts his gospel to the 'thought and sensitivities of his Greek believers'. There is, for Bousset almost a sense of cultural determinism about these developments in early Christian theology. 'The gospel could hardly have found effective form if not in this manner, that is in Paul's preaching of redemption through the cross' (Bousset 1908: 32-3).

Thus Bousset takes up the challenge of offering a contemporary interpretation of an apocalyptic reading of Galatians, which, while recognizing its cosmic-dualistic roots, attempted to show how Paul had moved away from them into a cosmology wherein the eternal is contrasted with the material and transitory. The twentieth century saw a number of major contributions to this task: Bultmann's existential interpretation of Paul, his pupil Schlier's commentary on Galatians which elaborates Bultmann's reading, and more recently the commentary of J.L. Martyn. Bultmann in his section on the understanding of



human existence before the revelation of faith, discusses the notion of *kosmos* in terms both of a sphere of human activity which is heading for its end and of powers opposed to God to which men and women are in bondage. But, as he insists: ‘This power, however – and this is the distinctive thing about Paul’s view – does not come over man, either the individual or the race, as a sheer curse of fate, but grows up out of himself’ (Bultmann 1952: 256). For Schlier, the fact that Christ dies to ‘tear us out’ of this present evil age expresses the power that this age has to bind people to it. Specifically, it is through ‘our sins’ that we are bound to this age: for they are nothing but ‘various forms of our dedication and voluntary-involuntary bondage to the present world-age which overwhelmingly threatens and lures us.’ Thus Christ’s eradication of our sins, sets us free from the power of this world and opens up the new age for us (Schlier 1965: 34). Sanders returns to a more explicitly apocalyptic reading of the passage: ‘Christians are delivered from the evil aeon. Thus the *purpose* of Christ’s death was not simply to provide expiation, but that he might become Lord and thus save those who belong to him and “in” him’ (Sanders 1977: 465). Similarly, for Martyn, Paul opposes the forensic eschatology of the ‘teachers’ which saw the cause of this world’s ills as lying in human disobedience and its remedy in renewed observance of the Law. Instead, he proclaimed the dawn of a new age which had broken the grip of the foreign powers which held human beings enslaved (Martyn 1997: 90–1; 97–105). Dunn, while giving a full account of the apocalyptic roots of the expression ‘evil age’ offers a reading closer to Calvin and Bultmann: ‘Christ’s death was the key to deliverance from the seductive and corrupting introversion of this age’s self-delusion, since by his death he broke both the power of sin and the power of death’ (Dunn 1993: 36).