

**PETER AND PAUL
AND THE TRADITION CONCERNING
“THE LORD’S SUPPER”
IN I COR 11:23-26***

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With reference to the Lord's Supper Paul wrote as follows:

The tradition which I handed on to you (concerning the Lord's Supper), originated with the Lord himself. That tradition is (I need not remind you) that: "The Lord Jesus, during the night in which he was delivered up, took bread. And after giving thanks, he broke it and said: 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord, until he comes" (1 Cor 11:2.3-26).

In order to understand the relationship between Peter and Paul, the importance of that relationship for our understanding the origin and significance of 1 Cor 11:23-26, we can begin by asking: "By what authority does the Apostle to the Gentiles assure the Corinthian church that the tradition concerning the Lord's Supper he had received and had in turn passed on to them, originated with Jesus himself?" Paul would never have claimed that he was an eyewitness to what happened during the night in which Jesus was delivered up. Nor can we understand him to be claiming that this is a tradition that had

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been revealed to him bodily and verbally by revelation from the Christ. All the technical terminology used by Paul indicates that tradition like that concerning the resurrection appearances he later (15:3-7), has been handed on as a well formulated statement the conventional manner of the time.¹

It is most likely that, in the first instance, Paul received these traditions he passed on to his churches from the church he had persecuted before he became a Christian. But in matters as important as these, it is not unlikely that Paul took pains to be sure about what he was authorizing his churches to receive as tradition concerning the normative events of the Gospel.

In the case of the tradition concerning the resurrection appearances, Paul had his own direct experience of the Risen Christ to serve as a control by which to judge the tradition he had received. And it is clear that he knows, or at least firmly believes, that the appearance of the Risen Lord to him is of the same order as that to the other Apostles.

Paul tells the Corinthians that most of the over 500 brethren to whom the Lord appeared on a single occasion were still alive at the time of writing (15:6). While it is possible, indeed probable, that Paul had the opportunity both preceding and following his conversion, to discuss the resurrection of Jesus with some of these Christians, this would hardly have satisfied the unquestioned concern for truth regarding events of the past that were decisive for the pastoral and theological task of expediting the Gospel, which we know motivated Paul (cp. Gal 1:20; 2:5, 14).

Since the tradition he had received concerning the resurrection placed Peter and the Twelve at the beginning of the series of resurrection appearances, to have discussed these appearances with Peter would have been of importance to Paul. Did Paul have the opportunity to hear anything directly from Peter on these matters, or on matters bearing on Paul's belief that the resurrection appearances to Peter and the other Apostles were of the same order as his? The answer is: "He certainly did."

I. *Galatians*

In his letter to the churches of Galatia, Paul informs his readers that three years after his conversion he went up (from Damascus) to

¹ See B. Gerhardsson, *The Origins of the Gospel Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

Jerusalem to visit (or get to know) Peter. And he adds that he remained with Peter 15 days (Gal 1:18).

In order to begin to comprehend the far reaching consequences of this meeting it is necessary to answer certain questions. Granting that Paul presumably wanted to make contact with church authorities in Jerusalem (he did see James, for example), why did he go to Peter? And why did he remain with Peter 15 days? In this connection we need to ask what we can learn from a philological analysis of the text about the probable parameters of Paul's purpose or purposes in undertaking this history making trip.

In answering these questions we face three main tasks: the first is to ascertain as best we can what Paul had been doing during the three year period between his return to Damascus mentioned in v 17 and his visit to Peter referred to in v 18; the second is to determine the most probable meaning in this context of the verb Paul used that is generally rendered in English by "to visit" or "to get to know"; and the third is to analyze the verbal phrase "and I remained with him" in relation to the temporal phrase "for fifteen days,"

The first task presents no great difficulties. Paul tells us in v 21 that after he had finished his business in Jerusalem he set out for the regions of Syria and Cilicia, and that at that time he was still unknown by face to the churches of Christ in Judea (v 22). What these churches knew about him was only what they could learn from the reports they heard about him, and these reports were to the effect that "the one who formerly persecuted us, now preaches the faith he formerly ravished" (v 23). To which Paul simply adds: "And they (i.e., those whom Paul formerly persecuted) glorified God in me" (v 24). Where were these Christians who glorified God in Paul?

Beginning in v 16 Paul tells his readers that (contrary to what they may have heard from others) following his conversion he did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did he go up to Jerusalem to (make contact with) those who were apostles before him, but rather he went away into Arabia, and then (without specifying how long he remained in Arabia) he adds: "and I returned again to Damascus" (v 17). This clearly implies that Paul had been in or near Damascus at the time of his conversion. Since the Churches of Christ in Judea did not know Paul by face, but only by reports they heard from others, it is clear that Paul had been preaching the Gospel in some area outside Judea during the three year interval in question, and it presents the least difficulty if we conclude that he had been doing this in and around Damascus, or perhaps more broadly in the general area of Southern Syria, It had to be in some place outside Judea, some place where his earlier persecuting activity was still

vividly remembered and could be existentially juxtaposed to his present activity.

Since in v 21 Paul writes that upon leaving Jerusalem he went into the region of Syria and Cilicia, and then includes not one word about what he did for the next 14 years before returning to Jerusalem for the apostolic conference of Gal 2:1-20, we are to conclude that the terse phrase "into the regions of Syria and Cilicia" is directional and that Paul is opening up a new phase of his missionary career that at least in its initial stage was to see him through the Cilician gates. Paul would in any case most probably have come into Galatia from Cilicia. Once the Galatians came to know Paul they would have had reason to follow his career with interest. But where Paul had been before he came to Galatia from Syria and Cilicia would have been relatively vague to them. The one thing they did not know and needed to get straight was Paul's earliest contacts with the Jerusalem based Apostles. This explains Paul's relatively detailed account on this point. From this account we can infer a great deal more than he explicitly tells us.

From our analysis we conclude that during the three years in question, Paul had been preaching the Gospel outside Judea in an area of his former persecuting activity, and that during this period of evangelization he had laid the groundwork for beginning a westward mission to the Gentiles. His going to Jerusalem of a necessity must have proceeded from the reality of these three years of preaching and from his decision to embark on this far reaching mission.

II. *To Visit Cephas*

In v 18 Paul explains that he went up to Jerusalem to visit Peter. The verb used is ἱστορήσαι which in this case can be best understood if we begin with its cognate noun form ἵστωρ. The *histor* in ancient Greece functioned as examiner and arbiter in legal matters. He was learned in the law and skilled in examining witnesses. He knew how to ask the right questions of people who were being examined in order to ascertain the truth in matters of dispute. The truth he was after was not philosophical truth in some abstract metaphysical sense, but rather the kind of truth that can issue in practical wisdom. In the final analysis the *histor* would be called upon to make a judgment. The *histor* was a judge.

The first Greek historians were geographers who explored the great rivers that emptied into the known seas. Having penetrated inland as far as they could safely travel, they would then interrogate people who had come down these rivers from further inland to get from them eyewitness accounts about the unexplored sources of the

great rivers running further back up into the unknown interiors of the continents. These same Greeks would question the priests living in the temples which were supported by these ancient river cultures, about records kept in the temples, about the genealogies of the local kings, and the customs of the local inhabitants, The reports of these geographers constituted the beginnings of what came to be called "history,"

The verb ἵστορησαί can mean to inquire into or about a thing, or to inquire about a person, Or it can also mean to "examine" or to "observe," Such a questioner or observer would then become "one who is informed" about something, or "one who knows,"

In the case at hand the verb is used with the accusative of person, so that it can mean to "inquire of" or "to ask." One can inquire of an oracle. Lexicographers are led to place our text in this context and cite Gal 1:18 as follows: "visit a person for the purpose of inquiry, κηφᾶν." Such a meaning equivalent is contextually preferable to those one generally finds in English translations: RSV "visit"; NEB "get to know"; Goodspeed "become acquainted with"; or the Amplified New Testament "become (personally) acquainted with." Even the paraphrase "visit Cephas *for the purpose of inquiry*" is lexicographically limited in that it fails to suggest as strongly as it might the well established usages "examine" and "observe," both of which are faithful to the function of the *histor* and open up rich possibilities for understanding what Paul meant and how his readers would have understood his phrasing in this instance.

The linguistic evidence examined thus far by no means limits us to a view that Paul meant to suggest that he had simply made a courtesy call or that he went up to Jerusalem for an innocuous social visit with Peter. As we go deeper into the lexicographical evidence offered by Liddell and Scott, we are carried even farther away from such an understanding of the text.² The word, of course, can mean simply "to visit," But should we so understand it in the context in which we find it?

² In other contexts, this verb means: "give an account of what one has learned," "records." As *historia* it is used in the sense of "inquiry"; it is so used in the title of a work by Theophrastus: "systematic (or scientific) observation." In the absolute it is used of "science" generally; of "geometry," and in empirical medicine for "body of recorded cases." *Historia* is also used in the sense of "knowledge obtained through inquiry and "observation" i.e. "information." And finally we have the meaning of *historia* as: a "written account of one's inquiries," "narrative," "history" (LSJ 1.842). WZNT cites examples from Hellenistic Greek which mean simply "get to know," which meaning has been accepted by the translators of NEB. However, on the basis of context, "visit a person for the purpose of inquiry" is to be preferred.

The most complete study of ἱστορήσαι as used by Paul has been made by G. D. Kilpatrick.³ Kilpatrick takes into consideration the Latin, Coptic and Syrian versions, all of which understand ἱστορήσαι in the sense of "to see." He notes, however, that later commentators were not content with this interpretation. Chrysostom perceived that ἱστορήσαι must here mean more than "see." He makes a distinction between ἰδεῖν and ἱστορήσαι and explicitly notes that Paul does not write: ἰδεῖν πέτρον, but ἱστορήσαι πέτρον. Kilpatrick discusses the views of other writers, Greek and Latin, and concludes that the oldest identifiable interpretation is that of the versions which treat ἱστορήσαι as the equivalent of ἰδεῖν and dates it 2nd century. Chrysostom's comment, which is shared by Latin commentators, he dates as earlier than the middle of the 4th century; and suggests that it perhaps belongs to the Antiochene tradition of exegesis.

On the basis of Liddell and Scott's article which Kilpatrick regards as probably the best guide we have, but also taking into account other lexicographical aids, he concludes that "ἱστορήσαι κηφᾶν at Gal. 1:18 is to be taken as meaning 'to get information from Cephas'" (p. 149). In coming to this conclusion Kilpatrick notes that the reason that ancient commentators rejected this interpretation is that it appeared to them to be 'inapplicable' in Paul's case. On the basis of Gal 1:11-12, where Paul says that he received "the Gospel" by revelation, "they argued that St. Paul had already received the requisite knowledge by revelation and so had no need to visit St. Peter for that purpose." Those who took this position and at the same time recognized that ἱστορήσαι must mean more than ἰδεῖν, generally followed Chrysostom in making Paul visit Peter "to pay his respects." Kilpatrick notes that for Augustine the visit was merely a token of friendship. For Victorinus and Ambrosiaster the visit is an acknowledgement of "the primacy of Peter" (p. 146).

Kilpatrick has his own theory as to why Paul would have sought information from Peter. He notes that the interpretation suggested by Liddell and Scott 'to visit a person for purpose of inquiry,' ie., "to get information," satisfied the conditions of the context, so long as the meaning of εὐαγγέλιον does not mean "information about Jesus," and since Paul seeks information from Peter and not from James, with whom he also had some contact, Kilpatrick asks: "Is there any information that one had to give him that the other could not provide?" In answer he writes: "St. Peter had been an eye witness and disciple

³ "Galatians 1:18 ἹΣΤΟΡΗΣΑΙ ΚΗΦΑΝ," *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of Thomas Walter Manson* (ed. A. J. B. Higgins; Manchester: University Press, 1959) 144-49.

of Jesus. St. James could not claim 'to be a comparable informant about the teaching and the ministry.' In conclusion Kilpatrick writes: "We know then of one kind of information for which St. Paul would go to St. Peter rather than St. James, information about Jesus' teaching and ministry."

Kilpatrick considers but rejects the first meaning that Liddell and Scott give, "that of inquiry into or about a person or thing" (p. 147). He cites Plutarch's *Moralia* 516 C, *De Curiositate* 2, iii, 314 in the last Teubner edition, for an example of the use of ἵστορησαι for 'getting information' about both persons and things: "Aristippus is so excited by what he hears of Socrates that he is beside himself. . . He found out about the man, his utterances and his philosophy." For some unaccountable reason, Kilpatrick dismisses the lexicographical implications of this text from a near contemporary of Paul by saying: "But we may exclude at once the explanation that ἵστορησαι κηφᾶν meant 'to inquire into, investigate, Cephas.'" In fact "to get information from Cephas" is not incompatible with "to inquire into, investigate Cephas." Because of the very close relationship of Peter to Jesus, and because Jesus first appeared to Peter, for Paul to go to Peter for information about Jesus' teaching and ministry, entails from the outset that Paul is involved in questioning Peter not only about Jesus, but in effect about Peter's memory of Jesus, his beliefs about the meaning of Jesus' death and resurrection, and thus Peter as a witness is inextricably bound up together with that to which he is a witness. The two cannot be separated as simply as Kilpatrick suggests. We see no objection to combining Liddell and Scott's first meaning for ἵστορησαι with their suggested interpretation. To be sure the focus of Paul's inquiry would be Jesus, but that can hardly have precluded serious attention by Paul to the question of Peter's credibility. Indeed we may say that the Apostolic witness preserved in the NT rests primarily upon Paul's conviction of Peter's credibility as a witness, as well as upon Peter's conviction of Paul's credibility as a witness. Their mutuality in finding one another to be credible witnesses is absolutely basic for understanding Christian origins.

At issue is how we are to understand certain phrases Paul uses in arguing for his independence from the authority of the Jerusalem apostles, or as he refers to them "those who were apostles before me" (Gal. 1:17). The translators of the NEB have a firm grasp of the essential character of Paul's argument so we can best follow his thought by citing that translation. In his opening words Paul strikes this note of apostolic independence: "From Paul, an apostle, not by human appointment or human commission, but by commission from Jesus Christ and from God the Father who raised him from the Dead"

(Gal 1:1). To remind his readers that Jesus Christ has been raised from the dead by God the Father immediately places Paul who has seen the Risen Jesus on an equal footing with all the other apostles and cuts the ground out from any argument that would proceed from some presumed advantage on the part of those apostles who had known Jesus before his death and resurrection.

"I must make it clear to you, my friends, that the gospel you heard me preach is no human invention. I did not take it from any man (not from Peter or James for example); no man taught it me; I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11-12).

Paul is not denying that he has ever taken over anything from anyone, least of all is he denying that he has ever been taught by anyone. The fact that in his first letter to the Corinthians he explicitly states that he is handing on the tradition that he had received: "That Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures. . ." makes it clear that there was tradition, including factual information concerning Jesus that Paul did receive. But for Paul facts themselves do not the Gospel make. No doubt Paul, as a Pharisee of the Pharisees, in his role as persecutor of the Church, made himself acquainted with the essential content of the Gospel as it was being preached and defended by those within the covenant community with whom he was contending. Indeed it would not be out of character for this great theologian to have achieved an even more firm and comprehensive grasp of the essential content of this Gospel than was in the head of many of the faithful who were willing to die for it. What was at issue for Paul were not the facts concerning the earthly life of Jesus but the meaning of these facts and the truth of his resurrection. As he persecuted the Church and ravished the faith, he was convinced that the Gospel preached by the Christians was false. That is why he was willing to persecute them unto death if necessary. Everything hinges on the "Truth of the Gospel." Once it pleased God to reveal his Son to Paul, so that Paul could see Jesus as the Son of God, everything changed (see Gal 1:12, 15; 1 Cor 9:1; 15:8; and Phil 3:21). What had been perceived as false, was now recognized as true on the basis of Christ's appearance to Paul. That Jesus had died, or even that he had been crucified, was never in dispute between the Christians and the pre-Christian Paul. But the belief that Jesus had died "for the sins" of others, "according to the Scriptures" and that God had vindicated him by raising him up--those were faith claims made by the church whose truth the pre-Christian Paul could never have accepted, but whose truth, on the basis of Christ's resurrection appearance to him, he was now prepared to embrace, pass on to his converts, and presumably himself proclaim. That there were factual details concerning these deep matters of faith that may have interested Paul

should not cause alarm for those who wish, at all costs, to preserve his independence of those eyewitnesses upon whom he would have been dependent for finding adequate answers to some of his questions.

We take this position because the answers Paul received were always received within the context of a faith already firmly and irrevocably grounded in the decisive revelation that preceded and led to his questions. Most if not all of Paul's post-conversion questions would have been of the nature of questions for the purpose of clarification in detail. Paul would hardly have asked Peter "Did Jesus die?" or "Was Jesus crucified?" That kind of information would have been entailed in the essential kerygma Paul had formerly rejected and now himself proclaimed.

Paul's pre-Christian questioning would have focused on issues vital to the way in which the Law and the Prophets were being interpreted and acted upon. But once Paul became a Christian there would have been a whole new set of questions for him to ask concerning aspects of Christian life and faith which were relatively untouched by points at issue over whether something had or had not happened "in accordance with the scriptures." As a Pharisee Paul had sat in Moses' seat, and it thus had been for him and his fellow Pharisees to decide how the Law and Prophets were to be interpreted. When any members of the covenant were interpreting the Law and the Prophets in a manner contrary to Pharisaic teaching, and especially when these interpretations led to behavior that was threatening to the established world of Jewish Piety, Paul, as a Pharisee, zealous for the Law, was constrained to act. And act he did. But once Paul was converted, questions like: "What happened on the night Jesus was handed over?," i.e., questions concerning matters important to Christians, but which had not been problem causing to Paul the enforcer of Torah, would now have become questions of interest to Paul the Christian leader and they were perfectly legitimate questions for him to pursue. As his leadership role in the church grew, that he have a firm grasp on such matters would have become important in Paul's overall preparation for mission.

In this context we should not shy away from accepting the plain meaning of what Paul writes in reference to going to Jerusalem: he went to question Peter. Paul is not making himself subservient to anyone in his decision to ask questions. This apostolic concern to "get it right" is foundational for Christian life and faith. Paul is not for-ensically diminishing his authority by "making inquiry" of Peter. On the contrary his use of $\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\rho\eta\sigma\alpha\iota$ in this context conceptually places Peter in the block. Paul is the $\acute{\iota}\sigma\tau\omega\rho$. Peter is the one being cross-examined. What is at issue is the truth in a whole range of practical matters which Paul wants to discuss with Peter--none, we conclude,

extending to the heart of his Gospel. That much Paul appears to rule out decisively in what he says about how he received his Gospel in Gal 1:1-17.

Paul in going to Jerusalem to question Peter, is moving up the stream of church tradition to its very source, i.e., to those eyewitnesses who first carefully formulated it.

Paul's use of ἵστορησαί at this point serves very well his of establishing both his apostolic independence and his apostolic authority. He is not just an independent apostle who has seen Risen Jesus. He is an independent apostle who stands in a relationship to Peter. By implication, everything that Paul did or said in the church after that meeting carried with it the implicit authority of both Paul and Peter. That was the risk Peter took in agreeing to the meeting. We have no way of knowing from any statement made Peter on the subject how Peter viewed Paul's coming to Jerusalem. But the practice of risk taking out of love, even love of a potential enemy, has been endemic to Christian faith from its origin in the heart of Jesus.

And I remained with him 15 days

The conventional critical comment on this compound phrase reflects the purpose of this phrase in Paul's overall argument in Galatians; namely to establish that he was not dependent for this authority to preach the Gospel upon those who had been Apostles before him. Thus E. De Witt Burton writes: "The mention of the brief duration of the stay is intended, especially in contrast with the three years of absence from Jerusalem, to show how impossible it was to regard him as a disciple of the Twelve, learning all that he knew of the Gospel from them."⁴ But if this is the case, how much more remarkable is the evidence that Paul provides! For in this case Paul's statement that he remained with Peter for 15 days is being given under some constraint. His purpose would have been better served had he been able to write that the visit was for only one day.

We have an example in the early church of such a one day visit which features "greeting the brethren" (Acts 21:7). Of course such visits can last several days. Thus when King Agrippa and Bernice arrived at Caesarea for a courtesy visit to Festus "They spent several days there" (Acts 25:13-14). While visits in the early church are often for unspecified periods of time, it is not unusual to have the length of

⁴ E. De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1921) 60.

stay explicitly mentioned, and it is instructive to see Paul's visit with Peter against the background of a spectrum of visits of specified length. Thus in addition to the one day visit of Acts 21:1, there are three instances of seven day stays or stayovers. Thus Paul met up at Troas with some fellow workers who had gone on ahead, and they spent a week there. This is not a visit per se, but it is instructive (Acts 20:6). As Paul was returning to Jerusalem for the last time his ship put in at Tyre to unload cargo, he took advantage of the situation and spent seven days with the disciples in that city before returning to his ship (Acts 21:4). On his way to Rome Paul and those with him finally reached the port of Puteoli, where some fellow Christians invited them to remain with them seven days (Acts 28:14).

If we are to appreciate the significance of Paul's two week stay with Peter, we cannot do better than recognize that in cultures which observe a lunar calendar important meetings or conferences fall into one or another of four basic categories. There are important one day visits. These provide the occasion for direct face to face meetings between important persons. Only limited tasks can be accomplished, however, during a one day meeting. Next we have a basic pattern of three days and two nights. The guests arrive during the first day, and after greetings and preliminary matters are taken care of, the agenda for the following day is agreed upon. What is not accomplished during the second day can be dealt with before departure on the third day. The three day visit, meeting, or conference is very efficient and often used. Next is the one week meeting. This is reserved for more important meetings. For one thing it is very expensive in terms of time taken out of the busy schedules of the persons concerned, as well as the time required in making arrangements for such a long series of discussions. A great deal can be accomplished within the rhythm of the week long meeting. It is relatively rare, however, for conferences, whether planned or unplanned, to go into a second week. Such two week conferences, when planned, are generally planned some time in advance, and are reserved for only the most long term projects. A 15 day visit corresponds comfortably to the rhythm of a two week conference. One could arrive on the sixth day of the week sometime before sunset which begins the sabbath and depart early on the morning following the sabbath two weeks later. Such a stay will accommodate a leisurely visit, with ample time for work and relaxation. One can expect maximum communication during such a visit. Among other things such a period of time allows for the most difficult of topics to be laid out on the table, and, providing the persons concerned are capable of it, there is time to confront decisive issues,

bare mounting tensions, and confidently await lasting resolutions, all within the framework of what can be called a "double sabbath."

The point is not that Peter and Paul used their two week visit in any such fashion. We will never know how they spent those days together in Jerusalem. The point is that two weeks for important leaders, not to say the two persons who eventually emerged as the two leading Apostles of the Church, is a considerable length of time for a visit. Seldom do great leaders have the luxury of such schedules. In our own time one thinks of the Camp David accords. Or we can cite the two week visit that Dietrich Bonhoeffer made to talk with Karl Barth on his way back from his stay in the United States before he took up his role within the life of the Third Reich, which led eventually to his death.

Two weeks provided ample time for both Peter and Paul to discuss whatever was uppermost in their minds, including such topics, we must presume, as the Lord's Supper and other matters bearing upon the preaching of the Gospel, including the resurrection.

And when we realize the full range of meanings that Paul's readers could rightfully associate with his use of ἵστορησαί in this context, presuming that he was careful in his choice of language, we must be open to understanding Paul as saying that he went to Jerusalem to question, examine and observe, to the end that he would leave informed and ready to report to others on the results of his inquiry.

Peter was Paul's host throughout the two week period. As Peter's guest Paul was being afforded an unparalleled opportunity to gain an inside view of Peter's life and manners. To remain with Peter for two weeks would, of necessity, have afforded them the opportunity to share table fellowship, and it is altogether likely that they observed the Lord's Supper together in accordance with the words of institution which are preserved for us in 1 Cor 11:23-26 sometime during that two week period. It would be interesting to know whether James was present on this presumed occasion.

We are now ready to take up the question with which we began this section on Galatians: Granting that Paul wanted to make contact with Church authorities in Jerusalem (he did see James, for example), why did he go to Peter?

III. *The Role of Peter in the Pre-Pauline Palestinian Church*

In the Gospel of Matthew are preserved in their pristine oral form the following words of Jesus:

Woe unto you, Chorazin!
Woe unto you, Bethsaida!
For if the mighty works which were done in you,
Had been in Tyre and Sidon
They would have repented long ago in sack cloth and ashes.
But I say to you,
It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon
At the day of judgment
Than for you!
And as for you, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted into heaven?
Thou shalt be brought down to hell!
For if the mighty works which have been done in you
Had been done in Sodom,
It would have remained until this day.
But I say to you,
It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom
At the day of judgment
Than for you! (Matt 11:21-24)

The even handed treatment of these three Galilean cities, all of which face a terrible fate on the day of judgment for their failure to repent in the face of the mighty works that had been done in them, does not prepare us for the exceptional role that one of the three plays in the Gospel stories of Jesus. All four Gospels feature the city of Capernaum, and give scant attention to the other two places which one would judge from the words of Jesus were the beneficiaries of his preaching and healing ministry no less than Capernaum.

The Gospels, of course, tell the story of Jesus from the theological perspective of the mission to the Gentiles. In even the most Jewish of the four, the Risen Jesus commands the eleven disciples to go and "make disciples of all the Gentiles" (Matt 28:19).

Indeed it is to the text of this Gospel that we must go in our search for an answer to the question of how the city of Capernaum has come to play such a dominating role in the Gospel story.

But first it is important for us to situate in our mind's eye the location of Capernaum in relation to other points of interest in the early Church, especially the city of Damascus which lies to the northeast.

The Lake of Galilee is a great expanse of water fed by the Jordan River, which empties into the lake at its northern estuary and exits at the south to wend its way through the great Jordan valley until it finally empties into the Dead Sea. Capernaum is situated at the northern end of the lake west of the Jordan estuary. Here it occupies an outstanding position at the crossroads of both land and sea-routes leading north and east from Galilee.

The main road north from Judea and southern Galilee skirted the western coast of the lake until it reached a point just west of Capernaum. There it divided. One could continue north by ascending up the river bed of Nahal Korazim by way of the village and synagogue of Korazim (following the spelling of modern topography). One would then cross the Jordan over the B'noth-Ya'agor bridge and proceed eastward through Gualanitis (Golan) to Damascus. Or one could follow the eastern branch of this road at Capernaum and proceed along the northern coast of the lake of Galilee leaving the port of Capernaum on the immediate right and thus in a short time reach the Jordan estuary. The river was crossed about one mile above the estuary via the ford at Beth-Saida (Bethsaida), which in the 1st century served as the capital of Philip the Tetrarch of Gualanitis, Iturea, and Trachonitis. From Beth-Saida this road turned northwards until it joined the Qu'neitra-Damascus highway.⁵

As a port Capernaum was favorably located in relation to excellent fishing grounds near the Jordan estuary, and from Capernaum people had easy access by boat to Tiberias and about 30 other fishing villages all around the lake of Galilee.⁶ All in all Capernaum was well situated to be a base for the disciples as they undertook, as in time they certainly did, the making of new disciples in areas north and east of Galilee. At any rate, however it happened, by the time the evangelist Matthew undertook to compose his Gospel, Capernaum, had become an important city in the salvation history of the Gentile Church.

It is clear that the evangelist Matthew composed his Gospel while standing in the tradition of an early Christian mission that came originally out of northern Galilee. He takes as his *central key text*, compositionally speaking, a text from Isaiah. In this text, a passage which makes no reference to Capernaum is interpreted in a way that nonetheless makes Capernaum a part of God's plan of salvation for the Gentiles.⁷ According to the Hebrew-Masoretic text, this passage from Isaiah reads:

⁵ B. Sapir and Dov-Neeman, *Capernaum; History and Legacy, Art and Architecture* (Tel-Aviv, 1976) II.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For other reasons supportive of the view that the evangelist Matthew wrote for readers who lived in Christian communities which were the fruit of early missionary activity from northern Galilee into southern Syria, see W. R. Farmer, "Some Thoughts on the Provenance of Matthew," *The Teacher's Yoke: Studies in Memory of Henry Trantham* (ed. E. J. Vardaman and J. L. Garrett, Jr.; Waco: Baylor University Press, 1964) 109-16.

In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time he hath made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

The people that walked in darkness there have seen a great light: they that dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined (9:1-2).

The LXX version of this text in Matthew is shortened and slightly modified:

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles. The people that sat in darkness saw a great light: And to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

The evangelist believes that the way to understand this text is to realize that when the prophet Isaiah writes "by the way of the sea," he is referring to the seacoast of the Lake of Galilee. This we know because in the preceding verses Matthew notes that in leaving Nazareth and coming to dwell in Capernaum by the sea in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, Jesus did so in order that the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled (4:13-14).

Thus, Capernaum is important because, situated on the coast of the Lake of Galilee, it can be interpreted as being "by the way of the sea." Since there is nothing in the text of Isaiah that refers to Capernaum, one must presume that Capernaum was in some unexpressed way important to the evangelist. According to the words of Jesus, Capernaum is notable as one of three cities doomed for destruction because of its negative response to his ministry. What then has happened to reverse this judgment of Jesus so that in the Gospel stories of God's salvation Capernaum plays such a positive and important role?

One might say that there is no mystery, since we know that Jesus had a ministry in Capernaum, and since Capernaum was a city on the coast of the Lake of Galilee, it was natural for the evangelist to see Jesus' going to Capernaum as a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. However, it is equally clear that Jesus also had a ministry in other Galilean cities and villages, including significant evangelistic efforts in Chorazim and Bethsaida, and yet little or nothing is said about these ministries. Clearly a selective process has taken place which calls for an explanation.

Something very important concerning Capernaum must have taken place in order to account for its prominence in the Gospel story. The evangelist has made this city the turning point in the whole development of Jesus' ministry. Following his baptism in the Jordan,

and his return to Nazareth in Galilee, Capernaum is the next place of importance. Jesus goes to Nazareth, but nothing much of importance happens there. He goes immediately then to Capernaum where the first thing he does is to call Peter and his brother Andrew as well as James and John. He calls them from their fishing duties as his first disciples. Capernaum is the place where Jesus inaugurates his public ministry by calling disciples, three of whom, Peter, James, and John, will be with him at most of the high moments throughout his ministry. When compared to the rest of the Twelve, these disciples, and especially Peter, clearly dominate the Jesus tradition that the evangelist will use in composing his Gospel.

The best way to explain this selectivity is to recognize that the story of Jesus is being told from a particular perspective, i.e., that of the evangelist, or better, that of the churches for which he is writing his Gospel. The best way to explain this selectivity of emphasizing Capernaum and certain of the Twelve is that Capernaum and some or all of those first disciples called by Jesus were singularly important in the history of the evangelists' church.

This is not to say that the story of Jesus has been falsified. Rather it is to say that the Gospels grow out of an exegetical tradition. It makes the best sense if we posit that Jesus himself inaugurated this exegetical tradition by his reading of Isaiah. Because Isaiah was important for Jesus, Isaiah was therefore important for his early disciples. The early Christians living on the coast of the Lake of Galilee, including any living in Capernaum, would have been the first to understand and appreciate this Matthean hermeneutical development within the Jesus-school Isaianic exegetical tradition.

Our analysis suggests that this exegetical tradition developed in the hands of a Christian preacher in the city of Capernaum who interpreted the text of Isaiah to apply to the city in which he was preaching. "We here in this place have seen a great light." It would appear that in some such way the text of Isaiah has come to be seen in relationship to the history of the readers for whom the evangelist is writing.

Capernaum is one of many places frequented by Jesus. But this place, this particular place, because of its topographical importance, so well situated as a base for evangelistic outreach with good road and water connections, especially between Galilee and Damascus, becomes very important to the mission that moves from Galilee towards Damascus. Capernaum is the only city Jesus is known to have frequented that is situated on the seacoast made important by the prophecy of Isaiah, and which also served travelers on their way from Jerusalem to Damascus. Capernaum was a chief port of entry

for travelers from southern Syria (including Damascus) into Galilee and points south (including Jerusalem). At the same time, and for similar reasons, it was the most suitable northern base for Christian missionary activity, moving out of Galilee into southern Syria. We know that Paul's persecution of Christians took him to Damascus, and that if he ever passed through Galilee on the way he would have passed by or very near Capernaum.

The whole of early church history makes sense if Peter was important in an early Christian mission going forth from Galilee into southern Syria and if this was also the missionary church that Paul had been persecuting and from which he received the tradition he passed on to others after his conversion. This would not have precluded Peter's spending periods of time in Jerusalem, and giving leadership to the Twelve from that center.

IV. Paul's Relationship to Peter

Looking at the matter in this way makes it possible for us to say that Paul entered into a partnership with Peter in principle the day he began preaching the faith of the Church that he once ravished (Gal 1:23). There is nothing intrinsically implausible or improbable in this way of interpreting the evidence. It certainly helps us to understand how it was possible for Paul to visit Peter in Jerusalem and to remain with him for 15 days.

It is altogether likely that each knew a good deal about the other long before they met in Jerusalem. And it is not unlikely that there had been some communication between them during the period Paul was preaching the Gospel prior to his visit to Jerusalem to visit Peter. The visit itself almost certainly would have required some communication between them as well as some kind of pre-understanding.

Paul's decision to preach in Sicily and points further west would have provided the occasion for him to visit Peter in Jerusalem, and for him to reach a firm apostolic understanding with that apostle to whom the risen Christ, according to the tradition he had received, had indeed appeared first. Thereafter, wherever Paul went he passed on the tradition he had received from the mission Peter had organized and inspired.

I delivered to you first of all that which also I received: That Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (Isaiah 53); and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures (Hos 6:2, Jonah 2:1); and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the Twelve; then he appeared to about five hundred brethren at the

same time, of whom the majority abide with us until this day, but some have fallen asleep; then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles (I Cor 15:3-7)].

To this litany of what he had received which now he passes on to the Corinthians, Paul adds pertinent items from his own history with fitting theological and interpretative comments:

And, last of all, as to one born out of due time he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, one who is not (even) worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace which I have received has not been without effect; on the contrary (because of the effect of God's grace) I labored more abundantly than all of them (i.e., the other apostles): yet not I but the grace of God which was with me. Whether it be I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed (8-11).

This tradition that Paul passes on; and which represents Peter as the first to whom the risen Christ appeared, raises interesting questions. The Gospel of Matthew, for example, preserves a tradition according to which Jesus after his resurrection first appeared to Mary Magdalene and the other Mary. It is argued that Paul passes on a kerygma that must have the value of legal testimony, and that since women's testimony was unacceptable in Jewish courts, it was omitted altogether in kerygmatic passages, so that it would be wrong to argue that the tradition Paul passes on conflicts with that from Matthew. In any case, it is clear that Paul is passing on a pro-Petrine tradition, i.e., a tradition that developed within a Church in which it was remembered that the Risen Lord first appeared to Peter. That apostle to whom the Risen Christ was believed to have first appeared would have had a special place in post-resurrection churches. It is also important to note that in Paul's version of this tradition Christ's appearance to him, coming at the end of the series, "last of all," creates a series which begins with Peter and ends with Paul. According to Paul's version this is a closed canon of resurrection appearances. It runs the gamut of Apostolic authority--from Peter to Paul. Paul is least of all, because he persecuted the Church of God. But, he is also first, because where sin doth abound, there doth grace much more abound. Similarly Paul can claim to have labored more than any of the apostles, which would have included Peter. So the last shall be first--whether by one's own labor in the Gospel, or by God's grace.

Paul passed on a tradition that had developed in a church in which there was already present an incipient Petrine primacy. But his churches received this tradition from him within an overall theological framework which bespoke apostolic mutuality between the first of the Twelve and the Apostle to the Gentiles. Was this simply Paul's

construction: or did it represent a bona fide apostolic agreement that had been reached between Peter and Paul before or during that 15 day meeting in Jerusalem?

It must have represented an implicit apostolic *quid-pro-quo* whether consciously recognized or not. In any case no one can deny the facts: Paul passed on a pro-Petrine if not an implicit Petrine-primacy tradition and Peter supported Paul's right to head the apostolate to the Gentiles. Of course this understanding was not officially ratified by the pillars of the Church in Jerusalem until 14 years later when Paul returned to Jerusalem, and lay before those who had been apostles before him the Gospel he had been preaching to the Gentiles.

It has been argued that the Jerusalem conference was only possible because Peter was willing to arrange it at Paul's request, and for the sake of the Gospel.⁸ According to this argument, the fundamental theological agreement reached between Peter and Paul during their 15 day visit 14 years before the Apostolic Conference (Gal 2:1-10), tested by 14 years of missionary work by Paul and his associates, provided the essential components for the successful outcome of the Apostolic Conference. The agreement of the Jerusalem apostles to ratify the longstanding understanding between Peter and Paul which issued in the decision to make each of them the heads of two separate but concordant missions, is the apostolic *magna charta* of the holy catholic church, reaffirmed martyrologically by signatures made in blood by these two chief Apostles during the Neronian persecution. Paul gives his readers an eyewitness report of what actually happened at this historic conference. It is one of the most remarkable statements in the NT:

When they (i.e., the pillars of the Church in Jerusalem) saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel of uncircumcision, even as Peter with the gospel of the circumcision (for he that wrought for Peter unto the apostleship of the circumcision wrought for me also unto the Gentiles); and when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles, and they unto the circumcision (Gal 2:7 -9).

This dual leadership of the historical apostolate helps explain why the NT writings feature Peter and Paul. But the subsequent

⁸ W. R. Farmer, "Peter and Paul: A Constitutive Relationship for Catholic Christianity," *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers, a volume in honor of Stewart Dickson Currie* (ed. W. Eugene March; San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980) 219-36; and "Peter and Paul," *Jesus and the Gospel; Tradition, Scripture, and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 50-63.

concordant martyrdom of these two Apostolic heads is no less essential to the historical development that eventually led to the formation of the NT canon.⁹

There is a solid NT foundation for the recognition of Irenaeus that the founding and building up of the Church in Rome by "The two most glorious (i.e., martyred) apostles Peter and Paul" (*Against Heresies* 3.3.2) provides the Holy Catholic Church with an essential touchstone in history for the combatting of heresy. That which is not in harmony with the concordant apostolic witness of Peter and Paul sealed in blood, and witnessed to in the scriptures which have been normed by this apostolic history and faith, is not catholic, and cannot be accepted as being faithful to the primitive *Regula*, i.e., the "truth of the Gospel,"¹⁰ by which these two Apostles had agreed to norm their faith and practice (Gal 2:11-21).

Tertullian correctly saw that the norm by which the issue between Peter and Paul at Antioch was finally settled was in fact a primitive Apostolic understanding based upon a theological agreement to which both Peter and Paul subscribed (*Against Marcion* IV ii.1-5). He understood that *regula* to have been laid down for the Church by the Apostles at the Jerusalem conference of Gal 2:1-10. Our analysis leads to the conclusion that this apostolic conference was preceded by a less publicized, and, in some sense, preparatory meeting, a meeting that had taken place between Peter and Paul in the same city 14 years earlier (Gal 1:18).

In his First letter to the church at Corinth Paul addresses the problem of party spirit in that church and specifically refers to four parties, i.e., those who say "we belong to Paul," those who say "we belong to Apollo," those who say, "we belong to Cephas," and those who say "we belong to Christ." While Paul does not criticize Peter for contributing to this divisiveness it is clear from the fact that there were members of the Corinthian church who said "we belong to Cephas," that there was a basis for tension between Peter and Paul over the way in which their respective adherents behaved toward one another. Just how serious this tension may have been we do not know. There is no reference in any other letter of Paul to a "Cephas party." In Paul's Second letter to the church at Corinth he is at pains to criticize certain opponents at Corinth who questioned his apostolic

⁹ W. R. Farmer and D. Farkasfalvy, *The Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist, 1983) 7-95.

¹⁰ For the relationship of the apostolic norm of the "truth of the Gospel" and the 2nd century forms of the "Regula," see W. R. Farmer, "Galatians and the Second-Century Development of the 'Regula Fidei,'" *The Second Century*, a Journal of Early Christian Studies, 4 (1984) 143-70.

authority and worked against him. The depth of Paul's feeling about the challenge this opposition represented to his apostleship may be measured by his use of sarcasm in referring to them derogatively as "super-apostles." While there is no way these "super apostles" in 2 Corinthians can be identified with any degree of certainty as adherents of the "Cephas party" in I Corinthians, neither can one absolutely rule out the possibility that Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians may have stood in some meaningful, even if undefinable, relationship to this Party.

To the degree that we allow for the possibility that Paul's opponents in 2 Corinthians are positively related to the Cephas Party mentioned in I Corinthians, the case for serious tension between Peter and Paul in the period following the Apostolic conference in Jerusalem is strengthened. Certainly the incident that Paul relates in Galatians 2 concerning the confrontation he had with Peter over the issue of table fellowship between Gentile and Jewish Christians in Antioch serves to underscore the undeniable fact that these two apostles could differ strongly over very important issues. However, such disagreements only serve to underscore how firm was the bond that united them. The more we make room for Post-conciliar tension, and the greater the place we give to this tension, the more we recognize the need for pre-conciliar solidarity to account for the eventual outcome. For if there is one thing that is certain in church history it is that in spite of any pigheadedness on the part of either or both these great apostles, they did stand together on the fundamental theological basis of the Faith, i.e., God's redemptive, sacrificial, and atoning love for sinners, and all else that is entailed in the good news of justification by faith (Gal 2:15-21).

IV. The Pre-Pauline Tradition Concerning the Lord's Supper

Finally, in answer to the question, "By what authority does the Apostle to the Gentiles assure the Corinthian Church that the tradition concerning the Lord's Supper he had received and had in turn passed on to them, originated with Jesus himself?" we answer, by the authority of those who were apostles before him. And if it be asked, did Paul have the opportunity to discuss the form, content, and credibility of this tradition with those apostles who were eyewitnesses to what actually happened in Jerusalem on the night when Jesus was delivered up? The answer is most assuredly yes.

First he could, and presumably did, discuss such matters with Peter, who, according to the Gospels (Matt 26:17-30 and parallels), was present there in Jerusalem that night in the very room where Jesus took bread and broke it. Second, Paul had further opportunity

to discuss such matters with John as well as with Peter 14 years later during the Jerusalem conference, if by that time he still had any questions. Paul's subsequent assurance to his readers in Corinth that he was passing on to them a tradition that he had received entails under these circumstances, the presumption that this tradition is handed on to us in the scriptures as tradition that comes not only with the authority of the Apostle Paul but with that of those Apostles Paul knew who had themselves been eyewitnesses to the event. We cannot be certain of this point. But it appears to us to be intrinsically probable in the light of the considerations to which attention has been brought in this essay.

The import of this conclusion is far reaching. If Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures (1 Cor 15:3), since Isaiah 53 is the only scripture theologians can supply to explain the meaning of the tradition Paul is passing on, we must be open to the conclusion that this passage in the book of Isaiah was important for Jesus. The evidence of his words preserved in Matt 20:25-28 (and Mark 10:42-45), where the Son of Man gives his life as a ransom for many, argues for this conclusion.

It would follow in this case that for Jesus to speak as he spoke and to act as he acted on the night he was delivered up would have been for him to have taken a crucial step in instituting the Church. And a Church so instituted would be a Church which in a central way would live out of the mystery of this Eucharist. In other words it would be a martyrological church living out of the vicarious and atoning sacrifice of Jesus. The concordant martyrdom of the two chief Apostles Peter and Paul in Rome would be inspired by the definitive faith that mysteriously comes to expression in the eyewitness tradition concerning this institutional act, and, as a rite, it would be central in the life and faith of that Holy Catholic Church within whose divine economy it would be the vocation of the Church in Rome to represent the concordant witness of the Chief Apostles Peter and Paul, and to counsel with all churches which wish to remain faithful to that earliest apostolic witness: "in the night he was delivered up, he took bread. . . ." That is to say, words, and deeds, as well as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, would be normative for the Church in relationship to this central rite as the specification by our Lord of how the concord between the Law and the Prophets and the Covenant that was coming into being through his death and resurrection was to be understood and lived out; a rite in which the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets is celebrated, the redeeming benefits of the atoning sacrifice of Christ are appropriated by faith, and the fruits of the Spirit that flow from the New Covenant are shared by the participants.

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