M: Historical Paul? An Exercise in Conditional Neutrality?

BOOK XII - Part V

The Pursuit of Philosophy as a Discipline

Volume III

The Prescience of Philosophy as a Discipline:

Beyond Criticism:

How Should Philosophy
Progressively Perfect an Ongoing Critique of its Discipline,
And,
Through Such Constructive Insight,
Perceptively Appreciate the Nature of the Human Condition??
A Critique of Theory *versus* A Theory of Critique…

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M: Historical Paul? An Exercise in Conditional Neutrality[1]

0. Synopsis

An increasingly influential number of scholars, re-examining the topic of Early Church History, have revisited the dating as to when the *Gospels*,[2] *Acts*, and *Pauline Letters* were written and who now see them as more likely to be second century texts rather than their traditional dating in the first century of the Common Era. Indeed, their canonical redactions would need to be placed around the mid-second century CE. If accepted, this revolution in dating would have profound ramifications for how Early Church History should be approached. Moreover, the search for the imputed historicity of Jesus, of Paul, and the Early Church, as was traditionally conducted, must now be seriously called into question given that such a quest now refracted through second century writings can only reveal the anxieties, controversies, and complexities of a second century, and not the first. In this short presentation, let me explore a brief outline as to how this process of redating is being conducted. The framework being adopted for this exposition being that of a 'conditional neutrality',[3] i.e., exercised as a series of conditional possibilities, as 'what ifs', and, that if these conjectures re dating were to be accepted, in what way would we then need to ask, 'just what ramifications might flow on in the wake of these hypothetical reconsiderations? (0)

1. The So-Called Synoptic Problem

The traditionally perceived dating, perhaps initiated by the church father Irenaeus, c. 130-202 CE,[4] was for certain 'authentic' *Pauline Epistles* to be have been written first pre-the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE, then the *Gospel of Mark*, perhaps a decade afterwards with *Matthew* and *Luke*, followed a little later, around the turn of the second century, in *John*. *The Revelations of St John* might be added to this list with a few other relatively minor texts like, e.g., the *Didache*. Now, even this traditional consensus, itself, is not settled, and, I only proffer a potted version in this regard. (1)

However, a number of such scholars, again, not necessarily in an agreement with each other, have revised this general consensus and shift the production and redaction of most of these texts to the second century CE. How has this revision come about? Let me proffer the following argument, admittedly harmonizing some of these competing schemes for dating without, I hope, too seriously altering the overall arc of this trajectory? (2)

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1 Conference paper for The Continental Philosophy Group, 2026.

2 The expression 'Gospel' in Greek is *evangelion* and means 'good new', or similar (without initially representing a certain genre of religious literature).

3 A methodological concept first introduced in *A First Lecture in 'Creative' Theology/'Creative' Secularity* (*Pursuit*, III.XII.V.L).

4 This church father argued for four authentic gospels and was one of the first to name them with their traditional nomenclature of 'Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John'.

The retrospectively reviewed 'heretic' Maricon of Sinope, c. 85-c. 160 CE, was the first to put forward the idea of a *New Testament* in contrast with the *Old Testament* of the *Jewish Bible* as translated into Greek in the form of the *Septuagint*.[5] As a rich merchant connected to shipbuilding, it is obvious he received a good classical training. He might have also been a Jew given his knowledge of the *Septuagint*? Around 135 CE he moved to Rome and opened a school of religious thought. In some ways, Maricon could be viewed as a Gnostic given his disseminated view that there must have two gods, namely, a Creator Deity of the *Jewish Bible* and the Loving Father as preached by Jesus. His detailed character assessment of the former was found wanting, and, so, as a logical way of resolving this conundrum, he proposed that the God of the *Jewish Bible* could not be the same God, the Father, as preached by Jesus. Of course, a solution not without its own set of problems and, no doubt, one of the reasons why he was retrospectively deemed to have been a heretic. Perhaps, around the 140s CE he published in three sections eleven books, and where he is perceived to be the *de facto* originator of this concept of the *New Testament*, namely, *Antitheses*, (an introduction to Marcion's idea of there being two deities), *Evangelion* (1 book, a *Proto-Luke*) and the *Apostolikon* (10 books, namely, the following *Epistles of Paul* starting with *Galatians*, 1 & 2 *Corinthians*, *Romans*, 1 & 2 *Thessalonians*, *Ephesians* [circulated as *Laodicieans*], *Colossians*, *Philemon*, and *Philippian*).[6] (3)

His *Evangelion*, although not named other than as a *Gospel*, is a *Proto-Luke* and from recent reconstructions, courtesy of comments made by the church fathers Tertullian and Epiphanius, appears to be about one quarter to one third the size of a *Canonical Luke*. Missing from Marcion's gospel, e.g., are the nativity stories, and the two parables of *The Prodigal Son* and *The Good Samaritan*. Some people have argued that these later insertions are often via the influence of the gospel of *Matthew*. On stylistic grounds this reconstruction differs considerably from the redactions of a slightly later *Canonical Luke*. The quality of the Greek being more refined in the latter. (4)

In his *Antitheses* he notes the existence of other gospels, but declares his own version to be the true, authentic one. In this introduction he also seems to be alluding to the antitheses in *Matthew*.[7] At the same time, he appears to have no acquaintance with *Acts* usually understood to have been written in the hand of the *Canonical Luke*. (5)

In recent reconstructions of these *Pauline Letters*, it is also claimed that they, too, are shorter than their 'later' canonical 'redactions'. Now, some critics, both ancient and modern, have claimed Marcion edited their canonical versions and cut out a variety of sections. However, a much simpler explanation is just to argue that these epistles, 'inherited' by Marcion, were already in a shorter form and that later redactions were similarly added that lengthened their more final canonical versions. (6)

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5 It could be argued that, in his time, Marcion would not have been reviewed, generally, as a 'heretic', but, as one more variety of a Christian sect. However, towards the end of the second century, and ever onwards, a Proto-Catholic-Orthodoxy would view those who do not fit that mould as 'heretical'.

6 In the writing of this presentation on the role played by Marcion in the early church I am very grateful for the work and podcasts of Dr M. David Litwa.

7 *Matthew* 5.38-39.

This non-ascribed gospel, attested to my Marcion, is the first historical mention we have of *Luke*, albeit in the form of a *Proto-Luke*. In light of this attestation of '*Luke*', some scholars have proposed the primacy of *Luke* over *Mark*. I don't think this need apply as Marcion, in his *Antitheses*, has already noted the circulation of other gospels.[8] (7)

Now, some scholars have argued that Marcion's *Proto-Luke* does the same work in proffering a solution for the so-called 'Synoptic Problem' that would have been done by the speculative proposition of that mysterious document '*Q*'.[9] Another solution has been proposed that *Proto Luke*, *Proto-Mark*, and *Proto-John* were influenced by the writing of a later *Matthew*, and where, through partial harmonization of inserted redactions, would finally form the relative finality of their canonical versions.[10] (8)

The traditional misunderstanding that *Mark* is somewhat 'primitive' should also be revised.[11] Although the Greek in *Mark* has been criticized as not being the most refined, still, arguably, its rhetorical structures are surprisingly sophisticated when seen for what is being attempted. In this gospel it has been argued that *Mark* is illustrating certain verses in the *Pauline Epistles* to the effect that the Jewish people just do not understand the teachings of Jesus and a more profitable mission is being found in the world of the Gentiles. He often has his disciples not understanding the import of his teachings and actions, but, that the 'knowing audience' of this gospel should understand what is being communicated by the text, namely, that Jesus is the new Moses, a better Elijah, and, by implication, a vast improvement on both Romulus and Odysseus. So, actions interpreted as rather shamanistic and primitive, like the 'spitting' on the deaf and blind persons, is to be better reviewed in its rhetorically constructed context, namely, that, just as Moses struck the rock and water gushed forth, in a parallel instance in this gospel, the 'Rock', namely, 'Jesus' through his spittle (water) is able to cure the deaf and blind persons, and so on.[12] Read through this rhetorically pre-constructed superstructure this specific gospel should not be dismissed as early, or primitive, as rather naïve or as unsophisticated, and so on. Now, I have included this slight digression to note that rather than arguing for the primacy, say, of *Mark* or *Luke*,[13] the co-arising of these gospels in the first half of the second century would make better sense, certainly their redactions, more or less, were finalized in that period of time. That, in many ways, they metaphorically 'bounced' off

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8 Scholarship notes at least over forty other gospels also in circulation.

9 E.g., Dr. Markus Vinzent.

10 As argued, e.g., by R. G. Price.

11 E.g., it has been argued that both *Mark* and *Canonical Luke* apparently reference the works of the Jewish historian Flavias Josephus, c. 37- c. 100 CE. He publishes in *The Jewish War* (*De Bello Judaico*): Published around 75–79 CE. This 7-book account details the Great Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE), including the siege of Masada and the destruction of Jerusalem. *Antiquities of the Jews* (*Antiquitates Iudaicae*): Published around 93–94 CE. *Against Apion* (*Contra Apionem*): Published around 97 CE (after the *Antiquities*). A two-book apologetic defense of the antiquity and nobility of the Jewish people against Greek detractors.

12 Refer to the following podcast: Dr. Richard Carrier; *Jesus Feeding Miracles Were Never About Food*: Link: https://www.youtube.com/live/y_y5xuM4Uvc?si=rDdcrMX2I1o3yA1o

13 The primacy of *Proto-Luke* has been recently argued for by Dr. Nina E. Livesay. A number of other earlier scholars have argued for something similar, e.g., Dr. Burnett Hillman Streeter, and Dr. Vincent Taylor. However, I am siding here, more or less, with their parallel co-formation in the first half of the second century CE.

each other and, in their process of redactions, each attempted to reassert different prioritizations of the Christian message?[14] (9)

Then, how should the 'original' *Epistles of Paul*[15] be viewed in terms of their dating? One person has argued for a date in the mid-90s CE.[16] Another scholar things they have more traditional roots in a time before the destruction of the Jewish temple in 70 CE.[17] I would argue that given their first attestation in Macion's *Apostolikon*, and assuming little redaction under his dissemination around 140 CE, that regardless of their initial roots in mid or later first century, or sometime before the mid-second century CE, their final redactions would have more reflected second century theological preoccupations, rather than first century considerations, and so on. (10)

Whither the historical Paul? Just where should we place in time this so-called 'author' or these imputed co-authors given both the possibility of co-authorship and these periods of later redaction? (11)

In the so-called writings of the 'Apostle' Paul, I do not think it to be very controversial to argue that one would not be able to 'resurrect' the historical Jesus. Although preaching the good-news, very little mention of Jesus is actually cited by these epistles other than in the form of 'visions'. Historically, Paul never met Jesus, and never mentions details of his ministry. Then, if the gospels are not biographies, noting only the *bios*, the life of certain people, and were never meant to be histories, but, rather, rhetorically contrived to promote distinctive forms of religious dissemination, then it would not be appropriate to use such literature in order to formulate historical versions of Jesus, Paul, or even notable moments in the 'life' of the Early Church, especially in the first century CE. With these facts, these data points, or, rather, tantalizing scraps of difficult to verify information, we are somewhat forced to adopt the perspective that these books in the *New Testament* are entirely constructed as 'forgeries', or worse, 'fabrications based on prior forgeries', or, indeed, entirely as a 'succession of pseudepigrapha'. On the other hand, we could take a middle path here and review such 'contested authorship' as more 'pious fictions', or, perhaps preferably, as 'inspirational literature' written in good faith, or, at least in a format to present an 'honest' vision of the 'truth', regardless of however mistaken or non-mistaken we might think of such an impossible task?[18] Some scholars have even

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[14] Perhaps seeing *Luke* as giving an emphasis to the doctrines of the atonement and the resurrection; *Mark* as making a division between the old and the new covenants and its transmission of the latter to the Gentiles; *Matthew* attempting an integrated account and returning to a more Jewish vision of the faith; and *John* re-emphasizing the primacy of 'faith' over 'gnosis' (in a reaction to that as disseminated by the *Gospel of St Thomas* according to Dr. Elaine Pagels; *Beyond Belief*: *The Secret Gospel of St Thomas*; 2004)?

[15] Often referred to as the 'authentic' *Pauline Letters*, but, in line with their most likely pseudoepigraphical origination they are better referred to as the 'original' *Pauline Letters*. Refer to paragraph 10-14.

[16] Jacob Berman.

[17] Dr. Richard Carrier.

[18] The same type of 'accusation' could be made of the *Old Testament* with its cultural appropriation of much earlier Middle Eastern myths; that the *Pentateuch* (*Torah*), in all probability, was redacted in a final form in a committee in the third century BCE, Daniel in the second century BCE, etc. Then, arguably, the Christian world culturally appropriated the central scriptures of the Jewish Religion in order to advance its own ministry in the Roman World, where, by such means, it has been argued that the Christian sect

argued that the novel in antiquity, often assuming a religious form, could also be a genre being alluded to here in the use of these narrations within the Gospels..? (12)

Now, in the spirit of a conditional neutrality, if we were to accept that second century datings basically apply to all the *Canonical Gospels*, *Acts*, and the *Pauline Epistles* found in the *New Testament*, whether some of the latter be treated as so-called 'authentic' or not, could this pursuit of an historical Jesus, an historical Paul, an historical early church be credibly contemplated? Indeed, what ramification naturally flow on from such a revision of this traditional Biblical landscape?[19] (13)

In the traditional chronologies, in pursuit of an historical Jesus, it was argued that all one had to do was return to earlier texts, say, *Mark*, strip out later mythic-like accretions and in this process of refinement of the textual 'ore' what one would be left with would be the target of this hermeneutical obsession, namely the historical Jesus, *et al*. Now, I admit to once being very sympathetic to this hermeneutical approach as formulated, say, by Rudolf Bultmann,[20] along with his arguments for a de-mythologization of the relevant texts. However, it would appear, in this radical redating to the second century CE, that there are no 'relevant texts' to de-mythologise in this regard! That the so-called 'histories' of the *Gospels, Acts*, and the *Epistles of Paul* were never meant to be either biographical or read as histories in the first place. That these obsessions need to be recognized for what they are – the imposition of a pattern of misinterpretation that would be better replaced by a more profitable pattern of interpretation, as an 'encounter' that would 'engage' the text in question in a 'working-recognition' on its own apparent terms of reference, at least to that extent that that approach could be both meaningfully envisaged and entertained… (14)

2. Conclusions

In classical antiquity there was a rhetorical device called 'prosopopoeia' – the technique of adopting the persona or mask of another entity. This can mean making an abstract concept or inanimate object talk (like personification), but it specifically includes writing or speaking in the voice and perceived style of a deceased, absent, or imaginary person. The epistles ascribed to Paul may or may not have been written in an alignment with such a device? But, whether that were to be the case or not, we must also understand that each and every text had been redacted at some point in time, was harmonized, had insertions inserted and deletions deleted, brought up to date, made to illustrate a reifica-

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would not be seen as 'modern' and having no antiquity like the other religions in its midst? In the same regard, some scholarship in early Islamic history has become extremely controversial. Likewise, the Buddhist world also does not escape this type of criticism. I have quipped in the past that well-patronized temples had back rooms writing the latest in scriptures, and, by such means, keeping up with the latest in doctrinal developments. For hundreds of years the formular 'Thus have I heard…' was to be read as an indication that this text was purporting to be the words of the Buddha himself. Or, similarly, just what was the relationship between the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature and the philosophical earthquake unleashed by the likes of the famous dialectician Nagarjuna, *et al*?

19 An 'exploding' of both the myths of 'Biblical inerrancy' and 'Biblical historicity'!

20 Rudolf Bultmann, 1884-1976.

tion of certain injunctions and doctrinal points, and so on… as I noted in my introductory *Synopsis*:

> …the search for the imputed historicity of Jesus, of Paul, and the Early Church, as was traditionally conducted, must now be seriously called into question given that such a quest now refracted through second century writings can only reveal the anxieties, controversies, and complexities of a second century, and not the first. (15)

As *Mark* tells us, and I paraphrase, 'for those who have eyes to truly see and ears to truly hear let them understand…'[21] For example, if we were to read these passages where Jesus spits upon the person he is going to heal and we were to read this literally, at face value, as if an historical event, then we have completely missed the rhetorical point of this text. Indeed, such events set in a succession of scenes set over the span of three days… an allusion, I must confess, I do not seem to understand, and, no doubt, must resign to the fact of being one of the those lost souls not able to find redemption and eternal salvation... (19)

But, much as in reading a novel, not too long ago looked down upon as nothing more than 'a tissue of lies', we might opine instead:

> To lie we must tell the truth,
> And to tell the truth we must lie..!![22] (20)

Noël Tointon, Penrith, 14.9.26.

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[21] *Mark* 8.18. Refer also to *Mark* 8.23 & 25 (healing the blind person); *Mark* 7.33 (healing the deaf and mute man). My paraphrase also echoes *Matthew* 13.16 and *Luke* 10.23-24.

[22] This might seem to be a bit too cryptic, but, let me quickly explain. In order to convincingly tell a lie, you must first relay a succession of true facts before then tweaking one or two of them in an untruthful direction. Moving in the opposite direction, in order to represent the truth of a truthfully considered representation, one must misrepresent what is to be intended as a truthful transmission in order for its de-misrepresentation to better represent what was being originally intended. I.e., 'understanding' as 'ever a work in progress'. As an illustration of this fact, I am reminded of a certain person who requested some biographical information about 'why I was motivated to write on philosophical topics?' Then, every time, I approached this topic I found I was ending up with a different biography despite the same life, the same *bios*. Furthermore, reading my motivation retrospectively back into my interpretation of certain events also seemed to somewhat muddy the waters as I had to ask if those identified objectives were actually being entertained in the initial stages of starting such a pursuit (such as, e.g., this series of books titled *The Pursuit of Philosophy as a Discipline*). If 'understanding' is a 'process of ongoing thematization', then this 'work in progress' must apply throughout its 'recognition, encountering, and engagement, along with any recollections we might have of the former in terms of motivation, objectives, etc.' In the progress of this process seeking to de-mis-represent any misrepresentations either advertently or inadvertently being entertained along the way. In the same vein, noting that a good title should misrepresent its entitled text, e.g., ironically, etc.. Once we understand how to de-mis-represent that misrepresentation only then does the title insightfully point to the representation of the presentation of the body of that text being titled. Given titles are 'about the text' and not so much 'of the text', and where this ambiguity can never be completely defused.

3. A 'Short' Postscript[23]

If you were a betting person, on which of the following would you place what you would consider to be your safest bet? On the existence of either an historical Jesus, an historical Paul, or the historical existence of an early church? If you could suspend both your religious preferences and your non-religious preferences, a bet placed on the existence of the early church might seem to be the safest option. Yes, there are serious scholars who are calling the existence of these two religious leaders into question, but, no one would seriously call into doubt the existence of the early church… or, would they? (21)

That, a so-called 'early church' was also 'one integrated institution' should also be called into question. What most, if not all, early writings appear to tell us, despite processes of retrospective idealization and redaction, is that a multiplicity of different strains and strands of belief were coming together like as if added to a 'soup' which through continual stirring would then take on more the complexion of a 'stew', albeit one where we may no longer see what had been added, but, where we can still intuit a complex of forces and flavours that have not nor ever were perfectly mixed and melded together. Let me briefly note a small sample of these ingredients, namely, apocalyptic citations, gnostic imagery, devotional anecdotes, doctrinal disputes, pro and anti-Jewish preferences, pro and anti-Graeco-Roman influences, disputations between Pauline and Petrine factions, and so on. Along with geographical and ideological islands of isolation, 'the early church' might be better thought of as a 'competing cluster of early churches' that did not necessarily agree with each other, and, more often than not, did not agree with each other. Indeed, arguably, only with the arrival of church councils under Constantine, *et al*, did the early churches take on the semblance of an 'Early Church'. That the formative years in gospel production generally reflect this creative coming together of many different voices. That only with an accumulation of money, property, power, and political influence could the early churches be then more correctly viewed as 'The Church'. That, with that type of a milestone achieved, the ecclesiastical victors could then retrospectively rewrite history arguing for a greater degree of commonality that apparently did not occur. I would respectfully suggest this is one reason why so many early church fathers were later thought to be either 'heretical' or 'semi-heretical' or 'just a little bit too difficult' or 'not quite orthodox enough' to simply explain to later audiences?[24] (22)

A cosmological metaphor springs to mind, namely, that so-called 'early church history' is a bit like the so-called 'Big Bang' that, then, for a lengthy period in time of a few hundreds of millions of years, the entire cosmos would remain dark, and, that it was only in the birth of the stars, galaxies, constellations of the same, and so on, did the world

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[23] A doubly ironic sense of 'shortness' given the immensity of this shift from an 'internal' view of the Traditional to an 'external' view of the Traditional, with the latter taking a Meta-Traditional or Extra-Traditional sense of perspective (although this type of exercise is still one that can be done under the suspension of a conditional neutrality, i.e., operating with hypotheticals, etc. Although, again, at the metaphorical 'end of day', de-suspensions should also be expected when and where certain conclusions appear to be probabilistically weighted in certain definite directions that also should not be ignored whilst also being qualified as 'provisional' at the same time. 'Doubly ironic' in the sense that the issues raised in this discussion, as here being overseen, is both too 'short' as a topic and too 'long' for a mere postscript.

[24] E.g., Marcion, Tertullian, Origen.

light up once again after this imputed period of darkness. Without a cultural elite, able to both read and creatively write, the ensuing lack of written textual documentation could only 'cast a dark shadow' over those early years in the growth of this phenomenon centered on the birth of an embryonic Christian world, in the midst of a Roman world, where only a few of its inhabitants had both the money and leisure, along with the motivated ability and access, to find a sufficient classical education that would then allow both the ongoing deposition and dissemination of such an interwoven textual tradition.[25] (23)

In historical hindsight, we could claim that all traditions are ever in a state of a continual process of re-constitution, and, where, from time to time, various changes of state will occur that could also, in that same period in time, re-constitute the entirety of that same tradition through the weight of a set of counter-traditions. One has only to think of the Reformation and its paralleling in the Counter-Reformation. However, be that as it may, we can also perceive, or rather, apperceive, the persistence of a certain distinctive problematic whose ongoing periods and processes of resolution appear to ever remain within the parameters of that same tradition in question. This is why I believe it behooves serious Christians to look more-kindly on the entirety of their own traditions, and through attitudes that take on the dispositions of an Inter-Faith, Open-Faith, and an Engaged-Faith, may well find themselves in a better position to more deeply appreciate and comprehend both the continuities and discontinuities of the Christian Tradition itself. In essence, find ghosts still debating between the lines, so to speak... (24)

That, in this regard, a radical approach to both religious and secular worlds is also required for whomsoever wishes to re-direct the trajectories of their own cultural-intercultural sense of a place in this world at large. Moreover, an inability to seriously regard such an existential problematic, be it Christian, or Islamic, or Buddhist or Hindu, or whatever else it might be, then, that very tradition which ignores its own traditional sense and semblance of a problematic, or, indeed, rejects the very existence of such a problematic, will find themselves situated in a time when those very traditions, themselves, will need to reflect more heavily on the root causes of such discontentment and disenchantment. Indeed, where such reflections are necessary lest they will surely wither and waste away, leaving only their burial in their resident cultures that then would have radically moved on to the novel innovations of new and better things..? (25)

4. Did the Historical Paul Exist? But, If that Were Granted, Which One?

I don't believe it would be controversial to argue that scholarship, in general, sees a variety of contradictions both within and between, say, the *Pauline Letters* and *Acts*. A complexly constructed, perfectly consistent text, to my mind, is philosophically impossible to attain and maintain as obtained, e.g., given, for a start, that all texts are interpreted and the conventions for doing so must be fuzzy enough to allow both the adoption and adaptation of a set of possibly relevant readings that could be brought to bear on that text being placed under the intensity and depth of that more detailed type of focus. As well,

[25] The requisite degree of freedom, that we should note, was achieved on the backs of an enslaved population, and, where even most of the non-enslaved people had only various limited degrees of freedom.

we should also recognize three additional hermeneutical facts, namely, that authors themselves cannot be perfectly consistent and coherent in their intent behind the formation of a textual representation of their thoughts although such intent must be integrated enough in order to form that textual deposition itself; that there is always a certain misrepresentation at work in both the inscription and reading of a textual deposition; and, moreover, the process of interpretation is always rendered more difficult and relatively discordant between languages and across time (and that even with simple paraphrases or commentarial annotations our interpretations are redolent with both actual and potential misrepresentations, be they as inscribed and/or as interpreted). But, putting that aside, are we now in a position to discern if an historical Paul existed, and, if the so-called 'authentic letters', once effectively ascertained to be in an 'original-like state', could be attributed to his authorship? (26)

On one hand, we have, say, Dr. Nina Livesay arguing that the all *Pauline Letters* and *Acts* are forgeries, and, on the other hand, we have, say, Dr. Richard Carrier, representing somewhat of a more conventional position, arguing that at least six of those 'authentic letters' are, indeed, by this historical figure Paul. Now, taking a middle path in the form of a 'conditional neutrality', i.e., in our exercising a 'hypothetical approach operating through the maintenance of a continual series of working suspensions', we could explore the difficulties either side will need to confront in order to inform a more conclusive series of arguments that might distinctly head one way or the other. I.e., when that suspended approach is then allowed to be effectively de-suspended in the aspirational formation of a series of definitive decisions whose decisive asymmetries would allow that co-associated degree of determination to be issued. I.e., if that realized degree of decisiveness should be both arrived at and be validly discerned through the conjectural openness of a well-argued, well-informed, conformally oriented pattern of 'working research' duly engaged with the requisite degree of scholarly concern and care? (27)

Besides the obvious problems involved in this type of textual criticism, given textual redactions and distortions in dissemination across time, what are, in my opinion, some of the important historical considerations that need to be taken into account? Noting that the reconstructions of Marcion's '*New Testament*' entails a *Proto-Luke* much slimmer than a *Canonical Luke*, and, that the ten *Pauline Letters* collected by Marcion differ from their more *Canonical Redactions* in a similar manner, and if we were to assign *Acts of the Apostles* with a mid-second century date, we would then need to ask, say, if the remaining six authentic letters were, more or less, written by the same hand, have a mid-first century dating, and where their 'original sections of text' genuinely depict the authorship, directly or indirectly, of this historical figure 'Paul'?[26] (28)

Just as the 'hand' of *Canonical Luke* appears to be the same 'hand' in the writing of a *Canonical Acts* there is also a strong degree of consensus that at least six of the so-called 'authentic letters'[27] were written by the same 'hand' (that equally separates them

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[26] There are, I believe, internal allusions to their co-authorship, or at least being written down by someone other than Paul?

[27] *Romans*, I & II *Corinthians*, *Galatians*, *Philippians*, I *Thessalonians* (minus *Philemon* which can be viewed by some as an exercise in rhetoric?).

from the rest of the *Pauline Corpus*). So, the remaining questions to consider would then be, first, are they mid-first century texts, and, second, can they be ascribed to this historical figure Paul? (29)

Dr Richard Carrier[28] has pointed out that, as 90% of Early Christian writings are forgeries, or pseudoepigrapha, then it would be reasonable to question if the entire *Pauline Corpus* were forged, given a considerable portion of it is obviously forged,[29] and not just the later, so-called 'non-authentic letters'? However, whatever position is finally adopted, we still need to distinguish 'to what extent a Pauline narration apparently matches or does not match the possibilities of an historical, mid-first century Paul, and v.v?' However, given a profound paucity of relevant first century textual materials, we can only fall back on noting different strategies behind various varieties of consensus, and, if we ourselves concur, fully or in part, with that segment of consensus that we find ourselves to be in a more receptive agreement. Personally, given a later date in the second century for the parallel gestation of a plethora of gospels and letters, but, accepting merely a 'transmission' of a *Proto-Pauline Corpus* by Marcion, my opinion would be to place those 'authentic texts', written by one author, around the end of the first century by someone who was both well-educated and conversant with the political dynamics of a very early church. That, that granted, if only hypothetically, it would follow that the Paul portrayed in these Epistles need not substantially coincide with an actual historical Paul about whom we would know nothing more other than the apparent personalized statements as preserved in this *Pauline Corpus*.[30] However, to be argued as being somewhat in favour of this historical link, is the observation that when this letter genre attaches a famous name it usually finds a better chance of being disseminated to an audience already aware of such a well-known personage. Still, the use of a famous name does not guarantee the actual authorship of the 'author' cited. Witness the fact that, in the Greco-Roman world, some letters issued in the name of Plato are now viewed as spurious. (30)

5. Sources: In part generated with Google AI

What scholars and books deserve to be read for a redating of *Gospels*, *Acts*, and 'original' *Pauline Epistles* to second century of the Common Era?

The *Gospels* & Marcionite Priority

Marcion and the Dating of the Synoptic Gospels (2014) by Markus Vinzent: Vinzent argues that all four canonical Gospels were written in the first half of the second century as direct literary responses to Marcion's text. He highlights the absolute lack of explicit gospel citations in any external Christian literature before the mid-second century.
The Oldest Gospel and the Formation of the New Testament (2015/2018) by Matthias Klinghardt: Klinghardt provides a meticulous textual reconstruction of Marcion's gospel,

[28] Refer to the following podcast where Dr Richard Carrier discusses in some detail these types of issues. Link: https://youtu.be/Wm7XmDHw7g?si=PbuOgRyyDw84NPcK
[29] The position adopted by Dr Nina Livesay.
[30] An opinion as held by Jacob Berman, e.g.

asserting it is not a butchered edit of Luke, but rather the original proto-gospel. In this model, the canonical Synoptic Gospels must be pushed well into the mid-second century.
The First New Testament: *Marcion's Scriptural Canon* (2013) by Jason BeDuhn: BeDuhn provides a vital textual baseline by reconstructing the earliest known Christian canon (mid-second century), demonstrating how the text of the Pauline letters and a proto-Luke circulated during this era.

The Redating of *Luke-Acts*

Dating Acts: *Between the Evangelists and the Apologists* (2006) by Richard I. Pervo: Pervo provides the most celebrated contemporary argument for a late date for Acts (c. 115 CE). He bases this on the author's apparent reliance on the late-first-century works of Jewish historian Josephus and the book's alignment with early second-century themes.
Marcion and Luke-Acts: *A Defining Struggle* (2006) by Joseph B. Tyson: Tyson suggests that the final canonical version of *Luke-Acts* was produced in the early to mid-second century as an emergency counter-measure against the massive popularity of Marcionism.

The Pauline Epistles & Canonical Anthologies

From Paul to Saul: Two Collections of Pauline Letters in the 2nd Century (2025) by Markus Vinzent et al.: This volume claims that the undisputed letters of Paul did not emerge as we know them until two major waves of second-century redaction. The authors argue that figures associated with Polycarp and Irenaeus heavily expanded and harmonized an earlier 10-letter collection.
The Falsified Paul: *Early Christianity in the Twilight* (2003) by Hermann Detering: Representing the legacy of the Dutch Radical School, Detering argues that even the 'authentic' *Pauline Epistles* (like Galatians and Romans) are actually second-century products born out of early Gnostic and anti-Gnostic controversies.
The First Edition of the New Testament (2000) by David Trobisch: Trobisch analyses the physical manuscript evidence to argue that the New Testament was not a slow, organic accumulation, but a deliberately published anthology produced in the mid-second century by a specific editorial team. (26)

Authors with Podcasts, Books, and Bibliographies Writing on this Topic, etc:

Dr. M. David Litwa, Dr. Markus Vinzent, Dr. Richard Carrier, Derek Lambert (Mythvision Podcasts), Jacob Berman (Historic Valley Podcasts), Robert M. Price, Dr. Nina E. Livesay, Dr. Bart D. Ehrman, Dr. C. J. Cornthwaite… (27)