

# **Simon of Gitta and Paul of Tarsus: True Rivals**

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## **Introduction**

The Christian tradition, beginning in Acts 8.9-24, positions Simon Magus as the arch-rival of Peter. The evidence for this is plain in the Acts of Peter: “the brethren entreated Peter to join battle with Simon.”<sup>1</sup> The present paper positions Simon as having Paul as his most significant rival. Though there is nearly no evidence or account of Paul and Simon having met, nor of having addressed one another, it is possible to understand both figures better by seeing how they came from similar locations, faced similar problems, suffered similar insults, undertook similar strategies, sought to become distributors of the Holy Spirit, worked wonders, proposed strange doctrines, and contested the authority of those who knew Jesus in Galilee. While Christian narrative portrays Simon and Peter as rivals, a more historical reading strategy reveals Simon and Paul as rivals in contention for the same status, power, and privilege in the fledgling movements devoted to Christ.

Methodologically, the challenge of making an argument concerning both Simon of Gitta and Paul of Tarsus is the asymmetrical evidentiary base. In Paul’s case we have letters from his pen, so to speak. We have nothing comparable for Simon. After the letters, we have for Paul narrative accounts and pseudepigraphical compositions. With Simon, we also have a raft of later narratives, though

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<sup>1</sup> Acts Pet. II.4.7.

not—to my knowledge—extant pseudepigraphical compositions in his name.<sup>2</sup> The procedure I propose to address this asymmetry of evidence attempts to start with a like-with-like comparison, namely the Paul of Acts with the Simon of Acts. This is a comparison of thoroughly mediated and transformed figures. After delineating the structural and literary relation of Paul and Simon in Acts, I turn to the letters of Paul to summarise the figure that precedes Acts' reception and transformation. By understanding how Acts transforms Paul, one may propose a hypothesis concerning how Acts transforms Simon. There is no way to test this hypothesis directly; it simply stands to establish a possibility in a direct and transparent manner. Certain vulnerable assumptions attend to such an enterprise: that Simon is not simply a Lukan creation, that the writer of Acts had equally, or merely sufficiently, rich information about a “primary” Simon, and—perhaps less vulnerably—that “Luke” was no less radical in the rewriting of his villain, Simon, than he was of his hero, Paul. This bears emphasis: whatever measure of “positive” (from a Lukan point of view) transformation of Paul the author of Acts undertakes is likely to be at least matched by a negative transformation of the villain, namely Simon.

After sketching the probable transformation undertaken by the author of Acts, it becomes possible to turn to the Petrine literature of the third and fourth centuries and to understand how both Paul and Simon were transformed in parallel or complimentary ways.

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<sup>2</sup> The treatise referred to by Hippolytus, *Megale Apophasis* does not survive except in hostile references and is unconvincingly attributed to Simon (*Haer.* VI.9-18). Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, trans. M. David Litwa, vol. 40 of *Writings from the Greco-Roman World ; Number 40* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2016). Stephen Charles Haar, *Simon Magus: The First Gnostic?*, Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft Bd. 119 (Berlin ; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 97–99. details scholars who believe that Hippolytus accurately represents a genuine work of Simon.

## Formed Simon and Formed Paul

The first objects of responsible comparison are characters in the narrative of Acts: Simon of Samaria (not yet of Gitta)<sup>3</sup> and Paul of Tarsus. Both of these are *characters* in the narrative of Acts, created, delineated, and formed by the author of Acts. As such they are properly comparable. Both are baptised, both attempt to join the circle of Jesus accredited followers and emissaries, both attempt to become distributors of the Holy Spirit, both are accused of the practice of magic. They differ primarily—and probably programmatically—in their relation to Peter.

Ferdinand Christian Baur famously and brilliantly understood the magnification of Paul to become an equal of Peter to be one of the largest motivating programs of the book of Acts.<sup>4</sup> While several aspects of Baur's larger framework, as well as the effect of that framework on specific details of interpretation, have aged poorly, his insights on the purpose and effect of the portrayal of Paul in the book of Acts remains a rich resource. To be specific about problems in Baur's work, his overly-robust concept of a fully-formed Christianity, his naturalisation of a supersessionist reading of the role of

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<sup>3</sup> After Acts locates Simon in Samaria, Justin specifies Simon as from the Samaritan village Gitta (*1 Apol.* 26). This tradition also appears in Clementine *Homilies* 2.22.2, Hippolytus *Haer.* 6.2, Epiphanius *Pan.* I.21.1.2. See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 110. For wider overviews on Simon Magus, see Wayne A. Meeks, "Simon Magus in Recent Research," *Religious Studies Review* 3.3 (1977): 137–42; Morton Smith, "The Account of Simon Magus in Acts 8," in *Studies in the Cult of Yahweh* (Brill, 1996), 140–51; Alberto Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval, and Early Modern Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); Ayse Tuzlak, "The Magician and the Heretic: The Case of Simon Magus," in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 416–26; Alberto Ferreiro, *Receptions of Simon Magus as an Archtype of the Heretic*, 1st ed. (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, trans. Eduard Zeller, Second Edition., vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1876).

Judaism, and the Hegelian superstructure of his later thought are noteworthy and play no part in the reconstruction I attempt.<sup>5</sup> In Baur's words:

The idea that runs through the whole is that of a parallel between the two Apostles Peter and Paul, and pervades each of the two great sections into which the work is divided (chapters i. to xiii., and xiii. to end). The unity of the work consists in this idea: its chief tendency is to represent the differences between Peter and Paul as unessential and trifling. To this end Paul is made in the second part to appear as much as possible like Peter, and Peter in the first part as much as possible like Paul ... this had been done in the interests of Paul.<sup>6</sup>

Thus Peter is also transformed, made into the initial Apostle to the Gentiles (converting Cornelius in Acts 10.1-44).<sup>7</sup> The mutuality of transformation of the two preeminent Apostles is one of Baur's key insights.

### ■ Formed Simon

While the character of Paul occupies sixteen chapters of Acts, Simon appears only in Acts 8.9-25. He is a minor character, but the story of Simon is positioned between the nadir of Paul's persecution of the Church<sup>8</sup> and the turning point of Paul's story, his conversion on the road to Damascus.<sup>9</sup> Simon receives the preaching of Philip, believes, and is baptised. The author of Acts precedes the narrative of these events with a characterization of Simon as a self-promoting practitioner

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<sup>5</sup> Some of these qualities in Baur's work are intensified and rendered programmatic by means of Baur's appropriation of a Hegelian historical scheme, but they are also present in his works before his acquaintance with Hegel. For supersessionist, see 1876:3; for the "idea" and "principle" of "Christianity" as expressed in the historical Jesus, see also 1876:3. Enumerating further instances would exceed the bounds of a paper, much less those of a footnote.

<sup>6</sup> Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:6. As Baur notes, his first expression of this understanding of Acts was in 1838. See Haar, *Simon Magus*, 12–15. on scholarly reaction to Baur.

<sup>7</sup> Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:84.

<sup>8</sup> Acts 8.1-3.

<sup>9</sup> Acts 9.1-19. The direction of Paul's travel and the characterization of the event as conversion are chosen only in relation to the narrative in Acts without any claim to being accurate for the historical Paul.

of wonders (μαγεύων),<sup>10</sup> but the author of Acts does not suggest that Simon's belief was insincere, nor that there was anything inauthentic about the baptism of Simon.<sup>11</sup> Simon followed the "normal" route of receiving preaching, being persuaded and expressing this persuasion by undergoing a ritual immersion. Oddly,<sup>12</sup> baptism does not in this section of Acts imply a full-fledged participation in the community devoted to Jesus as Christ. Acts asserts that Philip's baptism did not confer the Holy Spirit on those who believed and undertook ritual immersion. The distribution of the Holy Spirit to those believers required the prayer and ritual touch of Peter and/or John.<sup>13</sup> This may be an early sign of hierarchy among the twelve; some could deliver the whole package, others had less power and could offer a preliminary initiation to prospects, but did not have authority to complete their initiation into the movement. In the narrative of Acts, Simon attended to this act of distribution and sought to enter the distribution network at the highest level. He proposed to offer money to the Apostles (presumably to the distributing Apostles Peter and John) to facilitate joining the distribution network.<sup>14</sup> Peter condemns Simon's endeavour as well as his intention,<sup>15</sup> instructing him to repent and pray for forgiveness. In a gesture that suggests the sincerity of Simon's repentance, he asks for Peter's prayers to the Lord implying that Peter has threatened him (perhaps along the lines of Peter's interactions with

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 8.9, cf. Acts 8.11.

<sup>11</sup> In the words of David L. Eastman, "Simon the Composite Sorcerer," *New Testament Studies* 68.4 (2022): 412., "this is the story of a marginal new convert who makes a terrible mistake; but when he is made aware of it, he repents and begs for forgiveness.

<sup>12</sup> Or not? Acts's understanding of baptism in relation to a proper understanding of loyalty to Jesus as Christ separates the act from the understanding. Compare the characterization of Apollos as knowing "only the baptism of John" (Acts 18.25).

<sup>13</sup> Acts 8.14-17.

<sup>14</sup>J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Simon Magus (Acts 8: 9-24)," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73.1 (1982): 54. notes the possibility that Simon may have consulted Philip on whether to offer money to become a distributor.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 8.23 "I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity."

Ananias and Sapphira, though the text of Acts 8 does not actually present any direct threat from Peter). The author of Acts does not in any way suggest that Simon's implied repentance is insincere.

Though the narrative of Acts does present Simon as repenting with presumed sincerity, it is also essential to note that Simon has entered conflict with Peter and been subordinated to Peter in that conflict. Simon has been working wonders in Samaria<sup>16</sup> and Peter has been working wonders in Judea.<sup>17</sup> In a contest of two wonder-workers, Simon has been bested by the heroic Apostle.

### ■ Formed Paul

In the narrative of Acts, Paul too is the recipient of baptism,<sup>18</sup> presumably in Damascus by Ananias who is called a "disciple."<sup>19</sup> Acts 22.16 reiterates the implication that Ananias oversaw and presumably undertook Paul's baptism. Neither Acts 9 nor Acts 22 suggests that the distribution of the Holy Spirit to Paul was separated from his baptism by the mediation of one of the twelve (as in the case of Simon in Acts 8). And yet no reason is given why the baptism of Ananias, a subsequent disciple, should be a more complete package than that of Philip.<sup>20</sup> On the basis of his baptism by Ananias, Paul preaches aggressively in Damascus for a very short while, and then heads straight to Jerusalem to confer with the leaders of the movement.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Acts 8.9, 11.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 3.7-11, 5.1-12.

<sup>18</sup> Acts 9.17.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 9.10.

<sup>20</sup> Richard I. Pervo, *Acts*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 205. suggests that the Philip of Acts 8 is the Philip of Acts 6.5-6 rather than the Philip of the twelve apostles of Lk 6.14. This does not explain any inferiority to Ananias.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 9.19-20 "For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.'" and Acts 9.23-25 "When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill

Paul seeks exactly what Simon sought: to join the inner circle of the movement at the highest level and to become a distributor of the Holy Spirit. Peter is the model distributor. While in Acts 8, Peter and John follow Philip's baptism and distribute the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands, in Acts 10.44 Peter distributes the holy spirit simply by preaching. It is only after receiving the Spirit through Peter's preaching that Gentiles such as those in Caesarea—preeminently the elite Centurion Cornelius, but also the Gentile masses—receive the Holy Spirit. At Caesarea, baptism *follows* reception of the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> For the author of Acts, the status of individuals—i.e. the primacy of Peter—apparently trumps any rigid sequence of initiation rituals.

The interaction that Paul has with disciples of Jesus at Ephesus in Acts 19.1-7 repeats, with meaningful variation, the disjunction between baptism and the infusion of the Holy Spirit that characterises the Simon narrative in Acts 8. The so-called “disciples” have known only John's baptism. After receiving Paul's diagnosis of their insufficient baptism, these disciples become anabaptists, so to speak, being baptised again (Acts 19.5). In a separate act from this re-baptism, Paul, by laying on hands, infuses them with the holy spirit. There are twelve of these disciples—historically coincidental at best, typologically a no-brainer.<sup>23</sup> Paul—not only in the self-conception of his letters, but even as a character in Acts—has achieved what Simon sought: he has become a distributor of the Holy Spirit.

Though Paul is not characterised by the author of Acts with the same derogatory terms associated with magic that Simon is (*μαγεία, μαγεύω, μάγος*), he is also evidently a wonder-worker.

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him ... but his disciples took him by night and let him down over the wall, lowering him in a basket.” Acts 9.26 “And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples.”

<sup>22</sup> Acts 10.47-48.

<sup>23</sup> Acts 19.7.

Exorcism, healing, and the creation of magical objects such as the textiles that distributed Paul's power at distance are all part of the portrait of Acts.<sup>24</sup> Though Acts is not keen to give credence to the perspective of critics of its heroes, the accusation against Paul and Barnabas is apparently an accusation of magic.<sup>25</sup> The aphorism that my wonders are miracles and your wonders are magic holds for Acts, so the narrative implication remains that the exorcism credited to Paul<sup>26</sup> would have been construed as *μαγεία* by his accusers. The historicity of this episode is of no interest here; the salient insight is that even the author of Acts can draw as plausible an accusation of illegitimate powers levelled by the opponents of the heroes of his narrative. Paul and Simon are both—from some points of view—practitioners of magic.

But where Simon is a defeated, or at least subordinated, sorcerer in the narrative of Acts, Paul is both a triumphant sorcerer (or miracle-working depending on the position of whoever articulates the character's actions), and also one who defeats a sorcerer. F.C. Baur emphasises the conflict between Paul and Elymas in Acts 13.6-11 as a programmatic fabrication by the author of Acts in order to raise Paul to the status of an equal to Peter who had bested Simon earlier in the narrative.<sup>27</sup> Here Simon and Paul are portrayed in complementary rather than co-ordinated ways, but this is a function of their status as genuine rivals in combination with the author of Acts' endeavour to adjudicate that rivalry and position Paul as the victor who attains equality with Peter. Baur suggests that "the idea that runs

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<sup>24</sup> E.g. Acts 14.8-10, Acts 19.11-17.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 16.20-21. Craig de Vos, "Finding a Charge That Fits: The Accusation Against Paul and Silas At Philippi (Acts 16.19-21)," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 74 (1999): 56ff.

<sup>26</sup> Acts 16.18.

<sup>27</sup> Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:92-93. More recently, Eastman, "Simon the Composite Sorcerer." argues that Elymas is a key ingredient in the development of Simon after Acts. Eastman makes no reference to Baur.



the whole [of Acts] is that of the parallel between the two Apostles Peter and Paul, and pervades each of the two great sections into which the work is divided.”<sup>28</sup> Without subscribing to Baur’s supersessionist and Hegelian framework, one can affirm his insight into the *tendenz* of Acts.

Three further elements of the character Paul as formed by the author of Acts are salient, but do not have strong analogues in the portrayal of Simon in Acts 8: (1) ministry to Gentiles, (2) opposition to Paul, and (3) conversation partners for Paul. Acts portrays Peter as the primordial minister to the Gentiles. Though the Lord announces Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles to Ananias,<sup>29</sup> it is a combined ministry to both Jews and Gentiles and it does not actually get started until Acts 13. In Damascus, according to Acts, Paul preaches in synagogues and angers Jews.<sup>30</sup> Only later does Paul programmatically go to Gentiles.<sup>31</sup> In the meantime, Peter has preached to Cornelius the Roman centurion as well as to a multitude of the uncircumcised. The spirit is distributed to the nations and the Gentile multitude are baptised.<sup>32</sup> Peter is, in the narrative of Acts, the first Apostle to the Gentiles. Before Paul undertakes any focussed mission to Gentiles, he follows the Petrine example of defeating a sorcerer and dialoguing with the Roman elite, in this case with the proconsul Sergius Paulus at Salamis on Cyprus. Paul defeats the sorcerer and the proconsul “believes.”<sup>33</sup> Compare also the subsequent claim of Peter “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.”<sup>34</sup> Peter is repeatedly the

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<sup>28</sup> Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:6.

<sup>29</sup> Acts 9.13.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 9.20-23.

<sup>31</sup> Acts 13.46.

<sup>32</sup> Acts 10.1-48.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 13.5-12.

<sup>34</sup> Acts 15.7.

primordial Apostle to the Gentiles in Acts. Paul on the other hand is, in Acts, a secondary minister to the Gentiles who *rises* to become the equal of Peter.<sup>35</sup>

Acts offers a vivid narrative of the struggle of the early assemblies with their surroundings, but a highly muted narrative of struggle *within* the early assemblies. The conflict of Hebrews and Hellenists in Acts 6 needs to be acknowledged,<sup>36</sup> but more common are the claims made along the lines of the communal harmony of “all believers.”<sup>37</sup> The efficient bureaucracy of Acts 16.4, where a central administration of “apostles and elders” in Jerusalem distributes decisions to scattered assemblies, is the redactional ideal Acts, rather than a description of historical occurrence. In contrast to such an efficient and unified superstructure of assemblies, Acts—with the exceptions just acknowledged—portrays contention as overwhelmingly with exterior adversaries. Often, Jews are cast in this role. While the instances are legion, Paul’s time at Corinth might be most revealing since a comparison with his own correspondence is available. According to Acts, it was there that Paul abandoned a program of preaching to both Jews and Gentiles and focussed exclusively on Gentiles.<sup>38</sup> The Jews of Acheia (with a few elite exceptions, see below) oppose Paul. That is the account Acts offers of Paul’s struggles at Corinth. Acts abounds with generalisations about οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι opposing Paul’s enterprise.<sup>39</sup> A secondary to Paul is from Gentiles who understand their practices of cult,

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<sup>35</sup> Acts 11.19 may be programmatic for the narrative Acts, ensuring that though Peter was first to the Gentiles, nothing intervened between his address to Gentiles and that of Paul.

<sup>36</sup> One might also note the circumcision party of Acts 11.2.

<sup>37</sup> Acts 2.22-47.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 18.6 “And when they [Jews] opposed and reviled him, he shook out his garments and said to them, ‘Your blood be upon your heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” A less exclusive focus on Gentiles begins in Acts 13.46.

<sup>39</sup> Acts 13.50, 14.2, 14.19, 15.1, 17.5, 18.12, 21.27, 23.12, 24.9.

devotion, and relationships with gods and supernatural beings to be threatened by Paul's proclamation of and calls for exclusive devotion to Jesus as the Christ of the God of Israel. Ephesian silversmiths,<sup>40</sup> angry soldiers and sailors, mixed mobs of Jews and Gentiles also afflict the Apostle.

The Paul of Acts—after a brief rocky start in his harassment of assemblies devoted to Jesus in the period before he himself undertook such devotion<sup>41</sup>—lives and works at the centre of the network, conversing harmoniously with its leaders, working cooperatively with those whose credentials included personal relations to the earthly Jesus. Such harmony is not only the subject of narrative, but evident also in the message attributed to Paul by the author of Acts. After the first summary—Acts 9.20 indicates that, shortly after his revelatory experience, Paul “in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, ‘He is the Son of God’”—Paul does not make an extended speech in the Acts narrative until Acts 13.16-41. Speaking to Jews and godfearers, Paul offers an amalgam of narrative and prophecy from Israelite history and scripture, application of those resources to the person of Jesus. His message is pretty much indistinguishable from the previous speeches in Jerusalem by Peter<sup>42</sup> and Stephen.<sup>43</sup> Paul is “on message,” so to speak, deploying prophecy and indicting Jews.

It is also worth noting who Paul's significant interactions are with in the narrative of Acts, especially as it progresses towards its close. Even before his devotion to Jesus began, Acts positions Paul as being directly deputised by the Jerusalem high priest in his harassment of the assemblies

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<sup>40</sup> Acts 19.24-41.

<sup>41</sup> 1 Co 15.9, Php 3.6, Acts 8.1,3, 9.1-2, 22.4, 26.9-11.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 2.14-39.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 7.2-53.

devoted to Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Paul's initial long speech in Acts only arises in the narrative after he has persuaded to belief the Proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus.<sup>45</sup> Paul's troubles at Corinth lead to a tribunal before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, in which Gallio turns on Paul's Jewish accusers.<sup>46</sup> Having been dragged out of the Temple by a mob and taken by the tribune of the Jerusalem garrison, Paul talks the tribune into letting him make a speech on the steps of the barracks. It is in this improbable speech that Paul makes his famous claim to have been educated from a young age in Jerusalem at the feet of the famous Rabbi Gamaliel. He also reiterates his previous authority given directly in writing by the high priest and the entire council.<sup>47</sup>

Eventually appearing before the governor of Judea, Felix, Paul—having been escorted to Caesarea by a party of two-hundred soldiers and seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen!—has a trial that includes the participation of the high priest Ananias and various Jewish elders. Felix, “having a rather accurate knowledge of the Way,” moves beyond the confines of the trial and seeks Paul as a personal instructor for himself and his wife.<sup>48</sup> Felix doesn't solve Paul's dilemma, but his successor Porcius Festus passes Paul onto a direct audience with the Emperor, though direct dialogue with the client king Agrippa reveals that the Apostle should have been released long ago.<sup>49</sup> The pattern here is in no way subtle: the Paul of Acts moves in the highest circles of elite power, besting the best of the best

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<sup>44</sup> Acts 9.1-2.

<sup>45</sup> Acts 13.5-16.

<sup>46</sup> Acts 18.12-17.

<sup>47</sup> Acts 21.37-22.5.

<sup>48</sup> Acts 24.1-25.

<sup>49</sup> Acts 26.32.

with his insightful speeches, and his uncanny rhetorical prowess. His bodily presence is not weak and his speech is of incalculable account.

To sum up the Paul of Acts: while Paul has a visionary experience, he enters the community through the normal means of baptism. He enters in the inner circle of the movement as a distributor of sacred *pneuma* on the basis of his vision, his acceptable preaching, his defeat of a sorcerer, and his conversion of an elite Gentile. He follows Peter's example of preaching to Gentiles and to Jews—the mission field is not divided. Paul largely faces opposition from Jews outside the movement and to a lesser extent Gentiles who do not embrace his message. He functions as a smooth cog in the well-oiled machine of a primordial orthodox harmony. He moves, as he always has, in the highest circles of Jewish and Gentile society, sought after as a teacher, though harassed by those whom his preaching and teaching rankle. A historically critical reader might demure.

## **Primary Paul**

The letters that are the most reliably attributed to Paul—Galatians, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians (in its composite survival), Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon—are what I am treating here as the “Primary Paul.” In the nineteenth century, F.C. Baur stated clearly: “For this history of the Apostolic Age the Pauline Epistles must in any case take precedence over all other New Testament writings as an authentic source.”<sup>50</sup> In the twentieth century, John Knox put that insight into starker language, stating that we must accept “even a clear hint in the letters as having more value

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<sup>50</sup> Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:4.

than the most explicit statement in Acts which contradicts it.”<sup>51</sup> In the twenty-first century, Albert J. Harrill describes many tales in Acts as “concocted,” and confidence in the reliability of Acts as “naive.”<sup>52</sup> The declarations of Baur, Knox, and Harrill are deployed to facilitate methodological responsibility in reconstructing Paul, but any understanding of Simon of Gitta is in equal need of caution about the witness of Acts.

While a full account of Paul as known through his authentic letters is a life’s work, a short account is necessary. Paul’s most extensive surviving account of his entry into the movement devoted to Jesus makes no mention of his baptism, nor of Paul receiving preaching that led him to be baptised. Instead, Paul proclaims that his gospel comes directly from revelation, that his status as an Apostle did not arise in a human hierarchy, but came directly from God.<sup>53</sup> Paul makes no mention of Ananias, nor of any similar figure. Paul acknowledges no patron, so to speak, within the movement. The mother of Rufus, alluded to ambiguously in Rom 16.13, just might be Paul’s foremother in the movement, but the location—whether Rome or Asia Minor—is difficult to reconcile with his own placement of his entry in the environs of Damascus.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Paul was apparently baptised, if one can trust the first person plurals in Rom 6.3 and 1 Co 12.13. He just doesn’t want to talk about it in any detail.

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<sup>51</sup> John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 63.

<sup>52</sup> J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in Their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 8. Richard Pervo observes succinctly: “Luke’s achievement as a historian lies more in his success at creating history than in recording it” (Pervo, *Acts*, 18.).

<sup>53</sup> Gal 1.1-13.

<sup>54</sup> See Jewett *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 968–69. on Rom 16.13 and the multiple ideas of the provenance of Rom 16.

Paul successfully becomes a practitioner of baptism and a distributor of the holy spirit. While it is possible to distinguish his preaching activities from his baptismal activities,<sup>55</sup> Paul's works do not provide a basis to distinguish the ritual of baptism from the distribution of the holy spirit. Writing to devotees in Corinth, Paul declares "For by one Spirit we were all baptised into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit."<sup>56</sup> Here he binds baptism as initiation into Spirit with the memorial meal as a regular infusion of Spirit. The eighth chapter of Romans is Paul's most extensive discussion of the spirit that dwells with persons devoted to Jesus. The Spirit dominates the devotee, the Spirit leads the devotee, the Spirit animates the devotee.<sup>57</sup> That which Paul distributes, namely the Spirit, is central in his vision of the life of devotees, to their ethical pathway, and to their salvation. Stanley Stowers emphasises the materiality of this distribution of *pneuma*. The *pneuma* of Christ, distributed through baptism and the ritual of the memorial meal creates kinship between Christ and the devotee.<sup>58</sup> The alternate path for the distribution of *pneuma* that Christ creates is the means by which Gentiles can enter into the family and thus the covenant of Abraham.<sup>59</sup> Both 2 Co 11.4 and Gal 3.2,5 make it clear that the distribution of the spirit was a matter of rivalry between Paul and those who were sceptical of his *bona fides*.

The conclusion of Romans positions Paul as a wonder-worker par-excellence:

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<sup>55</sup> Brigidda Bell, "The Cost of Baptism? The Case for Paul's Ritual Compensation," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42.4 (2020): 431–52. distinguishes helpfully between Paul's practices of preaching and baptism, but does not suggest that the practice of baptism was distinct from the distribution of the Holy spirit.

<sup>56</sup> 1 Co 12.13.

<sup>57</sup> Rom 8.1-10.

<sup>58</sup> 1 Co 12.12-13 may be clearest, but see also 1Th 4.8, Gal 4.6, 1 Co 2.12, 3.16, 6.19, 2 Co 1.22, 5.5

<sup>59</sup> See Stanley K. Stowers, "What Is Pauline 'Participation in Christ?'" in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities. Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders*, ed. Fabian E. Udoh (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 352–71. for helpful discussion on the distribution of material *pneuma*.

For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders [ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων], by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and as far round as Illyr'icum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.<sup>60</sup>

Paul's signs and wonders could certainly be called magic by anyone who was ill-disposed towards him.

A quick deployment of Jennifer Eyl's typology of Paul's wondrous and divinitory actions can help sketch an important dimension of his enterprise: (1) Paul channels and interprets both verbal and non-verbal signs from the divine;<sup>61</sup> (2) Paul interprets ancient sacred texts to analyse current conditions and predict future conditions;<sup>62</sup> (3) Paul heals human bodies and transforms regular material bodies into new material bodies;<sup>63</sup> (4) Paul performs unspecified wonders;<sup>64</sup> (5) Paul has visitations by god, is commanded by god, and possesses secret and mysterious knowledge from god.<sup>65</sup> Paul was a wonder-worker. His enemies might accuse him of magic and all five of these dimensions that Eyl outlines for Paul's enterprise eventually also become part of hostile Christian accounts of Simon.

Paul certainly implies that he faced conflict with individuals, including individuals representing organisations outside the movement of devotion to Jesus. His catalogue of hardships in 2 Co 11.23-28 includes the punishment of being beaten with rods, suggesting Roman magistrates,<sup>66</sup> lashes "at the hands of the Jews," suggesting synagogue authorities<sup>67</sup> that were likely to be outside the movement, as

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<sup>60</sup> Rom 15:18–19.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. non-verbal (2 Co 12.12), verbal signs such as tongues (1 Co 13.1, 14.6, 14.18), words from the Lord (1 Co 7.10, 14.37).

<sup>62</sup> E.g. Rom 1.17, 2.24, 3.4, 3.10 etc.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. 1 Co 15.51-53, See Jennifer Eyl, *Signs, Wonders, and Gifts: Divination in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 129–43.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. 2 Co 12.12.

<sup>65</sup> E.g. 2 Co 12.2-4, 1 Co 2.7-10.

<sup>66</sup> Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians*, vol. 32A of *Anchor Bible* (Garden City, N.Y: Doubleday, 1984).

<sup>67</sup> Furnish, *II Corinthians*, vol. 32A.



well as various environmental and social dangers, but even this catalogue includes danger from false brothers.<sup>68</sup> Shortly after, in the same letter, Paul indicates pursuit by the Roman governor resident at Damascus. There is no doubt of Paul's predilection to be in conflict with just about anyone who crossed his path, but the letters that survive are more frequently driven by conflict with other individuals or factions within the movement devoted to Jesus.

Paul was never in control of the narrative of his fraught position in the movement devoted to Jesus. When he wrote to the community he had cultivated in Thessalonica, he knew that news of his humiliation at Philippi had travelled a hundred miles. He did what any modern PR professional would advise and “got out in front of the story,” admitting that he was treated poorly, and laying claim to advantages and rights that he chose not to deploy.<sup>69</sup> In Galatia, Paul was followed by advocates of what he calls “another gospel” and whom he curses in the most bitter terms.<sup>70</sup> When he went, with apparent reluctance, to Jerusalem to meet with senior members of the movement, he claims that some members of the meeting were “false brothers” who were opposed to the freedom he held and offered Gentiles in Christ.<sup>71</sup> Soon after, he finds himself in dire conflict with Peter, the preeminent student of Jesus and leader of the movement. “I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned” (Gal 2.11). Paul appears to combine strong principles and weak filters. In the fissiparous context of early devotion to Jesus, Paul was a volatile catalyst of conflict. The Corinthian correspondence reveals this

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<sup>68</sup> 2 Co 11.26.

<sup>69</sup> 1Th 2.1-7.

<sup>70</sup> Gal 1-6-9.

<sup>71</sup> Gal 2.4.

in high relief, especially in his conflicts with “super-apostles.”<sup>72</sup> His brutal dig at the “dogs”<sup>73</sup> at Philippi and those “whose God is the belly”<sup>74</sup> suggests that he was deeply habituated to fighting tooth and nail to maintain his position in the movement. Conflict with outsiders pales in comparison.

Paul’s self-understanding, expressed perhaps most clearly in Galatians, is that from the moment of his revelatory call, he was fully oriented to an audience of Gentiles.<sup>75</sup> He also characterises the endeavour of Peter: “Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised.”<sup>76</sup> It may well be that Peter would describe his own remit as circumscribed to the circumcised, but Paul is willing to risk putting that in writing. The larger passage represents an obvious positional attempt to carve out for Paul the widest territory possible.<sup>77</sup> Even in 1 Corinthians, Paul does not rebuke those who say “I am of Cephas”<sup>78</sup> by claiming that Cephas should have no influence in Corinth. On the one hand, the claims of Gal 2.6-10 are probably more aspirational than descriptive; on the other hand, Paul never suggests that his enterprise with Gentiles is derivative rather than foundational. On the contrary, he insists that he is the primordial Apostle to the Gentiles. It is worth noting, however, one of the key conditions that Paul articulates for the position he attains in the movement: he must remember the poor.<sup>79</sup> As his letters show, this remembrance is not a mnemonic endeavour, but a financial one. Paul

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<sup>72</sup> 2 Co 11.5, 12.11.

<sup>73</sup> Php 3.2.

<sup>74</sup> Php 3.19

<sup>75</sup> Gal 2.7.

<sup>76</sup> Gal 2.7.

<sup>77</sup> Gal 2.6-10.

<sup>78</sup> 1 Co 1.12.

<sup>79</sup> Gal 2.10.

undertakes a monetary transaction as part of his entry into the distribution network of the Holy Spirit.

No one becomes a franchisee for free.

And Paul's message. This is a matter more suited to a scholarly career or two rather than a paragraph or two, but to sketch with the bluntest of strokes: (1) traditionally, Paul has been read as the founder of Christianity superseding Judaism, overseeing rejection and replacement; Lutheran and neo-Lutheran interpretations have buttressed such an understanding of Paul.<sup>80</sup> (2) The so-called "New Perspective" built on the work of E.P. Sanders and brought into a nearly systematic form by James G. Dunn replaced a criticism by Paul of "works-righteousness" with a criticism of ethnic pride.<sup>81</sup> (3) Lloyd Gaston's work, developed by John Gager, Stanley Stowers, Magnus Zetterholm and others, proposed what may be called a "radical New Perspective" that emphasised Paul's exclusive address to Gentiles, and his tight horizon of eschatological expectation to suggest that he undertook a program that could not last beyond the first century, did not simply imply the developments that followed, and which was inevitably distorted by the rise of an ongoing Christianity that saw itself in distinction to Judaism.<sup>82</sup> If one, as I do, takes this third option to be the most historically responsible reconstruction of Paul, then he was, by any measure, a creator of strange new doctrine in the first century.

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<sup>80</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>81</sup> James DG. Dunn, "Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3.10–14)," *NTS* 31.4 (1985): 530.

<sup>82</sup> Lloyd Gaston, *Paul and the Torah* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987); John G. Gager, *Reinventing Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); John W. Marshall, "Misunderstanding the New Paul: Marcion's Transformation of the *Sonderzeit* Paul," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 20.1 (2012): 1–29; John W. Marshall, "The Influence of 'The Introspective Conscience' on the New Paul(s)," in *Krister among the Jews and Gentiles: Essays in Appreciation of the Life and Work of Krister Stendahl*, ed. Paula Fredriksen and Jesper Svartvik, *Studies in Judaism and Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 2018), 122–45.

The primary Paul, the Paul of his own surviving letters, is a rogue, an innovator, someone battling in the corners to establish his place in a new movement, someone anxious to be his own man, having no debts, beholden to no patron, who does not flit among the elite, but who works out his place by striving to preach the message that he understands to have been laid upon him by revelation, no matter how so-called authorities—pillars—understand or misunderstand it. He works wonders, makes signs, interprets mysteries; he will put money where his mouth is, and Paul’s Christ is the “power of God”<sup>83</sup> and Paul deploys that power with his own presence.<sup>84</sup> If the phrase were not already applied to Simon of Gitta, one might Paul as a man that is the “power of God which is called Great.”<sup>85</sup>

## **Acts: Transforming Paul, Transforming Simon**

Having sketched the portrait of Simon that Acts produces, the portrait of Paul that Acts produces, and also the portrait of Paul that arises from his own letters, we are in a position to examine the transformations of Paul that Acts undertakes, and then to extrapolate concerning the transformations of Simon that are plausible for the activity of the author of the book of Acts.

### ■ Transforming Paul

Acts transforms Paul’s entry into the movement, placing him under the patronage of the very junior figure of Ananias. Acts maintains Paul as a distributor of the Holy Spirit through baptism.

Acts maintains the characterization of Paul as a wonder-worker. Acts transforms the primary conflicts

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<sup>83</sup> 1 Co 1.24.

<sup>84</sup> 1 Co 5.4.

<sup>85</sup> Acts 8.10.

that afflict Paul's enterprise from conflicts within the movement to conflicts with outsiders. Acts transforms the audience of Paul's most significant interactions from discourse with local communities devoted to Jesus to conversation with prominent officials in Roman administration. Acts transforms Paul's message from a consistent address to Gentiles to a repeated and fruitless address to Jews in a mixed audience and eventual repudiation of a potential Jewish audience. And Acts transforms Paul's message from a radical option for Gentiles in particular to a universal program that very few Jews accept. Acts makes a very new and different Paul.

What then of Simon? If we do not—though we may—assume he is a whole-cloth creation of the author of Acts, then we must understand transformation on the scale we have seen with our best known example: Paul. If we understand Simon as a complete creature of the author of Acts then we must evaluate every aspect of this creature in relation to the redactional interests of the author of Acts. Did the Simon transformed by Acts actually teach anything? If so, that has been effaced by the author of Acts. What were Simon's wonders? Again, we have no testimony to specifics, but we have a characterization: it was magic, that is to say it was not legitimate, nor respectable. It was beyond the pale, but it was probably amazing. At the same time as Simon is narrated in his glory, he is positioned in his ignominy.

While it must be admitted that the preservation of Paul's letters by the communities within the movement to whom he wrote conditions our view of his conversation partners, Paul's self described penchant for boasting does not lead him to boast of moving in the circles of Roman elites. When he writes to Rome he makes no mention of dialogue with elite Romans. When he writes to Corinth, Paul

notes that among his audience “not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.”<sup>86</sup> Perhaps this implies a small portion of relative elites within the assembly at Corinth, but Paul does not drop names and it is not clear whether *ἐὐγενεῖς* indicates anything more than prominence within a civic, as opposed to Imperial, context. Paul’s letters have no Felix, no Gallio, no Porcius Festus, no Berenice, no Agrippa, no Sergius Paulus, no Gamaliel, no Ananias or any other high Priest of the Jerusalem temple. The letters of the unashamedly boastful Paul make no such boasts.

And what of the collection that is witnessed in Paul’s correspondence with the assemblies of Galatia and prominent in the extensive correspondence with Corinth, also mentioned in Romans?<sup>87</sup> Acts 24.17, “Now after some years I came to bring to my nation alms and offerings,” is sometimes thought to be an allusion in Acts to the monetary transaction that Paul commits to in Gal 2.10. There are difficulties with such a simple equation. It is unclear how alms and offerings that the narrative of Acts sets in the context of the temple would constitute “remembering the poor” as described in Galatians. The famine prophesied by Agabus<sup>88</sup> also occasions a more plausible allusion to a collection organised by Barnabas and Saul (in that order and under those names).<sup>89</sup> Paul’s collection endeavour is a complex matter that seems to combine the trans-local financial aspects of Greco-Roman organisations, engagement with Jewish expectations concerning the homage of Gentiles to the God of Israel and Paul’s credibility within an organisational environment. Acts clearly repackages this complex

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<sup>86</sup> 1 Co 1.26.

<sup>87</sup> 1 Co 16.1-4, 2 Cor 8.1-9.15, Php Rom 15.14-32

<sup>88</sup> Acts 11.28.

<sup>89</sup> Acts 11.29-30.

enterprise as a simple act of piety in the temple. What was, at least partially, a monetary transaction that enabled Paul to enter the distribution network loses its palm-greasing aspect and gains the legitimacy of exemplary piety. The money is laundered.

Acts' transformation of Paul is massive, smoothing over his evidently prickly relationships to leaders, rounding off the rough edges of his innovative doctrine, making him a Roman citizen,<sup>90</sup> elevating his social dance-card from the low-level engagement with the particularities of non-elite assemblies to genteel intercourse with the Gentile elite, legitimating his wonders as God-given and God-driven rather than being the tainted works of a Magus, and cleansing the conditions of his entry into the distribution network of the Holy Spirit from any taint of filthy lucre.

### Transforming Simon

Here we move into hypothetical territory, but we are informed by the operation of the author of Acts on the primary Paul. Such reasoning about hypothetical transformation is not unknown in the study of early Christianity. Scholars of Q have long used Matthew and Luke's transformations of Mark as a guide to how those authors might have transformed the material they received from the *logionquelle*.<sup>91</sup> Is it not reasonable to assume that what was done to any Simon knowledge by the author of Acts could operate with the same amplitude that characterised that author's transformation of Paul?

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<sup>90</sup> Harrill emphasises the significance of this transformation into the civic one percent (*Paul the Apostle*, 97–101.)

<sup>91</sup> John Kloppenborg, *Excavating Q: The History and Setting of the Sayings Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 21–28.

Doctrine: Acts does not deal with Simon's thought/preaching/doctrine, but the level of transformation that Acts enacts upon Paul removes any confidence that any doctrine of Simon would be accurately represented by the author of Acts. The absence of any doctrine of Simon is, given the persuasion of Simon by Philip's preaching portrayed by the author of Acts, is simply implausible.

Wonders: counter-intuitive acts of power, deployments of pneumatic authority, all of these are notoriously susceptible to positional and polemical distortion. Except for the positionality of description undertaken by the author of Acts, this dimension of Simon is likely to be continuous with any historical actor lying behind the literary character. Money for position: this is a notable concern for the author of Luke and Acts. The author is clearly enamoured with the elite of Greco-Roman society and places on the lips of Jesus the inscrutable advice to make friends by means of unrighteous mammon.<sup>92</sup> The book Acts offers an early description of a primitive communism among devotees, though it notes the failures in the system with the malfeasance and perjury of Ananias and Sapphira. Peter plays the enforcer, killing the offenders with his curse. The episode in which Simon is rebuked by Peter is therefore within the *tendenz* of Acts, positioning Peter as the enforcer of financial propriety.

Finally, power: the provocative accolade that Simon's Samaritan audience offers, "this man is that power of God which is called Great" (Acts 8.10), transfers to Simon an audacious claim that echoes Paul's repeated self-understanding. Paul declares that his Gospel is the "power of God."<sup>93</sup> that Christ lives him,<sup>94</sup> that Christ is "the power of God,"<sup>95</sup> that the presence of Paul's spirit brings "the

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<sup>92</sup> Lk 16.9.

<sup>93</sup> Rom 1.16.

<sup>94</sup> Gal 2.20.

<sup>95</sup> 1 Co 1.24.



power of our Lord Jesus,” and that he himself wields “the power of God” in this dealings with the assembly at Corinth.<sup>96</sup> Such gutsy boasts in the language of power are absent from Paul’s lips in Acts, but they are the reputation Simon carries into his doomed negotiations to enter the pneumatic distribution enterprise of the Apostles of Jesus.

If there was a historical Simon, we can see him only in a mirror dimly, not face to face. The author of Acts gives every evidence of transforming his materials in service of his program, elevating Paul to equality and compatibility with Peter, casting Simon as the instantiation of the vices that the author of Acts derides over and over: illegitimate power, and financial impropriety. F.C. Baur suggested that Simon was worked up by the author of Acts as the opposite of Paul, taking on the liabilities of the Paul that the author received and allowing the Paul of Acts to shed the encumbrances of the historical Paul, to have the prickly particularities of the freelance Apostle rounded off so that he could be transformed from a disruptor to a company man.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> 2 Co 6.7.

<sup>97</sup> Treating the travails of Paul and Silas at philippi, Baur puts the motive of the writer of Acts starkly: “Everything is here introduced with this ulterior motive, to enhance the effect of the chief scene, the glorification of the Apostle and his companion. And what is the foundation of all this? The apologetic parallel between the Apostle Peter and the Apostle Paul” *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:158.

With astonishing confidence, Morton Smith went much further and sketched Simon as an entrepreneurial disciple of John the baptist whom Luke subjected to a false baptism narrative to subordinate him to Jesus, suggesting that the disciples of John were in a similar manner attempting to demote Jesus by noting that he had been baptised by John (“Paul’s Arguments as Evidence of the Christianity from Which He Diverged,” *Harvard Theological Review* 79.3 (1986): 254–60.). Smith’s hypothesis depended heavily on trusting the claim in the Clementine Homilies II.23 that Simon was a disciple of John. Such trust in the Clementine aligns Smith with Baur. Given the way the author Acts subordinates John (Acts 1.5, 13.24-25) and uses John’s baptism to subordinate others (Acts 18.25, 19.3-4), an omission of Simon’s fealty to John would be inexplicable.

## Subsequent Elaborations of the Rivals

[Note to CSBS Seminar readers: Here is where the potential data spirals out of control and it coincides with burning the midnight oil to get something into your hands ~~with only a minimally~~ without maximally shameful tardiness. Things will, with apologies, become even more schematic and more oriented to primary sources.]

The narrative presence of Simon of Gitta and Paul of Tarsus grows substantially after Simon's brief appearance in Acts and Paul's twenty-some thousand word legacy. In addition to narratives of these figures, they live in tradition in accounts of their doctrines and in Paul's case extensive surviving forgeries in his name, though Simon and Simonians too are accused of creating false and/or pernicious texts.<sup>98</sup> These afterlives beyond Acts and the authentic surviving Pauline corpus lengthen Paul's lead in the race he ran with Simon for position in the network of assemblies devoted to Jesus.

### Elaborated Paul

The elaboration of Paul, most prominently in pseudepigraphy and in narrative, is well known and may be sketched under a small number of headings. Paul becomes less eschatological, more ecclesiastical, more Petrine, more speculative, and, in a limited number of cases, more ornery. These transformations bear a variety of reactions to the figure of Simon. Regarding eschatology, everyone grows weary of intense expectation of the imminent return of Jesus. The writer of 2 Thessalonians transforms Paul's vision of a thief in the night and sudden destruction into a timetable of conclusion

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<sup>98</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* III.16: Simon and his followers compile "poisonous books under the name of Christ and of his disciples, and do carry them about in order to deceive you who love Christ, and us his servants."

with clear signs and no surprises. The Acts of Paul and Thecla transforms eschatology into personal asceticism,<sup>99</sup> Marcion transforms it into a bifurcated theology of the Jewish creator and the lofty unknown God,<sup>100</sup> Valentinus transforms it into a narrative of the individual soul's reunion with its ultimate home.<sup>101</sup> Simon is not necessary to facilitate this transformation of a fundamental aspect of Paul.

Becoming more ecclesiastical may begin in the theology of a trans-local ecclesia that surfaces in Colossians and Ephesians.<sup>102</sup> In the deutero-Paulines, the character of Paul offers scant consciousness of his own precarity, but assumes his position to declare what's what for the ostensible audience. The Pastoral Epistles take this disposition further and move Paul's discourse deeper into the micromanagement of what is evidently a set of second-century Christian assemblies. Admittedly, the Pastorals portray resistance to Paul, but his confident dismissal of rivals<sup>103</sup> evinces nothing of the desperation of 2 Corinthians or Galatians. The character "Paul" in the Pastoral Epistles is less concerned with shoring up his own unstable position in a fissile movement, than with establishing proper hierarchies in a movement in which his place is secure.

Specifically, Paul becomes more like Peter. Over two hundred years ago, F.C. Baur saw how much the speeches of Paul in Acts were like the speeches of Peter (and Stephen). The speeches Paul makes in the Acts of Paul repackage his preaching into the supersessionist model that Peter and

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<sup>99</sup> The transformed beatitudes of Acts Paul 3.5 are perhaps the clearest instance of this transformation.

<sup>100</sup> See Tertullian *Against Marcion*.

<sup>101</sup> See, for example, *The Exegesis of the Soul*, NHL

<sup>102</sup> Col 1.18,24, Eph 1.22, 5.23-32.

<sup>103</sup> In, for example 1Tim 1.3-7, 1.20, or 2Tim 2.17.

Stephen established in Acts.<sup>104</sup> One must also remember that the image of Peter is a moving target. Peter, in the Acts of Peter—quite anachronistically—hears the Gospel being read in an assembly during his own lifetime.<sup>105</sup> Peter is transformed from a Galilean fisherman into an observer of second-century Christian practice with many historical improbabilities along the way. Similarly, Paul in the Acts of Thecla preaches in beatitudes as if he has read Q or Matthew or Luke.<sup>106</sup> Eventually Peter and Paul are the protagonists of a joint Acts.<sup>107</sup> In many ways, the price of admission for Paul to the highest echelon of Christian heroic narrative is the forfeiting of several dimensions of his own idiosyncratic message as revealed in his surviving correspondence.

Within and beyond the story world of the churches and textual traditions that became dominant, Paul becomes more speculative. In the Latin Apocalypse of Paul he tours heaven and hell blogging the journey in a level of riveting detail that is absent from his characteristic reticence in 2 Co 12.17.<sup>108</sup> The Nag Hammadi Apocalypse of Paul shows him gaining knowledge that exceeds that of the creator God and of any of the other Apostles, and the claims and discourses of Valentinus position Paul as the source of secret knowledge of the structure of the universe and of a *heilgeschiichte* passed down to a second-century context from the Apostle himself.

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<sup>104</sup> Without the language of supersessionism, see Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:104.

<sup>105</sup> Acts Pet. II.6.20.

<sup>106</sup> Acts Paul 3.5-6.

<sup>107</sup> See Acta Petri et Pauli (Ps.-Marcellus) in Wilhelm Schneemelcher and Edgar Hennecke, eds., *New Testament Apocrypha. Volume II, Writings Related to the Apostles, Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, trans. R. McL Wilson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 440–42.

<sup>108</sup> Schneemelcher and Hennecke, *NTA-II*, 712–48.

There is also a countercurrent to the valorization of Paul, witnessed faintly in the New Testament canon, explicitly in the ascent of James, and implicitly in the *Kerygmata Petrou* and the pseudo-Clementine corpus more widely. The well-known admonition of 2 Pt 3.15-16 to be wary of how badly a Christian can get messed up by reading Paul is justly famous. Epiphanius's account of Paul's enterprise being motivated by failure in a love pursuit of the high priest's daughter,<sup>109</sup> while not reliably proceeding from Paul's own lifetime, suggests that the vitriol his letters serve up may have been part of a very bitter two way exchange.

The joint Acts of Peter and Paul offer a compelling picture of the buddy act into which the vitriol of Antioch is eventually transformed. Nero asks for Peter's opinion and Peter simply replies: "all that Paul has said is true."<sup>110</sup> Paul's change from rebel with the movement devoted to Jesus to member of the joint command is complete.

### Elaborated Simon

In the aftermath of Acts, the legends of Simon grow exponentially, far beyond the relevance implied by the short narrative in Acts. Transformation not only continued, it accelerated. Broadly speaking, there are two sides to the "elaborated Simon:" (1) the magical action figure in combat with the heroes of proper Christianity, pre-eminently but not exclusively Peter, and (2) the father of heresy spawning a lineage of unacceptable devotions ranging from simple devotion to Satan, deviance in close relation to the Christianity that won dominance, and deviance far afield, ranging from Mog Ruith, the

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<sup>109</sup> Epiphanius *Pan.* 30.16.6-9.

<sup>110</sup> Acts of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, *ANF* VIII.482.

famous Irish Druid, to Mohammed, the confuting new religious figure of the Byzantine era.<sup>111</sup> These two dimensions of the elaborated Simon are often mixed in a given narrative. The thread I seek to highlight in portraying Simon and Paul as true rivals is the manner in which Simon, in a few instances, becomes a receptacle for aspects of Paul that would impede Paul's ascent to eminence. As the loser in the contest to be the outsider who makes good, Simon bears the liabilities of the historical Paul, a sort of cleansing scapegoat in the development of Christianity's dominant narrative of its own genesis.

Shortly after the portrayal of Acts,<sup>112</sup> Justin Martyr takes up the legend of Simon with startling confidence and new information. As Acts asserts, Justin affirms that Simon won a wide following in Samaria.<sup>113</sup> Crucially, Justin locates Simon in Rome after his Samaritan activity, working wonders and receiving devotion including a statue with the inscription "Simoni Deo Sancto," "To Simon the holy God."<sup>114</sup> Justin adds the legend of a consort, the former prostitute Helena,<sup>115</sup> and Simon's disciple Menander whom Justin associates with unacceptable doctrines.<sup>116</sup> Justin's witness also alludes to his *Syntagma* of heresies which does not survive, but which he implies contains a fuller account of Simon

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<sup>111</sup> See Aileen M. O'Leary, "Constructing the Magical Biography of the Irish Druid Mog Ruith," in *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time*, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 219–30; Alberto Ferreiro, "Simon Magus, Nicolas of Antioch, and Muhammad," *Church History* 72.1 (2003): 53–70.

<sup>112</sup> Dating Acts is perilous, but see Pervo, *Acts*, 5 for 115 C.E.

<sup>113</sup> *Dialogue* 120

<sup>114</sup> 1 *Apology* 26.

<sup>115</sup> The Helena legend in relation to Simon Magus is elaborate. While absent from the Acts of Peter, it shows up narratively in *Clementine Recognitions* 2.23.1-4 and with a doctrinal angle in Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.23.2 in which Helena is a transpersonal being incarnated over and over and rescued by Simon; she is also the lost Sheep of Mt 18.12 in Irenaeus' account of Simonian biblical interpretation. See also Eusebius *EH* II.13 and Epiphanius *Pan.* 1.21.2.2-4. See Danny Praet, "Truth-Telling, Lying and False Wisdom in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: Simon Magus and Helen of Troy," in *In Search of Truth in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: New Approaches to a Philosophical and Rhetorical Novel of Late Antiquity*, vol. 496 of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* (Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 189–220. for a helpful overview of Helen and Simon traditions.

<sup>116</sup> In addition to this testimony from 1 *Apology* 26, Justin sets himself against Simon at a doctrinal level in 2 *Apology* 15.

as a heretic, as well as of his successors such as Menander and others.<sup>117</sup> It is difficult to characterise the source of the richness of information that Justin’s witness implies. There is no way to discern transmission from innovation, but the later one dates Acts, the less one can portray Justin as a simple free elaborator of Acts. It may well be—and given the loss of Justin’s *Syntagma* evidently is—that the legend of Simon circulated not only in our surviving sources but in wider oral and written networks in the second, or even the first, century.

The Acts of Peter establish Simon as the arch enemy of Peter. Their contests in Rome range across miracle—Simon’s preeminent trick is flying—and trash talk. Peter has a sub-specialty of miraculous messengers, first a large talking dog and then a seventh month old baby, who insults Simon gratuitously and goad him into a risible dialogue.<sup>118</sup> In the Acts tradition, including both the second-century Acts of Peter and the later Acts of Peter and Paul, it may be helpful to distinguish between the overlapping relationships of enemy and rival. Without a doubt, Simon and Peter are enemies. As the large dog says to Peter: “you shall have a great contest with Simon, the enemy of Christ.”<sup>119</sup> Conflict with an enemy is direct. A rivalry concerns a scarce good wherein two parties compete for that good: a lover, an object, a status position, the approval of an authority or of a corporate body, etc. The Acts traditions set up Simon as both an enemy and a rival of Peter, to be sure, but also—and this is a dimension of historical analysis and not just narrative paraphrase—as a rival of

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<sup>117</sup> 1 *Apology* 26.

<sup>118</sup> Simon repeatedly asks the messengers to tell Peter that he’s not home (Acts Pet. II.4.11, II.5.12). For the infant, see Acts Pet. II.5.15. Note also the beating Simon takes by slaves in Acts Pet. II.5.14. See Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, “Simon Magus as a Narrative Figure in the Acts of Peter,” in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 45–48. on the debasement of Simon in the Acts of Peter.

<sup>119</sup> Acts Pet. II.5.12.

Paul. Paul initially persuades Marcellus, then Simon reorients Marcellus's devotion, and it's up to Peter to resolve Marcellus's position between the two preachers. The competition for the approval of Nero in the Acts of Peter and Paul makes this clear in narrative terms. The Acts of Peter highlights Simon as a negative wonder worker, though it also includes elements of Simon the heretic with less emphasis.<sup>120</sup>

These two second-century sources establish the two tracks, wonder-worker and heretic, along which Simon was elaborated. Both have a mixture of those elements. Rather than proceeding with a presentation of the evidence based on sources, allow me to summarise these two tracks and then gather a third dynamic in which Simon becomes the bearer of Paul's liabilities. It must also be noted that the two tracks, wonder-worker and doctrinal innovator, are matters of prominence rather than hermetically sealed developments; they intertwine frequently.

The legend of Simon's spectacular conflict of Peter resonates through literature and polemic subsequent to the Acts of Peter and Justin's shadowy allusion to Simon in Rome. Simon's general penchant for "magic," his flying,<sup>121</sup> impeding speech,<sup>122</sup> and the legend of the statue in Rome<sup>123</sup> echo through tradition. At the same time, the tradition frequently showcases Peter's own wonder, while

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<sup>120</sup> Simon persuades Marcellus away from loyalty to Paul (Acts Pet. II.4.8). The implicit conflict over the loyalty of Marcellus is perhaps the closest to direct confrontation between Paul and Simon. The story also implies Simon teaching. The heresiologists elaborate on Simon's teaching at great length and narrative texts highlight extravagant attributed to Simon. Tamás Adamik, "The Image of Simon Magus in the Christian Tradition," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 54–62. goes furthest in an unconvincing effort to attach the elaborate heresiological attributions of Justin and Irenaeus to a historical Simon.

<sup>121</sup> Acts Pet. II.4.10, Didascalia 23.VI.8, Epiphanius *Pan* 1.21.5.2, Clementine *Recognitions* II.9.

<sup>122</sup> See the powers of the speaking baby in Acts Pet. II.5.15.. See also Jan N. Bremmer, "Aspects of the Acts of Peter: Women, Magic, Place and Date," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Peter: Magic, Miracles and Gnosticism*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 9–14.

<sup>123</sup> Beyond Justin 1 *Apology* 26, Acts Pet II.4.10 indicates that it was actually Marcellus who set up a statue to Simon. The statue legend also appears in Eusebius *EH* II.13.



distancing him from any negative labelling of these actions. Locating stolen goods,<sup>124</sup> paralysing people at will,<sup>125</sup> binding with maledictions,<sup>126</sup> reanimating smoked fish<sup>127</sup>—all these actions of Peter are the sorts of wonders that would support the accusation that Simon was a “magus.”<sup>128</sup> Just as Peter is sanitised, Simon is painted in ever more negative tones, even as an incarnation or direct emissary of Satan.<sup>129</sup>

Irenaeus is the primary founder of the narrative of Simon as heresiarch, the founder and father of all heresy.<sup>130</sup> While he articulates this first in *Haer.* 1.23.2,<sup>131</sup> the preparatory move is to write directly against Acts 8.13. While Acts indicates Simon believed, Irenaeus asserts he did not believe the preaching of Philipp, but only feigned belief.<sup>132</sup> Irenaeus goes on to use the topos of Simon as heresiarch to open Books II and III of *Haer.* Irenaeus also commences the tradition of Simon as the founder of a specific line of heretics. For Irenaeus, Simon is succeeded by Menander<sup>133</sup> and by

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<sup>124</sup> E.g. PGM III.479-94, V.70-9, V.172-212, CTBS 88, 92, 94, 95, 96, 98, 100, 101.

<sup>125</sup> Peter’s own daughter in Acts Pet. I.128-132.

<sup>126</sup> The large majority of the cast corpus of Greek and Latin *defixiones* may be characterised as binding people with maledictions; see Apostolic Constitution’s IV.6 for Peter binding Simon. Note also the power of binding and loosing given to Peter in Mt 16.19 (though it seems that Jesus’ whole audience gets such power in Mt 18.18).

<sup>127</sup> This trick might be a Petrine exclusive. Schneemelcher and Hennecke, *NTA-II*, 319 n. 82. Elucidates the vocabulary concerning the fish in question.

<sup>128</sup> Simon as Sorcerer in Tertullian *An.* 34.4, Boy familiar in *Clementine Recognitions* 2.26.1, Parhedral spirits Irenaeus *AH* 1.23.4., Hippolytus *Haer* 6.2, learning magic in Egypt *Clementine Homilies* 2.22.3. See Dominique Côte, “Simon Magus in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: ‘Magician’ or Philosopher?,” in *In Search of Truth in the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies: New Approaches to a Philosophical and Rhetorical Novel of Late Antiquity*, ed. Danny Praet and Benjamin de Vos, vol. 496 of *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 265.

<sup>129</sup> E.g. Acts Pet. II.6.16, Didascalia 23.VI.7, Manichean Apocryphal Acts (Schneemelcher and Hennecke, *NTA-II*, 87.

<sup>130</sup> Côte, “Truth-Telling,” 265. Offers a helpful review of the characterisation of Simon as the father of heresy.

<sup>131</sup> See also Pseudo-Tertullian *AdvOmnHaer* 1.2.2, Eusebius *EH* II.13, Epiphanius *Pan* I.21.1.2.

<sup>132</sup> Irenaeus *AH* 1.23.1, see also Eusebius *EH* II.1.11, contra *Apostolic Constitutions* II.7.

<sup>133</sup> Irenaeus *AH* 1.23.4, 3.4.3. See also Pseudo-Tertullian *AdvOmnHar* 1.3, *Apostolic Constitutions* II.8, and Eusebius *EH* III.26, IV.7, Epiphanius *Pan* 1.22.1.1

Cerdo.<sup>134</sup> Elsewhere Cerdo,<sup>135</sup> Marcion,<sup>136</sup> Cleobius,<sup>137</sup> Saturnilus,<sup>138</sup> Basilides,<sup>139</sup> Nicolaus,<sup>140</sup> and Valentinus<sup>141</sup> are named as the successors of or collaborators with Simon.<sup>142</sup>

Tradition also positions Simon as a durable direct influence on Christianity through an ongoing sect of Simonians, named by Eusebius a “pestilential and scurfy disease” afflicting the church in his own time, centuries after any contact between Simon and the Apostles.<sup>143</sup> Simon’s doctrinal offences consist either of outsized claims to his own cosmic significance—virgin birth,<sup>144</sup> or actually being the Christ<sup>145</sup> or Zeus<sup>146</sup>—or espousing doctrine that is unacceptable to the narrator or heresiologist in question. Such doctrine ranges from docetic<sup>147</sup> to demiurgical,<sup>148</sup> but also includes positions that later tradition mutes in Paul and transfers to Simon.

This transference constitutes the endeavour by the victorious of Christianity to renovate Paul and resolve the rivalry of Paul and Simon by making Simon the bearer of the liabilities of Paul’s audacious effort to gain a preeminent position in the new movement’s distribution structure for the

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<sup>134</sup> Irenaeus *AH* 1.27.1, Epiphanius *Pan* 1.41.1.1.

<sup>135</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* II.8, *Epistula Apostolorum* 1.

<sup>136</sup> Irenaeus *AH* 1.27.1.

<sup>137</sup> Acts Paul 8.

<sup>138</sup> Epiphanius *Pan*. 1.23.2.1.

<sup>139</sup> Epiphanius *Pan*. 1.24.1.4.

<sup>140</sup> Epiphanius *Pan*. 1.25.7.1.

<sup>141</sup> Irenaeus *AH* 2.9.2, Hippolytus *Haer.* 6.15.

<sup>142</sup> Simon himself is named, together with Helena, as a disciple of John the Baptist (Clementine *Recognitions* 1.23.1-4), but naming John the Baptist as the father of all heresy would be very awkward indeed.

<sup>143</sup> Eusebius *EH* II.1.11. See also Irenaeus *AH* 1.23.4 and Hegesippus *Fragments Concerning his Journey to Rome and the Jewish Sects* on the Simonian sect.

<sup>144</sup> Clementine *Recognitions* II.14.1-2.

<sup>145</sup> Acts Pet. II.2.4, Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.21.3, Epiphanius *Pan* 1.21.2.1.

<sup>146</sup> Epiphanius *Pan*. 1.21.3.6.

<sup>147</sup> Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.23.3, Pseudo-Tertullian *AdverOmnHaer.* 1.2, 1.4, Epiphanius *Pan*. 1.21.1.2.

<sup>148</sup> Irenaeus *Haer.* 1.23.3, Hippolytus *Haer.* 6.7-13, Clementine *Homilies* III.38.1-III.43.3, Pseudo-Tertullian, *AdvOmnHaer.* 1.2, 1.4, 1.5, Epiphanius *Pan*. 1.21.2.2, 1.21.4.4, 1.21.6.3 .

Holy Spirit, and by placing on Simon responsibility for an actual or distorted version of the innovative thought of Paul. This effort is, of course, clearest in that hypothetical source of the Clementine literature, the *Kerygmata Petrou*, but shows up widely dispersed in the tradition's hostile elaboration of Simon.

Simon, the character, ends up following Paul's admonition to followers of Jesus in Galatia: "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6.2). Simon ends up bearing Paul's burdens. These range from the humiliating beating with rods that Paul narrates,<sup>149</sup> to the taking on some of the sketchy claims Paul makes: "there are many Gods,"<sup>150</sup> that the law was given "by angels,"<sup>151</sup> or "put on the new man."<sup>152</sup> Simon becomes a practitioner of heavenly ascent with none of the reticence about such and endeavour that Paul demonstrates.<sup>153</sup> By the fourth century, the characters of Paul and Simon become somewhat confused in the always intense, but not always coherent, Epiphanius of Salamis, who ends up having Simon basically channel Paul and attributes embarrassing Pauline sentiments to Jesus (!).<sup>154</sup> The ability of the character of Simon to envelope and enact anything negative within Christianity is capacious, but the assemblage of particular liabilities from Paul that the character Simon bears is only preparatory to the crucial work the character does of freeing Paul from his successors and his conflicts.

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<sup>149</sup> 2 Co 11.25, compare Acts Pet. II.5.14.

<sup>150</sup> 1 Co 8.5 and Clementine *Homilies* III.38.1. See also Côte, "Truth-Telling," 268.

<sup>151</sup> Gal 3.19. For creation of the law by "lefthand power" or by "angels" see Epiphanius *Pan.* 1.21.4.5.

<sup>152</sup> Eph 4.24 and Clementine *Homilies* II.38.2. It should not go without saying that inasmuch as Simon is remade against Paul, he is remade against a moving target of a developing Paul rather than against any modern construction of a genuine Paul.

<sup>153</sup> 2 Co 12.1-7.

<sup>154</sup> Paul's admonition that it is good for a man not to touch a woman and that the unmarried would do well to remain so (1 Co 7.1, 7.7) gets attributed to interlocutors of Jesus by Epiphanius in his attack on the Simonians (*Pan.* 1.21.5.7).

Tertullian's quip that Paul might well be called the Apostle of the heretics<sup>155</sup> illustrates a major problem that dogged the reputation of the Apostle: he had as prominent followers both Marcion and Valentinus. These two giants of second-century Christianity drove heresiologists to apoplexy. Marcion championed Paul aggressively and claimed to restore the original Paul.<sup>156</sup> Paul himself promised to deliver mysteries and secrets and Valentinus claimed to be the recipient of an extensive corpus of those secrets through Theudas, a student of Paul.<sup>157</sup> Traditions concerning Simon that attach to him Marcion and Valentinus do more than cast Simon as the father of heresies; they relieve Paul of the discredit that those followers brought upon him in the eyes of the proto-Orthodox church.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* and Irenaeus of Lyon continue this offloading of awkward Pauline doctrine onto Simon. The *Apostolic Constitutions* contrasts Jesus to Simon, noting that Jesus fulfilled the law rather than having "dissolved the law, as Simon pretends,"<sup>158</sup> when clearly Paul had the reputation, in some circles, of abolishing the law, on the basis of Eph 2.14-15.<sup>159</sup> Irenaeus offloads more prolixly:

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<sup>155</sup> Tertullian *Marc.* 3.5.5.

<sup>156</sup> Tertullian *Marc.* 4.3 makes it clear that Marcion presumed the text of Paul to have been corrupted by false apostles and that Marcion positions himself as the restorer of a primordial Paul.

<sup>157</sup> Clement of Alexandria *Stromateis* 7.17.

<sup>158</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.IV.19. See Smith, "Paul's Arguments as Evidence of the Christianity from Which He Diverged." for a strong characterization of Paul's struggles with his own reputation for antinomianism.

<sup>159</sup> Again, Simon is being remade in reference to a developing Paul. That Paul is unlikely to be the author of Ephesians is of no consequence to the insight of offloading.

For all those who are of a perverse mind, having been set against the Mosaic legislation, judging it to be dissimilar and contrary to the doctrine of the Gospel, have not applied themselves to investigate the causes of the difference of each covenant. Since, therefore, they have been deserted by the paternal love, and puffed up by Satan, being brought over to the doctrine of Simon Magus, they have apostatized in their opinions from Him who is God, and imagined that they have themselves discovered more than the apostles, by finding out another god; and [maintained] that the apostles preached the Gospel still somewhat under the influence of Jewish opinions, but that they themselves are purer [in doctrine], and more intelligent, than the apostles. Wherefore also Marcion and his followers have betaken themselves to mutilating the Scriptures, not acknowledging some books at all; and, curtailing the Gospel according to Luke and the Epistles of Paul, they assert that these are alone authentic, which they have themselves thus shortened.<sup>160</sup>

By the end of the second century, Paul was understood in the circles with which Irenaeus intersected to have distinguished substantially between law and gospel. In Irenaeus, above, the distinction is attributed to Simon. The claim that the heretics have exalted themselves above the apostles cannot fail to bring to mind Paul's favourable comparison of himself to those he calls "super-apostles" [τῶν ὑπερλίαν ἀποστόλων].<sup>161</sup> The Apostolic Constitutions also bring Simon in to scratch other Pauline itches. Paul's very vulnerable statement that "indeed there are many Gods and many Lords"<sup>162</sup> lands on Simon in the statement that some of his successors "own the doctrine of many gods."<sup>163</sup> Soon after, Peter indicates that three times he had "discoursed before them [trustworthy authorities in the movement] with him [Simon of Gitta] concerning the true Prophet."<sup>164</sup> This mention of the "True Prophet" brings us (finally!) to the Pseudo-Clementine literature and, in particular, the *Kerygmata Petrou*.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Irenaeus *Haer.* 3.12.12.

<sup>161</sup> 2 Co 11.5, 12.1.

<sup>162</sup> 1 Co 8.5. I have removed the insulating scare-quotes around Gods and Lords that the RSV provides and capitalised them in conformance with the capitalization of those words in the bulk of the RSV translation.

<sup>163</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.II.8.

<sup>164</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* 6.II.8.

<sup>165</sup> On the basis of the discourse on the "True Prophet" *Clementine Homilies* I.18.1, III.21.1

The discourse on syzygies in the Clementine Romance positions Simon as the one who went to the Gentiles before Peter;<sup>166</sup> the Simon/Paul shuffle is already evident, and, as F.C. Baur noted,<sup>167</sup> quickly contradicted by Acts. The narrative implied in the syzygies discourse concerning rival gospels by Peter and Simon is the mirror image of the situation Paul narrates in Galatians. In the Clementine *Homilies*, Peter suggests that he brought a true gospel in pursuit of Simon's false gospel.<sup>168</sup> In Galatians, Paul asserts that a false gospel pursued his true gospel.<sup>169</sup> Moreover, Peter asserts that "it would be possible to recognise where Simon belongs, who as first and before me went to the Gentiles."<sup>170</sup> One need only recall the negotiations described (undoubtedly with bias) in Gal 2.1-10 to see that Simon is carrying the baggage of Paul in the Clementine Romance.

The interpretive pattern of syzygies seen elsewhere in the Clementine literature introduces the section of the *Homilies* that has Peter most radically place the liabilities of Paul on the character of Simon, explaining that one who understands the doctrine of syzygies should

discern by whom Simon, who as the first came before me to the Gentiles, was sent forth, and to whom I [Peter] belong who appeared later than he did and came in upon him as light upon darkness, as knowledge upon ignorance, as healing upon sickness.<sup>171</sup>

Peter's claim to be the corrector of Simon initiates a dialogue of which we see a fragment in *Homilies* XVII.13.1-2:<sup>172</sup> Simon suggests that Peter's claim to know Jesus from face-to-face pedagogy is in no way superior to knowledge acquired by visionary means. Peter responds with a narrative of his bona

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<sup>166</sup> Clementine *Homilies* II.17.3.

<sup>167</sup> Baur, *Paul, The Apostle of Jesus Christ: His Life and Work, His Epistles and Doctrine*, 1:84.

<sup>168</sup> Clementine *Homilies* II.15.4.

<sup>169</sup> Gal 1.6.

<sup>170</sup> Clementine *Homilies* II.17.3.

<sup>171</sup> Clementine *Homilies* II.17.3

<sup>172</sup> Haar, *Simon Magus*, 110–12. offers a helpful view of "the Pseudo-Clementine Image of Simon."

vides as a disciple and the credibility of his confession that Jesus is “the Son of the living God.”<sup>173</sup>

*Homilies XVII.19.1-7* brings the conflict to a head, pumping up the value of Peter’s whole year [!] with the teacher in comparison with Simon’s visionary mere hour, taunts Simon about how little he expounds the teachings of Jesus and what unfriendly relations he has to the Apostles of Jesus, calling out Simon aggressively for calling Peter “condemned,” echoing pointedly the conflict between Peter and Paul in Antioch.<sup>174</sup> This is all well known, and since F.C. Baur, widely understood to be a polemic against Paul veiled by the name of Simon. While this interpretive formulation has undeniable value, my effort here is to see that offloading the liabilities of Paul’s innovative, or even disruptive, doctrine, his embarrassing actions, and his deeply conflicted relations with other Apostles is not just a veiling, but part of a wider pattern of turning the contrast knob to eleven, resolving two close rivals—Simon and Paul, who both moved from outside positions, sought similar goods, but ended up on different sides of the ledger—into two opposite figures, to the benefit of the victor, Paul, at the cost of the vanquished, Simon.

## **Conclusion**

This endeavour of viewing the witnesses to Paul and Simon has, of course, not brought new information to the conversation, but perhaps it has enabled us to see how the divergent manners in which the Christian tradition (and every corpus except the authentic Pauline letters moves in an environment in which *χριστιανός* is an active concept) handled the possibility of a charismatic figure

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<sup>173</sup> Mt 16.16.

<sup>174</sup> Gal 2.11.

attempting to enter the movement at a relatively high level without taking the well-known path of apprenticeship to a disciple, or a disciple of a disciple, etc. who had known Jesus. Paul was adamant that he took no such path, but was admitted directly by God. We see how precarious and remarkable Paul's entry into the centre of Christianity's self-narration is. Simon, according to Acts, took a more culturally conservative route: he offered money to join a network that distributed a valuable good. Of course, inasmuch as Acts represents a historical interaction, Simon would have offered more: respect, clientage, and—perhaps—a commitment to make a collection for the poor saints.

Simon's strategy failed, not only in the manner that one would expect any number of individuals to flirt with a new religious movement, strive to negate advantageous terms of joining, but fail to do so, anonymously. Simon failed spectacularly and his failure was amplified by most of Christian tradition in the aftermath of the initial tale of an attempt to join that had gone wrong. Paul famously represents the opposite end of the spectrum. After a long rocky start—his initial relation to the movement being violent harassment—widespread scepticism about the genuineness of his devotion, trenchant criticisms of his thought, his works, his motivations, his pedigree, his very body, Paul becomes an ever-intensified hero of the movement, standing side by side with Peter, an early and preeminent apprentice to Jesus. The two Apostles are re-made to look more like one another, in their actions, speeches, doctrine, and activities. The Galilean fisherman even becomes a writer of elegant Greek letters. This continuum of attempts, not only to join, but to take leadership in the movement devoted to Jesus is worth consideration. It is the continuum within which we must imagine shadowy



repeated characters like Apollos,<sup>175</sup> one-hit-wonders like Agabus<sup>176</sup> or Antipas,<sup>177</sup> or poorly sketched villains like Diotrephes.<sup>178</sup> The goods were limited, and demand exceeded supply. The landscape of rivals was thickly populated. I've focussed on Simon and Paul because they form richly sketched limit cases and because of the evidence that their cases intersected in a resonance effect pushing Simon onto an infernal tableau and exalting Paul well beyond the third heaven.<sup>179</sup> I also have focussed on Simon because I regret not having asked Harol Remus him. I didn't ask Harold enough.

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<sup>175</sup> Acts 18.24-19.1, 1 Co 1.12, 3.4-6, 3.22, 4.6, 16.12.

<sup>176</sup> Acts 21.10-11.

<sup>177</sup> Rev 2.13.

<sup>178</sup> 3Jn 9.

<sup>179</sup> Simon Magus ends up in the third ditch of the eighth circle of Hell in Dante's *Inferno* XIX. Some thought Paul's ascent exceeded even the God of Israel; in the Nag Hammadi *Apocalypse of Paul*, he ascends beyond the creator God in the seventh heaven and leads the twelve Apostles from the eighth heaven to communion with Paul's fellow spirits in the tenth (NHL V,2.23-24).

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