

1 CORINTHIANS 15:8 : PAUL THE LAST APOSTLE

By Peter R. Jones

I

As a subject, 'Paul the last apostle' has all the marks of a scholarly old chestnut. Oddly it turns out to be, if one may change the metaphor, a virtual academic orphan which to my knowledge no one has adopted for serious and sustained analysis. It is also a subject that reserves many fascinating surprises both with regard to Paul's apostolic self-consciousness, as one might expect, but also for the general orientation of his thought. For the central term (ἔσχατος) of the key passage, 1 Corinthians 15:8, is capable of summing up the major point of contention in the modern Pauline debate between Käsemann, the spokesman for the primacy of justification by faith, and Stendahl, the proponent of salvation history. For while neither scholar discusses 1 Corinthians 15:8¹, their respective positions are reflected in the two possible senses of ἔσχατος which scholars of these two schools propose: (1) 'least', 'of no worth', which every justified sinner must confess concerning himself, and (2) 'last', a final chronological event or act of God in the process of redemptive history.²

The almost total absence of scholarly comment on the ἔσχατος of 1 Corinthians 15:8 is all the more surprising since Paul has never lacked serious interpreters concerned to show his crucial eschatological place in salvation history.³ His role in relation to the Gentiles is a case in

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1. I have gone through most of their published works, including those without scriptural indexes without finding a single discussion of 1 Cor. 15:8.
 2. For an excellent presentation of these two approaches, see N. T. Wright, 'The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith', *TB* 29 (1978) 69.
 3. We may recall the famous phrase of A. Fridrichsen presenting Paul as 'an eschatological person'. See his important work *The Apostle and His Message* (Uppsala Universitets Arsskrift, 1947) 3. According to C. K. Barrett ('The apostles in and after the New Testament', *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* [1956] 30-49) this judgment is 'widely held' to be a major step forward in apostleship research. One may compare with this judgment of Fridrichsen that of F. F. Bruce

point. In 1939 G. Sass declared that 'there are many apostles of Christ but only one eschatological apostle to the peoples'.⁴ Some fifteen years later J. Munck expressed the same opinion. 'It is above all on the shoulders of Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, that the task is laid of bringing about the fulness of the Gentiles.'⁵ In his later study *Christ and Israel*, Munck persuasively defends this opinion, noting that in Romans 9-11 Paul is dealing with peoples, not individuals. The sudden introduction of his own person indicates the uniqueness of the role he believes he is playing in the events of salvation history.⁶ Another Scandinavian scholar, B. Gerhardsson, echoes this judgment. 'Paul knows himself to have been chosen and set apart, even before his birth, to play a particularly important role in the history of salvation. He has been entrusted with the task of carrying the gospel to the Gentiles.'⁷ Such reasoning has led many scholars to lift the ambiguity from the anarthrous ἐθνῶν ἀπόστολος in Romans 11:13⁸ and to translate it 'the apostle to the

'Paul and Jerusalem', *TB* 19 [1968] 23): 'Paul is... clearly set forth as a figure of *eschatological significance*' (italics mine). See also the specialized article of M. L. Barre, 'Paul as "Eschatological person"', *CBQ* 37 (1975) 500-527.

4. G. Sass, *Apostolat und Kirche* (1939) 141, cited in W. Schmithals, *The Office of Apostle in the Early Church* (London: SPCK, 1971) 58. Compare the special place already allotted to Paul by H. Windisch, *Paulus und Christus* (1934).
5. J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959) 277.
6. J. Munck, *Christ and Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) 122.
7. B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Lund: Gleerup, 1961) 292.
8. This phrase is translated by the NIV '... the apostle to the Gentiles'. In favour of this translation it might be said that while in general anarthrous phrases suggest indefiniteness, proper nouns can appear without their article, as can certain well-used nouns. In particular this applies to nouns which govern a genitive, which is the case here. See N. Turner, *Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Vol. III (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963) 174ff. Turner gives the example of ἄγγελος κυρίου which should be translated 'the angel of the Lord', and then cites the canon of

Gentiles'.⁹ It would be redundant to cite the vast number of scholars who emphasize the unique eschatological nature of Paul and his ministry.¹⁰

However, it is important to note that his eschatological ministry is not limited to the Gentiles. As Munck suggests by the very title of his book, Paul is the key to the salvation of mankind. Taking up Munck's

Apollonius Dyscolus according to which nouns in regimen either both have the article or neither. This would appear to cover ἔθνῶν ἀπόστολος. If so, ἀπόστολος should be translated 'the apostle', since no one suggests translating ἔθνῶν 'of some Gentiles'. (Elsewhere in Romans Paul uses this form: see πνεῦμα ἀγλωσύνης in Rom. 1:4; compare ὑπακοῆν πίστει in Rom. 1:5; 16:26). This would be especially true, since, as E. Best notes in his recent article ('The Revelation to Evangelise the Gentiles', *JTS* 35 [1984] 19 n.88), ἔθνη is often used without the article when one is expected. He gives as evidence Rom. 3:29; 9:24; 11:12; 15:8; 1 Cor. 1:23; 2 Cor. 9:26; Gal. 2:15. Best also observes (p.19) that even those commentators who translate (ἔθνῶν) ἀπόστολος 'an apostle', in their notes speak of 'the apostle'.

9. Compare Rom. 1:5 'we have received (the) apostolic grace ... among all the nations'. Cf. Rom. 1:13; 15:15-18. Of this latter text J. Jervell says, 'Paul wants to represent the entire Gentile world in Jerusalem including the West (Rome)'. ('The Letter to Jerusalem', in *The Romans Debate*, ed. K. P. Donfried [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977] 74).
10. See the discussion of this point in my forthcoming monograph, but note in particular, E. Käsemann, *A Commentary on Romans* (London: SCM, 1980) 306-307 and 393. E. Best ('The Revelation to Evangelise ...' 23-25) discovers an accentuation of Paul's uniqueness in the 'pseudo-Pauline' epistles. If in Galatians, what Paul is he is in respect to some Gentiles, in Eph. 3:1 he is in respect to all Gentiles. Also in Col. 1:24 'Paul' claims a unique position in the universal church. However, Best himself has already established that ἔθνῶν ἀπόστολος in Rom. 11:13 means 'the apostle of the Gentiles' (p.19), so that it is difficult to imagine, in this domain, a more exclusive expression of uniqueness that that given here in a universally recognised Pauline epistle. One must rather speak of deep agreement on this point within the canonical Pauline corpus.

insight, N. T. Wright, in his 1978 Tyndale Lecture, puts the issue quite boldly: Paul is called 'to be the apostle to the Gentiles, to be the Jew entrusted with the creation of the worldwide people of God'.¹¹ According to K. H. Rengstorf, Paul conceives of his mission in terms of Jeremiah and Isaiah and as the 'supreme point of self-awareness' not only of himself but also of early Christianity in general.¹² Munck seeks biblical categories to describe Paul's significance. He speaks of Paul as a 'figure of redemptive history', and compares the apostle to Abraham, Elijah, and especially to Moses.¹³ This latter comparison Munck finds in 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 about which he says, 'Of Paul's many new and startling utterances, this is perhaps the most surprising. The greatest man in the history of Israel is put beneath the travelling tent-maker'.¹⁴ The present author's doctoral dissertation studied the significance of this comparison between Moses and Paul,¹⁵ and amongst other things discovered a score of well-known New Testament scholars who, with Munck, find in 2 Corinthians 3 not the usual Moses-Christ comparison, but that of Moses and Paul.¹⁶ The conclusion of this thesis is that the

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11. N. T. Wright, 'The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith', *TB* 29 (1978) 69.
 12. K. H. Rengstorf, 'ἀποστέλλω', *TDNT* I, 439.
 13. Munck, *Paul* 12, 48, 109.
 14. *Ibid.* 60-61.
 15. Peter R. Jones, *The Apostle Paul : A Second Moses According to 2 Corinthians 2:14-4:7* (Princeton Theol. Sem., 1973) (also microfilm, Ann Arbor, 1973). See also, 'The Apostle Paul: Second Moses to the New Covenant Community', in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. J. W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974) 219-241, and 'L'apôtre Paul: étude sur l'autorité apostolique paulinienne,' *Foi et Vie*, 1 (janvier-février 1976) 36-58.
 16. For bibliographical details see my thesis (n.15 above), p.9. These scholars include A. Menzies, A. M. Farrer, A. Denis, P. Demann, A. Schlatter, J.-F. Collange, H. Wendland, W. C. Van Unnik, H. Lietzmann, J. Jeremias, J. Roloff, C. K. Barrett, R. H. Strachan, M. E. Thrall, F. Baudraz, K. Stendahl, O. Cullmann, W. Schmithals, W. D. Davies, B. D. Chilton, and recently E. Richard, 'Polemics, Old Testament and Theology. A Study of 2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6', *RB* 88 (1981) 354, 366; and S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 233-239.

eschatological 'second Moses' is the model by which Paul understood and described the nature of the early Christian apostolate. In other words, for Paul it is the apostle of Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who accomplishes the ministry of the last eschatological Moses.

If Paul is, as these scholars suggest, a 'supreme point', a watershed in the history of early Christianity,¹⁷ is it not appropriate to ask the following question: Is Paul the last and final apostle? Of course all that Paul says about his apostolate serves to answer this question. However, 1 Corinthians 15:8 sharply focuses the issue when Paul says of himself: 'Last of all (ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων) he appeared to me also, as to one untimely born'. The conclusion of my research on this text is that here Paul is making a definite, unambiguous and theological claim to be the final apostle. I intend to deal with the two major objections to this interpretation.

II

A. *Objection 1: ἔσχατος Means 'Least'*

If G. Sass states that the ἔσχατος of 1 Corinthians 15:8 should be understood 'religiously' not temporally,¹⁸ it is R. Bultmann and his disciples who raise this judgment to the status of a major principle for Pauline interpretation. Though Bultmann to my knowledge does not specifically comment on this verse, the position he adopts in relation to the entire pericope, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, is well known. Paul's attempt to guarantee the resurrection of Christ as an objective fact is 'unconvincing',¹⁹ and so the text must be excluded

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17. One may note Wrede's description of Paul as the 'second founder of Christianity' (*Paul*, Boston, 1908, xi) and the remark of O. Cone (*Paul : The Man, the Missionary and the Teacher* [London: Black, 1898]) who believed that a 'new epoch in the history of Christianity' dawned with Paul's vision of Christ.
 18. Sass, *Apostolat* 97 n.266, cited in Schmithals, *Apostle* 73 n.76.
 19. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, I (New York: Scribners, 1951) 295.

from the kerygma.²⁰ This also effectively removes verse 8 from Bultmann's explanation of the significance of Paul's apostolate. We must nevertheless assume that Bultmann favours the 'religious' rather than the temporal sense of ἔσχατος, since elsewhere he sees Paul's call as paradigmatic of Christian conversion in general.²¹

But here we encounter a serious difficulty. When Bultmann argues that in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is engaging in *historical* apologetics, he implicitly recognises the *chronological* sense of ἔσχατος. But then, Paul's temporal ἔσχατος, implying that he is the last called, contradicts Bultmann's attempt to describe that call as typically Christian.

Bultmann's disciples treat 1 Corinthians 15:8 with varying degrees of interest. G. Bornkamm understands it religiously, retaining what it says about Paul's life-style as the least of the apostles, but passes in silence over the question of Paul's being chronologically last, a remarkable omission in a biography of Paul.²² The same silence is to be noted in J. M. Robinson and H. Koester,²³ as well as in

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20. R. Bultmann, *Kerygma and Myth*, ed. H. W. Bartsch (London: SCM, 1953) I, 112.
21. R. Bultmann, 'Paul', *Existence and Faith* (London: Collins, 1964) 114. On this see G. E. Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 367.
22. G. Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971).
23. J. M. Robinson and H. Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971). Koester's student E. Pagels, in her book *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979; London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980) 3-27, rejects the notion of a special apostolic experience of the Risen Lord limited to a specific time, and understands Paul's experience as the meeting of Christ 'on the level of inner experience' (p.11), open to all Christians. The view of W. Marxsen (*The Resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth* [London: SCM, 1970]) resembles that of Conzelmann. In his theological treatment of what he calls Paul's ὤφθη, he never once takes account of Paul's claim that his appearance was the last (98-111). Nevertheless Marxsen does note this fact on p.81.

H. Conzelmann, for whom Paul's claim to be last has apparently no theological significance.²⁴ It is all the more to the credit of the American scholar J. H. Schütz that he seeks to deal with Paul's phrase ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων in a significant way in terms of Bultmann's hermeneutic.²⁵

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24. While in his commentary on 1 Corinthians (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) *ad loc.* Conzelmann does categorically state, before the clear evidence of the text, that 'Paul is temporally and substantially the last', the appearance to him being 'the conclusive end of the appearances', in his *Théologie du Nouveau Testament* (Paris: Editions du Centurion, 1967) he refers only once, in passing, to 1 Corinthians 15:8-11 accompanied by the lapidary remark that, as in Galatians, so here, Paul is fighting for his apostolate.
25. J. H. Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority* (Cambridge: CUP, 1975). Inasmuch as his thesis is to show that Paul is not interested in questions concerning the historical legitimacy of his apostolate, Schütz is clearly following Bultmann who says: 'Wholly fortuitously, wholly contingently, wholly as specific event, the Word enters our world. No guarantee comes with it by virtue of which it is to be believed' (*Faith and Understanding I* [London: SCM, 1969] 64). This interpretative principle is already present to some degree in F. C. Baur whose historical reconstruction of the early Christian apostolate is conveniently summarised by B. N. Kaye, 'Lightfoot and Baur on Early Christianity', *Nov T* 26 (1984) 201: 'On the one hand, the Jewish Christian party sees apostles as those who have been commissioned by Jesus and who have a clearly identifiable and legitimating association and commission from Jesus himself. On the other hand, Paul's apostleship arises from within the heart... There is a considerable contrast here between formal and external legitimation on the one hand, and internal and spiritual legitimation on the other'.

Has Schütz seen in Bultmann the serious difficulty to which we refer? If he has, he does not say so. But it is interesting to note that quite consciously Schütz argues against Bultmann and contends that 'Paul is not interested in these appearances from a primarily historical perspective', but is interested rather in proposing himself as a paradigm for apostolic and general Christian experience.²⁶ Bultmann's dilemma is thus avoided by changing 'last' to 'least'.

Many Roman Catholic scholars have emphasized the great eschatological significance of Paul. But there appears to be a tendency to stop short of assigning definitive lastness to his apostolate in their comments on this verse. While not influenced by 'existential' theology, the Catholics, perhaps due to their confessional commitment, downplay the chronological sense of ἔσχατος in favour of the meaning 'least'. D. M. Stanley observes, for instance, that Paul 'puts himself in last place as unworthy of the name apostle because he had persecuted the church'.²⁷ Coming from Stanley this judgment is surprising, since he has long championed the eschatological interpretation of Paul's apostleship, seeing it as the fulfilment of the mission of the Isaianic Servant of the Lord. This same approach to 1 Corinthians 15:8 is adopted by J. Bonsirven,²⁸ J. Colson²⁹ and P. Grelot.³⁰ At the same time, the

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26. *Ibid.* 9. Bultmann ('Paul' 295) categorically rejects Barth's attempt to eliminate from Paul's reasoning the idea of historical proof.
27. D. M. Stanley, *Christ's Resurrection in Pauline Soteriology* (Rome: Analecta Biblica, 1961) 47.
28. J. Bonsirven, *L'Evangile de Paul* (Paris, 1946) 44.
29. J. Colson, *Paul, apôtre, martyr* (Paris, 1971) 42.
30. P. Grelot, 'La mission apostolique', *Le ministère et les ministères selon le Nouveau Testament* (Paris: du Seuil, 1974) 49. Cf. S. Brown, 'Apostleship in the NT as an Historical and Theological Problem' *NTS* 30 (1984/3) 478, who has a much looser definition of apostleship, but who seems only hesitantly willing to admit that '... Paul may not have believed that any missionary apostles were called after him'.

chronological primacy of Peter's resurrection experience as related in 1 Corinthians 15:5 is singled out.³¹ There are, of course, exceptions among Catholic scholars. Against a natural theological tendency which sees the continuation of the apostolic office in the papacy, L. Cerfaux and F. Amiot mention that Paul claimed to be the last apostle, but make no theological comment.³²

Those who maintain that 'last' is equivalent to 'least' do so for two different reasons. Paul places himself 'last' either because he is concerned to present the eschatological life-style of the Gospel, or because he is overcome by a genuine sense of modesty in the light of his unbelieving past.

B. Reply: ἔσχατος Means 'Last'

While this is not the place to criticise the one-sidedness of the Bultmannian hermeneutic,³³ it must be noted that this weakness radically affects Schütz's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:8. Since for him the Gospel is power not content³⁴ and Paul's apostleship is concerned

31. B. Rigaux, *Dieu l'a ressuscité* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1972) 129, who says: 'On sait seulement que les apparitions mentionnées ont eu lieu avant (ἔσχατος ὁε ...) celle de Paul... celle de Pierre apparaît comme primaire dans la confession.' Cf. Colson, *Paul* 75; Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection de Jésus et Message Pascal* (Paris: du Seuil, 1971) 122.
32. L. Cerfaux, *Le chrétien dans la théologie paulinienne* (Paris: Du Cerf, 1962) 115; F. Amiot, *Les idées maîtresses de St. Paul* (Paris: du Cerf, 1962) 19; Bonsirven (*Évangile* 257) says in passing and without comment: '[Paul] range: Képhas, les douze, les cinq cents frères, Jacques, tous les apôtres, lui-même le dernier des apôtres'.
33. On this see N. T. Wright, *The Paul of History* 87; E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SCM Press, 1977) 522; Ladd, *Theology* 29, 367, 390; R. T. France, 'The Authenticity of the Sayings of Jesus', in *History Criticism and Faith*, ed. C. Brown (Leicester: IVP, 1976) 104-105.
34. *Paul* 43, though one notes a certain equivocation on p.77.

with authority not legitimacy, it follows that Paul is concerned with being least and not last. On this particular point our exegesis will show (1) that Paul (as is usually the case) is not one-sided but is strongly affirming both his chronological lastness (ἔσχατος) and his 'existential' leastness (ἐλάχιστος) and (2) that major questions must be raised concerning the validity of Schütz's interpretation of Paul.

In order to exegete ἔσχατος soundly, let us examine several points:

(a). Ἐσχατος is an ambiguous term which can mean 'least'. Jeremiah describes Babylon as the least of the nations (ἐσχάτη ἐθνῶν , Je 50:12). In Luke 14:7ff. Jesus warns against taking places of honour and against the risk of being relegated to the lowest place (ἔσχατον τόπον , v.9). In 1 Corinthians 4:9, as Schütz notes,³⁵ the apostles 'generically are described as ἐσχάτους .' But here the temporal aspect is present, since the immediate context emphasizes the cosmic and eschatological significance of the apostolic ministry.³⁶ It is an end-time (eschatological) phenomenon to which the mystery of humiliation is integrally bound, as it was in the case of Jesus.

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35. Schütz, *Paul* 105. On p.105 n.2 Schütz refers for support to G. Kittel, ' ἔσχατος ', *TDNT* II, 697. Kittel does allow for this meaning in 1 Cor. 4:9 and a possible relationship with 1 Cor. 15:8. What Schütz does not mention is that Kittel does go on to say, 'At the same time ἔσχατος suggests the closing of a series, so that from the time of this there can be no similar or equivalent events'.
36. See L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Tyndale, 1958) 80; and G. G. Findlay in *EGT* II, 801. The *NIV* brings out the chronological sense proposed by the above commentators in translating 1 Cor. 4:9a: '... God has put us on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena'. There is a certain parallelism between 1 Cor 4:9 and 1 Cor. 15:8. In 4:9 ἔσχατος is accompanied by ὡς ἐπὶ θανατός and in 15:8 ἔσχατος by ὡς περὶ τὸ ἔκπρωμα plus ἐλάχιστος . Thus the clarity of 15:8 ought to guide the interpreter in his explication of the less clear text, 4:9.

(b). Paul, nevertheless, neither needs nor apparently uses the ambiguity of ἔσχατος in 1 Corinthians 15:8. In juxtaposing ἔσχατος with ἐλάχιστος (verse 9) the dialectical nature of his apostolate as both last in time and least in dignity is perfectly well expressed. If ἔσχατος only means 'least', there is a surprising redundancy in the otherwise highly condensed language of these verses. Thus a chronological ἔσχατος would already appear to be the correct exegesis.

(c). If, according to Schütz, apostles are generically 'last', why does Paul reserve this for himself in 1 Corinthians 15:8? Schütz claims Paul is here proposing his experience as 'illustrative of generic apostolic activity'.³⁷ But the text indicates that in being last, Paul is unique, not illustrative.³⁸ In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 not all the apostles can be last. Moreover, if the 'last' of 1 Corinthians 4:9 and 15:8 are not used in the same way, as I intend to show, one cannot be illustrative of the other.

(d). In spite of the possible ambiguity in the word in general, I submit that its chronological sense is overwhelmingly present in 1 Corinthians 15:8. Against the major current of scholarly interpretation,³⁹ only G. Sass,

37. Paul 103.

38. This is not to say that Paul is not suggesting himself as an example of grace. Paul's apostolate is an example of grace but by its very salvation-historical uniqueness.

39. The quasi-totality of scholars of all theological persuasions support a chronological interpretation: Schoeps, Ridderbos, Amiot, Cerfaux, Ladd, Léon-Dufour, Guthrie, Jeremias, Marxsen, Goguel, E. E. Ellis, Rengstorf, A. Richardson, Reiff, Roloff, Denis, J. Weiss, Wilkens, Godet, Conzelmann, Grosheide, Barrett (in his small study, *The Signs of an Apostle* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972] 43. Barrett appears to equivocate when he describes Paul in 1 Cor. 15:8 as claiming to be the 'latest and the least'. This equivocation is not in his commentary, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [London: A. & C. Black, 1968] 343-344); Plummer, Héring, Hodge, Allo, Lietzmann, Schneider, Grundmann, Georgi, Goppelt, Bruce, A. T. Robertson, von der Osten-Sacken, von Campenhausen.

in a passing remark, and Schütz, with numerous hesitations and equivocations, explicitly defend a non-chronological sense. Schütz admits that the phrase ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων, coming as it does at the end of a serial list, 'could suggest that Paul is either the last of those to be granted such an appearance or the last of the apostles'. To interpret it otherwise depends on three major 'ifs'. 'If Paul is not interested in these appearances from a *primary*⁴⁰ historical perspective'; 'if ... his relationship with the disciples is also not central'; 'if it (the phrase 'last of all') echoes the language of 4:9ff'. The weight of scholarly opinion and the impression of hesitancy in Schütz's exegesis give the feeling of 'forcing an open door', as the French say, in seeking to defend the chronological sense of ἔσχατος in 1 Corinthians 15:8.

(e). Some scholars, especially Roman Catholics, hesitate to describe as necessarily chronological the series of appearances which begins in verse 5 with εἴτα, then continues in verses 6 and 7 with ἔπειτα and εἴτα, and finishes in verse 8 with ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων. However, their reserve seems due more to the difficulty of harmonising the Gospel accounts with a strict chronological understanding of Paul's list⁴¹ than in denying all chronological concern to Paul. In the main, H. Lietzmann's judgment that Paul enumerates the appearances 'in *chronologischer Reihenfolge*,⁴² represents the majority opinion.

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40. Paul 105, italics mine. One may wonder whether this adverb suffices to eliminate the chronological aspects of Paul's argument. Paul elsewhere betrays a pre-occupation with this chronological aspect of his relationship with the other apostles, when in Gal. 1:17 he speaks of τοὺς πρὸ ἐμοῦ ἀποστόλους.
41. Rigaux, *Dieu* 129; E. B. Allo, *Première épître aux Corinthiens* (Paris: Gabalda, 1956) 391, who compares the use of εἴτα in 1 Cor. 15:5-8 with that in 1 Cor. 12:28 where no chronological sense is required. This, however, is not the case in 1 Cor. 15, as I intend to show.
42. H. Lietzmann, *An die Korinther 1 und 2* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1949) 77; see also Barrett, *First Corinthians*, ad loc., Marxsen, *Resurrection* 81-82; O. Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple - Apostle - Martyr* (London: SCM, 1953) 58-59 with n.65. E. Best ('The Revelation to Evangelise ...', 20) makes the most categorical of judgements concerning this issue: 'within the

The chronological sense of the creed in 1 Corinthians 15:3ff. is evident, for it recounts *in chronological order* the main facts of Christ's life and death and begins the list of appearances with the one to Peter, which it also preserves explicitly as first (*cf.* Mt. 10:2, *πρῶτος*). What is more, precisely the same idiomatic expression (*ἔσχατον* (ὁ) πάντων) occurs in only one other place in the New Testament, namely in the story about the woman with seven husbands with which the Sadducees seek to embarrass Jesus in *his* teaching on the resurrection (Mk. 12:22).⁴³ The text records the successive deaths of the seven brothers. 'Ὁ πρῶτος dies, ὁ δεύτερος dies, ὁ τρίτος likewise, as do the four remaining. 'And last of all (*ἔσχατον πάντων*) the woman dies'. Our phrase clearly functions here as the closing out of a serial and chronological list and thus provides an excellent point of comparison with our text.⁴⁴ But in addition to Mark, there is a comparable example in this same fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians. From verse 22 Paul begins a theological argument that has undoubted chronological character. He affirms that in the future 'all will be made alive' but each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then (*ἔπειτα*) those who belong to Christ; then (*ἔτι*) the end will come when Christ hands over the kingdom to God having destroyed all dominion. The text continues: 'for he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet. For the last enemy (*ἔσχατος ἐχθρός*) is death' (v.26).

sequence "then, then, then" *ἔσχατον* can only imply that there will never be another appearance of the Risen Christ to anyone'. Best's judgment rightly underlines the non-ambiguity of the grammatical data, but it does not satisfy those who propose that Paul is making a purely circumstantial statement. See further below.

43. Already noted by A. Plummer, *1 Corinthians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1911) 339.
44. There is certainly no warrant for taking the woman as the least of the those people mentioned in the story, and this is confirmed by the synoptic parallels (Mt. 22:27 and Lk. 20:32) which have respectively ὕστερον ὁ πάντων and ὕστερον, translated generally as 'lastly' or 'finally'. Indeed in all their references to other ancient sources, neither *AGB* nor Moulton-Geden give one example where ὕστερος does not have a chronological sense. For completeness, though, it should be noted that the third meaning of the verb ὑστερέω given by *AGB* is 'be less than, inferior to', used with the

Again in the same chapter, in verse 45 Paul uses both *πρῶτος*⁴⁵ and *ἔσχατος* in the chronological sense. In verse 46 the *πρῶτος* of verse 45, clearly chronological, is used in a logical/chronological sequence with *ἔπειτα*

So, only a few verses after our text Paul twice structures his thought by the same use of *ἔπειτα*, *ἔπειτα* and *ἔσχατος* with undoubted chronological intent. Moreover, the definitive nature of the defeat of the last enemy, death, would seem to corroborate the judgment of G. Kittel concerning 1 Corinthians 15:8. ' "Ἐσχατος", he states, 'suggests the closing of a series, so that from the time of this *ἔσχατος* there can be no similar or equivalent events!'.⁴⁶

(f). The immediate qualifying term, *ἔκτρωμα*, confirms this chronological interpretation of *ἔσχατος*. We are not able here to develop this important point.⁴⁷ Suffice it to say, with the majority of scholars,⁴⁸ that the evidence suggests a unique abnormal birth rather than the existential notion of death in the midst of life, i.e. life in total dependence upon God, as Schütz wants to understand it.⁴⁹ The phrase, in the words of H. J. Schoeps, 'is intended to denote the abnormality of his experience of a call... one born out of due time'.⁵⁰ Two important details support this traditional

genitive, which both Paul (1 Cor. 12:24; 2 Cor. 11:5; 12:11) and Matthew (Mt. 19:20) know. But this is not germane to the present discussion. I am indebted to Dr Murray Harris for suggesting that I look at the synoptic parallels.

45. Note the use of *πρῶτος* in 1 Cor. 15:3. Cf. Mark 4:28.
46. Kittel, *TDNT* II, 697. See also A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 669: 'Usually *ἔσχατος* refers to more than two, the last of a series or last of all, like *ἐν ἑσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ* (John 11:24), *ἔσχατον δὲ πάντων* (1 Cor. 15:8)'.⁴⁶
47. See my forthcoming monograph which deals in much greater length with both this particular point and with the entire subject of Paul as the last apostle.
48. See Calvin, Godet, von Harnack, Bengel, Windisch, Lietzmann, J. Schneider, Fridrichsen, Allo and Barrett.
49. Schütz, *Paul* 104.
50. Schoeps, *Paul* 81-82, n.1.

judgment: (1) the definite article τῷ, suggesting uniqueness rather than paradigmatic experience and (2) the verb ὤφθη, in the aorist tense, pointing to the fundamentally chronological sense of the entire phrase. This verb ὤφθη leads us to the final and decisive reason for understanding ἔσχατος chronologically.

(g). The major flaw in Schütz's non-temporal interpretation of ἔσχατος is, quite simply, that syntactically it is virtually impossible. Ἐσχατον, according to the grammarians, is an adverb.⁵¹ In the form of the accusative (ἔσχατον) it cannot be anything other than an adverb. It cannot be an accusative identifying Paul as the direct object of the verb, because, if it were, ἔσχατος would have to be in the dative case (ἐσχάτῳ) since ὤφθη throughout the passage requires the dative. And since the form is not ἐσχάτῳ it may not be identified as an adjective defining Paul's life-style. Thus we must say that Schütz imposes upon this text a theological construction which is not supported in the least by grammar or syntax. The grammar dictates that we must take this form adverbially⁵² and adverbs modify verbs, not proper nouns or pronouns. In this case, ἔσχατον is an adverb modifying ὤφθη in the same way as the adverbs of time εἶτα and ἔπειτα modify ὤφθη in the preceding verses (5-7).⁵³ Thus ἔσχατον concerns Christ, the subject of the very ὤφθη.⁵⁴ It then concerns Christ's last appearance, the last of his specific acts in salvation history which establishes the apostolate and terminates the period of the appearances.

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51. So Dana and Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the New Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1957) 236. See also E. Fleury, *Morphologie historique de la langue grecque* (Paris, 1947) 236. Cf. A. Plummer, *1 Corinthians* 339 and F. Godet, *1 Corinthiens* 338.
52. Just as πρῶτον functions throughout the New Testament in adverbial form - see particularly in Paul, Rom. 1:8; 15:24; 1 Cor. 12:28; 1 Thes. 4:16; 1 Tim. 2:1 etc.
53. Since ἔσχατον is syntactically related to the other adverbs, if we do not take them as chronologically related and with Schütz press the qualitative distinction, we are virtually forced to arrive at the strange idea of a sort of hierarchy of being, which is clearly not the intent of Paul.
54. It is then surely not an adverb of manner, suggesting the idea of his least important act, but an adverb of time. This is supported by the judgment

If these arguments are correct, ἔσχατος cannot here mean 'least'. Its meaning should not be sought in relation to the use of the term in chapter 4,⁵⁵ but rather in its employment in *this very same chapter* where it occurs no fewer than three times⁵⁶ - in verse 26 (ἔσχατος ἐχθρός), in verse 45 (ὁ ἔσχατος Ἀδὰμ) and in verse 52 (ἡ ἐσχάτη σάλπιγξ). In every one of these cases there is the note of eschatological finality and uniqueness, the 'last', after which there is no other. Thus the chronological sequence⁵⁷ of the two prototypical Adams begins with the πρῶτος and ends with the ἔσχατος. There is no second or third Christ. Similarly, in the New Testament conception of last things, the defeat of the last enemy means there will be no more death,⁵⁸ and the sounding of the last trumpet heralds this definitive state of affairs.

Paul's phrase must therefore mean that the appearance granted him was chronologically the last. The implication is therefore that Paul is the last apostle, since to be an apostle, according to Paul, one must have seen the risen Lord.⁵⁹ But this leads us to consider the second major objection.

of A. T. Robertson (*Grammar* 516) that πάντων is a neuter plural. For it would then imply 'last of all the appearances'. In this case πάντων could not refer to all previously mentioned persons against which Paul sets his 'leastness'. He does this, in the next verse, using other unambiguous language. However, it must be added that the ambiguity surrounding the antecedent supposed by the term πάντων is sufficiently opaque to conclude that the author has sought to communicate in this regard a certain indefiniteness. In this case, πάντων would simply underscore the note of definitive lastness, which one can express so clearly in French, as does the *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible*, 'En tout dernier lieu ...'.

55. As Schütz (*Paul* 185-186) does exclusively. Even in 1 Cor. 4:9 the meaning 'last' cannot be set aside without question.

56. Surprisingly this is not proposed in the secondary literature.

57. See 1 Cor. 15:45-46: πρῶτος ... ἔσχατος ; ... πρῶτον ... ἔπειτα.

58. Rev. 21:4.

59. Regnstorff, *TDNT* I, 430. See also on this K. Kertelge, 'Apokalypsis Jesou Christou', *Neues Testament und*

III

A. *Objection 2: "Εσχάτος is Chronological but Circumstantial*

The proponents of this position argue with an appeal to common sense that Paul could not have known definitively that he was the last. In 1 Corinthians 15:8, therefore, the expression 'last of all' is a purely circumstantial statement without any theological importance. In this regard W. Marxsen's judgment is a model of scholarly moderation. At the beginning of his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 he notes the elements that 'can be established with some degree of certainty'. The first is that 'Paul obviously means to say that the appearance to him was the last of the resurrection appearances'.⁶⁰ But he then adds that other later appearances 'can neither be ruled out nor... definitely asserted'.⁶¹ Marxsen is in fact affirming that Paul definitely claims to be last but that ultimately he could not know. X. Léon-Dufour is less sure about what Paul affirms, since for him Paul is either claiming to be last of this particular list or *the* last, but he resolves his hesitation quite peremptorily: 'We would not dare opt for the latter interpretation'.⁶²

Kirche, ed. J. Gnilka (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 270; E. Ellis, *Prophecy* 105; A. Schlatter, *Die Geschichte des Christus* (1923) 532; A. Richardson, *Introduction* 322; F. F. Bruce, *TB* 19 (1968) 20; L. Cerfaux, *Le Chrétien* 107; H. Ridderbos, *Paul* 449; Rigaux, *Dieu* 343; P. Grelot, *Le ministère* 49; W. G. Kümmel, *Theology of the New Testament* 134; J. Bonsirven, *Évangile de Paul* 258; and in the commentaries see Conzelmann, Barrett, and Morris. J. A. Kirk appears to accept this principle in his article 'Apostleship since Rengstorff' (*NTS* 21 [1975] 362) but his failure to consider 1 Cor. 15:8 allows him to come to the conclusion that 'the same apostolic ministry in differing historical circumstances exists today' (264).

60. W. Marxsen, *Resurrection* 81.

61. *Ibid.* 95.

62. Léon-Dufour, *Resurrection* 94: 'Nous n'osons toutefois adopter cette dernière interprétation'. Unfortunately he does not tell us what reasons prevent him from 'daring'.

Goguel is the only scholar I have found who makes a serious, sustained case against the thesis I am proposing.⁶³ He contends that Paul's words do not imply that there would never be another appearance like that which he experienced. No, Paul is making a merely quantitative observation, a statement of fact (*constatation de fait*) not an affirmation of principle.⁶⁴ Paul simply does not know of any others at the moment.⁶⁵

B. Reply: ἔσχατος is *Principal* not *Circumstantial*

It would be virtually impossible to count the number of times that the adjective 'eschatological' has been applied to Pauline theology by modern New Testament scholarship. Consequently it comes as a surprise to discover that Paul uses the term ἔσχατος but six times, of which five occur in 1 Corinthians and four in the fifteenth chapter.⁶⁶ This does not mean that the emphasis of modern scholarship is wrong. The whole structure of Paul's thought confirms the modern analysis. But it would seem to indicate that each use of the word ἔσχατος is not 'innocent', and is rather charged with deep 'eschatological' significance. We have seen that this is the case in the other occurrences of ἔσχατος in 1 Corinthians 15. They refer to final definitive events in the history of redemption, indicating that we ought to expect as much of the ἔσχατος of verse 8.

63. M. Goguel, *La foi à la resurrection de Jésus dans le Christianisme primitif* (Paris, 1933) 241-272.

64. *Ibid.* 268.

65. *Ibid.* 249. Because of reasons of space we will not seek to answer Goguel's entire argument. Again the reader must consult our future publication. Very briefly, Goguel argues that the difference between the other ecstatic visions of Paul (Acts 16:6-10; 18:9-11; 22:17-21; 27:23-24; Gal. 2:2; 2 Cor. 12:2-4), like those of Stephen (Acts 7:55) and John of Revelation (Rev. 1:10), and the christophanies of 1 Cor. 15 'remains one of pure form' (271). I believe the case for a substantial difference can be satisfactorily made. It is expressed in a condensed but adequate form in the judgment of Kim (*Origin* 56; see also 71, 73), that the appearance of the risen Lord to Paul means that he is granted, in this experience, a proleptic vision of the parousia, and that such an experience is to be distinguished from those recounted in 2 Cor. 12 (see Kim, *Origin* 56 n.1).

66. 1 Cor. 4:9; 15:8,26,45,52; 2 Tim. 3:1.

This is not, of course, the major reason why one should believe that Paul is making a statement of theological principle rather than simply making a circumstantial or off-handed observation. In fact, major reasons abound, but because space does not permit I propose to mention each point only very briefly and to select but one for longer development.

(a). It should be noted that Paul's language is 'foundational', prophetic and credal: foundational, because what he says is that in which the Corinthians stand and by which they are being saved (vv. 1-2); prophetic, because Paul is stating the Gospel which he received not only from the other apostles, but also directly from the Lord (vv. 1-3; cf. Gal. 1:11-12); and credal, as all scholars admit,⁶⁷ though it must be noted that in terms of syntactical structure the creed includes verse 8, which no doubt Paul has added. In sum, the last appearance to Paul is included in what Paul delivered ⁶⁸ ἐν πρώτοις, as of first importance for the Gospel.

(b). Paul's language is specific and affirmative. He knows *all the apostles* (πάντες οἱ ἀπόστολοι, v.7), and presents himself as the abortion (v.8), the least of the apostles. These formal aspects of Paul's language are corroborated by its material sense. Why does Paul go to such lengths to include himself in the creed and with such specific references? It is because behind this language is his view of redemptive history. This view is to be seen in:

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67. For a bibliography see H. Conzelmann, *Théologie* 79 n.1 and W. Schmithals, *Apostle* 74. See also S. Kim (*Origin* 70), for whom the tradition contained in 1 Cor. 15:3ff. '... is in fact a normative one'. Kim enlarges upon this. 'The normative character of the tradition is implied in Paul's language in 1 Cor. 15:1f.' (*Origin* 70 n.3). On this see also P. Stuhlmacher *Das Paulinische Evangelium I* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) 69, for whom the γνώριζω of verse 1 expresses the idea of the proclamation of an eschatological event, as in Dan. 2:23 ('... Ausdruck für die Kundgabe eines eschatologischen Tatbestandes').
68. On this see P. Stuhlmacher (*Evangelium* 275) who has rightly seen that, according to 1 Cor. 15:1-11, Paul's experience is constitutive of the knowledge in which the community must stand.

(c). the stated relationship of Paul to the apostolate as its last member, and the implicit comparison with Peter as its first. Peter, who appears first in Paul's list, and is known elsewhere as ὁ πρῶτος (Mt. 10:2)⁶⁹ may well be played off against Paul as last in 1 Corinthians 15, and indeed Paul does so in Galatians 2:6-10. But as Galatians shows, this is not a question of persons, but of apostolates, apostolates to Israel and to the Gentiles.

(d). Paul's prophetic declaration concerning his lastness stems, I believe, from his conviction that this is predicted in Scripture. The language of v.10, οὐ κενή and ἐκπόλαισα, constitutes a direct allusion to Isaiah 49:4. With many scholars,⁷⁰ I consider that

69. Cf. Lk. 24:34 which W. Marxsen (*Resurrection* 81) finds 'terminologically reminiscent' of 1 Cor. 15:5.
70. To my knowledge the first to propose this was G. Sass, 'Zur Bedeutung von δοῦλος bei Paulus', *ZNW* 40 (1941) 24-32. But the major step forward was made by L. Cerfaux, 'Saint Paul et le "Serviteur de Dieu" d'Isaïe', *St Ans* 27-28 (1951) 353ff. Other Catholic scholars have since added to this fruitful line of research, of whom one may note J. Giblet, 'St. Paul, serviteur de Dieu et apôtre de Jésus-Christ', *Vie Spirituelle*, 388 (1953) 244-265; A. Bertrangs, 'La vocation des Gentils chez St. Paul: Exégèse et herméneutique pauliniennes des citations vétérotestamentaires', *ETL* 30 (1954) 391-415; D. M. Stanley, 'The Theme of the Servant of Yahweh in primitive Christian Soteriology and its Transformation by St. Paul', *CBQ* 16 (1954) 385-425; P. E. Langevin, 'St. Paul, Prophète des Gentils', *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 26 (1970) 8; C. M. Martini, 'Alcuni termini litterari di II Cor. 4:6 e i racconti della conversione di san Paolo negli Atti', in *Analecta Biblica* XVII-XVIII (1963) I, 461-74; A. Kerrigan, 'Echoes of Themes from the Servant Songs in Pauline Theology, in *Studiorum Paulinorum Congressus Internationalis Catholica*, *Analecta Biblica* XVII-XVIII, II (Rome, 1963) 217-228. On the Protestant side one may cite J. Munck, *Paul* 25-30; K. L. Fitzgerald, *A Study of the Servant Concept in the Writings of St. Paul* (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960); T. Holtz, 'Zum Selbstverständnis des Apostels Paulus', *TL* 91 (1966) 320-330; P. Stuhlmacher, *Evangelium* 73; F. F. Bruce, 'Paul and

the servant's mission constitutes the model for his apostolate, but I believe one should go further and see it as Paul's model for the entire early Christian apostolate. The servant's mission has two stages. In the first stage the servant goes to Israel and meets with failure (Is. 49:4-6a). In the second and last stage the servant is sent to the Gentiles (Is. 49:6) who eventually bring about the turning of Israel (Is. 49:23) and the consummation. This Isaianic eschatology clearly stands behind Romans 9-11, and more particularly Paul's view of apostolic history. The original apostles are sent to the circumcision (Rom. 10:14ff; cf. Gal. 2:7)⁷¹ but are met by a 'disobedient and obstinate people' (Rom. 10:21). Like the servant, Paul is then sent (last of all) to the Gentiles, and like the servant amongst the nations meets with success (1 Cor. 15:10), and reserves the hope that through this Gentile mission Israel will accept and thus bring in the

Paulinism', *Vox Evangelica* 7 (1971) 11; J.-F. Collange, *Énigmes de la deuxième épître de Paul aux Corinthiens* (Cambridge: CUP, 1972) 137; C. J. A. Hickling, 'Paul's Reading of Isaiah', in *Studia Biblica* 1978, ed. E. A. Livingstone (JSNT Supplement Series 3, Sheffield, 1980) 215-216. (Though this author feels one 'goes too far... perhaps' in thinking that Paul saw himself as fulfilling the prophecies concerning the Servant, he does admit the 'particular personal significance' of Is. 49:6 for Paul, and notes that Paul uses Is. 49:1,4 in relation to his own mission); and most recently W. L. Lane, 'Covenant: The Key to Paul's Conflict with Corinth', *TB* 33 (1982) 8-9; Kim, *Origin* 10, n.4, 92,97, n.1; and J. Beker, *Paul* 115. E. Best ('The Revelation to Evangelise ...', 20) believes that 1 Cor. 15:8 suggests that Paul gives himself a special position in regard to the Gentiles, even though the text does not mention them. But this does not take into account the οὐ κενή and ἐκοπύσσα of verse 10.

71. On this see the excellent exegesis of J. Munck, *Christ and Israel* 89-104.

consummation, 'life from the dead' (Rom. 11:14, 25-26). The eschatological drama continues to play itself out after the death of the apostles but everything has been ineluctably set in motion by the completing of the original apostolic mission in the sending out to the Gentiles of Paul, the last apostle (cf. Lk. 21:14; Mt. 24:14).

It is this exceedingly simple and profoundly Scriptural eschatology of the period of grace preceding the parousia that enables Paul solemnly to declare that, as apostle to the Gentiles, he is the last of the apostles of Jesus Christ.

(e). The last point I wish to make seeks to confirm this biblical-theological analysis of Paul's thought by means of a terminological comparison.

Though originally an aristocratic Jew, Paul the Christian apostle finally comes to glory in his loss of all things and even in the abuse heaped upon him. One motivating factor for this is his ministry among the Gentiles, whose very name is synonymous with abuse.⁷² He who now becomes all things to all men can become an outcast in order to win the outcasts. Paul bears the insult, apostolic 'abortion', and admits that he is not worthy to be called an apostle (1 Cor. 15:9). He himself calls the Gentiles 'not a people' (Rom. 9:25-26; 10:19) and a 'wild olive shoot' (Rom. 11:17) unnaturally (*παρὰ φύσιν*, Rom. 11:24) grafted on to the legitimate natural tree. We see here a terminological parallelism between Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, and the Gentiles themselves. If Paul is an unnatural, apparently illegitimate member of the apostolate through whom God shows his grace (1 Cor. 15:10-11), the same can be said of the Gentiles who, against all normal expectations, become the means for the salvation of Israel, the 'natural' people of God.

If this parallelism is discernible, can we find a trace of it in the term *ἔσχατος*? In other words, can Paul be confident in proclaiming himself the last apostle because he knows that this same epithet is applied to the Gentiles?

72. See Matthew 6:7 and on the subject in general, *SB III*, 139; W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948) 60; E. P. Sanders, *Paul* 89 n.16. S. Kim (*Origin* 32f., 46) has rightly seen that for Paul, the blameless 'rightwing Pharisee', to go to the Gentiles, was to bear their curse.

In his extant letters Paul does not use ἔσχατος of the Gentiles, but he does come remarkably close when, for instance, he says that the Gospel is for the Jew πρῶτον and then for the Greek (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-10; cf. Acts 13:46), no doubt implicitly referring to the eschatology that will become explicit in chapters 9-11,⁷³ and when he calls the Gentiles οἱ μακρόν (Eph. 2:17), for in biblical perspective, the last in space are the last in time.

Moreover, elsewhere in the church of Paul's day the identification of the Gentiles as last (ἔσχατος) appears to be explicit. J. Jeremias's important work *Jesus' Promise to the Nations* (1958) has made an excellent case for accepting the notion of the temporal priority of Israel and the future in-gathering of the Gentiles as an authentic part of the teaching of Jesus. We simply will be content to note the literary phenomena without arguing this point. First, πρῶτον in Mark 7:27 is on the lips of the Gentile Syro-Phoenician woman implying, perhaps, an ἔσχατος for the nations. This idea comes to the surface in Matthew 20:1-16. The parable is decidedly chronological. The invitations to work go out throughout the day right until the eleventh hour. Then, interestingly, the parable recounts a dispute between those hired first and those hired last, because the master has paid all the same wages. Noteworthy for our purposes is the juxtaposition of the two expressions οἱ πρῶτοι and οἱ ἔσχατοι on no less than four occasions in the space of eight verses.⁷⁴ The question that one might raise is whether the parable of Jesus is intended to express the timeless truth of justification by faith or describe the particular character of the history of redemption. No doubt both are true. The history of the Jew and the Gentile is a particular example of the Gospel principle. But also the *heilsgeschichtliche* aspect is evident in the notion of the labourers of the eleventh hour, for they are invited at the end of the day,⁷⁵ and in the future

73. On this see the commentators, especially E. Käsemann, O. Michel and C. E. B. Cranfield.

74. Verses 8, 10-11 and 16.

75. So K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (London, 1977) 38, who compares these labourers with the Gentiles 'who come in at the last moment and get the same pay'. 'This', suggests Stendahl, 'is not so different from Paul's perspective in Rom. 9-11.' See also P. Bonnard, *L'Évangile selon Matthieu* (Paris:

reference in the saying of v.16, 'the last will be (ἔσονται)⁷⁶ first and the first last'⁷⁷

It would appear that this saying of v.16 firmly belongs to the parable that precedes it,⁷⁸ for it manifestly picks up the central terms of the story (οἱ πρῶτου and οἱ ἔσχατοι in order to restate what will be true in the future age. It would, therefore, appear that in essence the saying of v.16 had a salvation-historical intent.⁷⁹ This judgment would appear to be confirmed by the use to which Luke puts this saying in 13:22-30. In the prior Lucan context (13:18-21) there are two parables concerning the growth of the kingdom, of which the first contains an allusion to the Gentiles.⁸⁰ The kingdom will spread to include the Gentiles. This note is taken up again in vv.28-30. Having announced that 'you'⁸¹ will be cast out to have no part in the

Delachaux et Niestlé, 1963) 293, who sees the application made to the Gentiles and speaks in this regard of the 'paulinisme matthéen'.

76. I. H. Marshall (*The Gospel of Luke* [Exeter: Paternoster, 1978] 568), speaking of this saying and its use in Luke 13:30, judges that 'the future ἔσονται indicates the reversal of places that occurs in the age to come'.
77. A further argument in favour of the *heilsgeschichtliche* intent of the parable is the parallel between, on the one hand, the 'murmuring' of οἱ πρῶτου (Mt. 20: 11) and their 'envy' (translation of Mt. 20:15, ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς σου πονηρὸς NIV, proposed by the NIV) upon seeing οἱ ἔσχατοι receive the same wages as they, and, on the other hand, the 'jealousy' of Israel in seeing salvation come to the Gentiles (Rom. 11:11, 14; cf. 10:19). Moreover, can this be automatically put down to a Paulinism, since Paul cites an Old Testament prophecy (Dt. 32:21) which predates Paul, Matthew and Jesus?
78. So Bonnard, *Matthieu* 291.
79. This is not to suggest that it was not used also to express a general gospel principle - see Mt. 19:30; cf. Mk. 10:31. Hence the judgment of Marshall (*Luke* 568) that it is an 'isolated logion of general application'. However, even in the two texts here cited the eschatological future is very much in view.
80. As the commentators note.
81. Marshall, *Luke* 566: 'The Jews who had companied with Jesus during his earthly ministry'.

eschatological banquet, Jesus then speaks of 'people' who will come 'from the east and west and north and south' (v.29) to take their place at table with the patriarchs and faithful of Israel (v.28). This would appear to be an extremely clear reference to the Gentiles,⁸² not diaspora Jews, especially since Matthew's precision (8:12) sets the 'sons of the kingdom' in contrast to the πολλοί who will come in. Luke then proceeds to cite the saying 'there are those who are ἔσχατοι who will be πρώτοι, and πρώτοι who will be ἔσχατοι'. The identification of the Gentiles as ἔσχατοι, already strongly indicated in the use of the saying in Matthew 20:16, now in Luke is made virtually certain.⁸³ In fact, Luke and Matthew so corroborate each other on this point that one may not say that this emphasis is distinctively Lucan. Luke does, however, develop it in his second volume, Acts.

We single out a crucial moment in his narrative where in 13:47 the Paul of Acts, in perfect harmony with the Paul of the epistles, cites Isaiah 49:6. Πρῶτον is applied to Israel. 'It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first (πρῶτον) to you'. And in the face of their obduracy Paul turns to the Gentiles, taking the servant as his model. But this very citation of the Septuagint associates the Gentiles with οἱ ἔσχατοι. This first/last formula seems to have gone unnoticed, but when one sets out the text in Hebrew poetic parallelism, 'the Gentiles' (ἐθνῶν) appears as synonymous with 'the end of the earth' ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς).

τέθεικά σε εἰς φῶς ἐθνῶν
τοῦ εἶναί σε εἰς ὠτηρίαν ἕως ἐσχάτου τῆς γῆς. ⁸⁴

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82. *Ibid.* 568. 'The subject of the verse is of course the Gentiles...' against the suggestion of Diaspora Jews made by N. Q. King (cited in Marshall) and A. R. C. Leaney, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (London: Black, 1966) 209.
83. In favour of this interpretation are J. Weiss (and W. Bousset) (*Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments I* [Göttingen, 1917] 476) and W. Grundmann (*Das Evangelium nach Lukas* [Berlin, 1966] 286-287), both cited in Marshall (*Luke* 568) who also appears to share this opinion.
84. E. Best ('The Revelation to Evangelise' 3) comes close to this proposal when, in commenting on Acts 1:8, he observes that the reference of the phrase 'ends of the earth' is 'to the Gentiles, for if Rome is intended it represents the centre of the Gentile world. The phrase itself is derived from Is. 49:6 and is used again in Acts 13:47 in relation to the Gentile mission'

The terminological evidence indicates that (1) in certain early church circles the Gentiles were known as *the last*, οἱ ἔσχατοι, and (2) the Paul of Acts explicitly associates ἔσχατος with the Gentiles. This evidence so agrees with Paul's own eschatology and his own meditation on Isaiah 49:1-6 that the identification must not have been far from his own mind when he declared himself the *last* apostle.

IV

Before ending this study I should like to refer briefly to a certain number of exegetical and theological implications.

(A). Paul's claim that he occupies the last place in the apostolic ministry of the end times would suggest that he is conscious of being called to bring the apostolic gospel to completion. Evidence for this may be sought (1) in the particularly Pauline phrases τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου ('my gospel')⁸⁵ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν ('our gospel'),⁸⁶ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ εὐαγγελισάμην ὑμῖν ('the gospel which I announced to you')⁸⁷ τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τὸ εὐαγγελισθῆν ὑπ' ἐμοῦ ('the gospel which is preached by me')⁸⁸ and τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ὃ κηρύσσω ('the gospel which I preach').⁸⁹ These phrases would appear to indicate a special relationship between the Gospel and the last apostle, and thus a special relationship between his gospel and the gospel that preceded him.

(2) This relationship would appear to be one of completion. If Paul's gospel, as he says, is the 'gospel of the uncircumcision' (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς ἀκροβυστίας, Gal. 2:7), for which he was granted a special revelation of the mystery (Eph. 3:3) concerning the Gentiles (Eph. 3:8), and if according to Isaiah 49:6 (as we have seen), Matthew 24:14, Luke 21:24 and Romans 11:25 the preaching to the Gentiles is the last event before the end, it would appear that the revelation concerning the Gentiles would complete the apostolic gospel for the period preceding the end. (3) A trace of this thinking may well

85. Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8.

86. 2 Cor. 4:3; 1 Thes. 1:5; 2 Thes. 2:14.

87. 1 Cor. 15:1; 2 Cor. 11:7.

88. Gal. 1:11.

89. Gal. 2:2. Compare also the similar expressions in Gal. 2:7 and Eph. 3:6; and on this point in general see G. Friedrich, 'εὐαγγέλιον' *TDNT* II 233.

be preserved in Colossians 1:24 where Paul states that he has been made a minister in order to complete (πληρῶσαι) the word of God. Against the majority opinion according to which Paul is merely referring to geographical exhaustiveness, as in Romans 15:19 and 2 Timothy 4:17, R. E. Brown offers the following interesting judgment, with which we gladly concur: 'Among the new elements is the author's insistence on completing the message of God, in showing the full glory of the mysterious divine plan.'⁹⁰ We would merely demur in calling this insistence 'new', for we have found it to be already implicit in Paul's claim to be last.

(B). Paul's reason for writing 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 becomes exceedingly clear. He is seeking to legitimize his extended teaching on the nature of resurrection in verses 12-58 (1) by showing it to be in essential agreement with apostolic tradition in general (vv. 3aff., 11)⁹¹, and (2) by demonstrating that he

90. R. E. Brown, *The Semitic Background of the Term "Mystery" in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968), 53. An echo of this may well be present in 2 Tim. 4:17, which according to E. Best ('The Revelation to Evangelise' 26) is a particularly 'clear expression of the uniqueness of Paul's Gentile apostolate'. The phrase πάντα τὰ ἔθνη , 'all the Gentiles', suggests that all are 'representatively present in Rome'. Further 'what the Gentiles hear is not Paul but the kerygma from Paul'. I understand this comment of Best to mean that the text is describing not an incidental personal experience, but a solemn public divine declaration of the Gospel as it concerns the Gentiles as a people. Finally, one may note Best's comment concerning the verb πληροφóρῶ, with which I find myself in entire agreement. According to Best (*ibid.*) this verb indicates that Paul is a unique instrument, for 'the word carries the sense of completion. In Rome the kerygma to the Gentiles is brought to fruition; Paul's special position as their apostle is complete ... since many have preached and will preach to Gentiles, his uniqueness lies in the revelation given to him of their place in the church rather than in the preaching itself'.
91. So Barrett, Conzelmann and Morris.

belongs to the apostolic circle from which this teaching arises,⁹² in order, as R. von der Osten-Sacken shows, to present himself as a legitimate exegete of the tradition.⁹³ Against Schütz we must say that Paul is not just concerned about the authority and power of his apostolate, but also about its legitimacy. This is why he claims to be the last apostle. Schütz's general thesis would thus depend upon the truth of this specific affirmation concerning these verses: 'What interests (Paul)... is the nature and function of the apostle, not the size of the circle'.⁹⁴ But our exegesis has sought to show that Paul's ἔσχατος brings that circle to its close.

(C). If Paul's ἔσχατος closes the apostolic circle, then we believe with Osten-Sacken that the deaths of the apostles represent a theological problem⁹⁵ and implicitly raise the principle of the closing of the canon.⁹⁶ The notion of a unique apostolic ministry limited to the time of the incarnation carries within it the idea of completed revelation as norm or canon for the church.

(D). The completion implicit in Paul's ἔσχατος suggests, against the majority opinion, that the idea of guarding the deposit of the faith expressed throughout the Pastorals, is a fundamentally Pauline notion.

(E). The closure with Paul of the apostolic circle causes grave difficulties for all forms of the theory of a continuing apostolic ministry - from the Pentecostal/charismatic teaching, which generally uses the term

92. This apostolic circle 'gehört auf die Seite des Evangeliums; so R. von der Osten-Sacken, 'Die Apologie des Paulinischen Apostolats in I Kor. 15:1-11', ZNW 64 (1973) 260; cf. O. Cullmann, *La Tradition* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1953) 32: '... l'apostolat n' appartient pas au temps de l'Eglise mais à celui de l'incarnation du Christ'.

93. *Ibid.* Osten-Sacken (see previous note) refers to K. Holl and A. von Harnack, and in general see Becker (*Paul* 5-6) who affirms that to be an apostle for Paul means to be 'a Christ-appointed interpreter of the Gospel', '... a direct mediator of the gospel and its authoritative interpreter'.

94. Schütz, *Paul* 101.

95. Osten-Sacken, 'Die Apologie' 261.

96. *Ibid.*

'apostle' in a somewhat less than Pauline fashion,⁹⁷ to the Roman Catholic notion of true apostolic succession. This latter position rests on at least two lines of biblical-theological argument. (1) The traditional argument based on the dominical word to Peter in

97. As a matter of fact, there appear to be two divergent positions on the apostleship in modern-day Pentecostal/charismatic theology. The one which deals rather loosely with Paul's terminology can be represented by Ralph Shallis in his book *Explosion de vie* (Editions Farel, Fontenay-sous-Bois, 1979, 289) who encourages believers to seek the apostolic ministry. '*Veux-tu devenir apôtre? Dieu ne demande pas mieux!*' But three conditions are imposed: '*Une vision de Christ qui change ta vie; un travail pionnier efficace en terre païenne; une acceptation sans limite de la souffrance*'. However, Shallis recognizes that Paul is in '*une catégorie spéciale*' similar to that of the Twelve, and that he received '*une vision extraordinaire... même... unique*'.

If this position allows a good deal of ambiguity, the other does not. To be fair to Pentecostalism in general, it would seem that only certain fringe groups adopt teaching such as that represented in particularly clear and unambiguous form in the Apostolic Church, and in the short study by J. E. Worsfold, *The Catholic and Apostolic ministry of the Apostle and Prophet: The Paul and Silas Ministry* (Katartizo Communications, P.O. Box 196, Paraparamu, New Zealand, 1981). Worsfold proposes that the church rediscover the apostolic ministry as it has been understood in the Catholic Apostolic Church and in the movement associated with Edward Irving, under whose influence, in 1833, 'twelve apostles (were) called and separated to a universal yet delimited "herald ministry"' (p.14). With the death of the 'last apostle' in 1901, the movement entered into a 'Time of Silence', but it is this notion of apostleship that has been 'bequeathed to the Apostolic Church concerning future apostolic and prophetic ministry' (p.16).

Matthew 16:17, and (2) that proposed by John Henry Newman⁹⁸ and recently taken up by Claude Tresmontant,⁹⁹ according to which revelation extends from Abraham to Christ (and by implication the Gospels) whereas Paul begins the period of 'dogmatic development' (1 Cor. 11:22; 15:3) which the church of Rome continues. Nevertheless both arguments are obliged to ignore Paul's claim to be the last apostle. So to Cullmann's argument from silence that nowhere in the New Testament do we read of apostles naming other apostles¹⁰⁰ we may add the explicit statement of Paul to be the last of the apostles. Against Newman and Tresmontant we should say that 1 Corinthians 15:8 presents a Paul conscious of being not the church's first developer of doctrine but rather its last-called recipient of the foundational revelation of the gospel.¹⁰¹

(F). The element of completion implicit in Paul's ἔσχατος militates against a growing tradition in modern New Testament studies which posits an initial situation of the theological pluralism in primitive Christianity. James Robinson takes as his starting point the primacy of 'historic consciousness' which does away with 'monolithic divine revealed truth' and provides as the true object of New Testament research the history of dogma, the process in the history of ideas.¹⁰² This process is marked by diversity and conflict. For Bultmann the conflict is between Paul and John on the one hand and Luke/Acts on the other; for Käsemann the New Testament is an example of the debates marking early Christianity.¹⁰³ This analysis has recently been extended by François Vouga. Following the lines drawn by H. Koester in his article, 'One Jesus and Four Gospels',¹⁰⁴ Vouga finds five competing groups in the pre-Pauline church. His conclusion, based upon the

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98. J. H. Newman, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* [1845] (London: Sheed and Ward, 1960) 50.
99. C. Trésmontant, *Le Christ hébreu* (Paris: O.E.I.L., 1983) 215.
100. Cullmann, *Tradition* 32: 'Les apôtres n'ont pas institué d'autres apôtres, mais des évêques'.
101. Beker, *Paul* 6.
102. Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories* 10.
103. See F. Vouga 'Bulletin du NT', *ETR* 4 (1983) 540.
104. H. Koester, 'One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels', *HTR* 61 (1968) 203-247.

conviction that at its beginning Christianity was marked by diversity rather than a fundamental unity,¹⁰⁵ is that the one apostolic church never existed. The latter is a nostalgic picture projected by Luke's theologically tendentious history, and is to be rejected.¹⁰⁶

The numerous difficulties inherent in this reconstruction of primitive Christianity can be exemplified in particular by Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15:1-11. His appeal to common tradition (vv. 3ff.), to the specific events constituting the gospel, and to the kerygma preached by all (v.11) constitutes an unmistakable affirmation of fundamental original unity. His employment of ἔσχατος with its implicit notion of continuity and completion renders this unity even more evident, so much so that to maintain his position Vouga would have to accuse not only Luke of tendentiousness, but also Paul. Certainly it could be done, but it would render an already highly speculative reconstruction even less convincing. No doubt one must affirm the presence of God in the process of history, but 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 and Paul's chronological ἔσχατος also declare history to be the locus of God's specific acts of redemption recounted in the Gospel as a unified and coherent divine message of salvation.¹⁰⁷

Our study has led us to believe that in presenting himself as the last apostle Paul is in no way engaging in off-handed or circumstantial opinion. Rather the apostle is making a solemn claim concerning his apostolic ministry that is grounded in the revelation of salvation history and the part he would play in it. This understanding of his role is accorded to Paul by the risen Lord at the time of his call, and confirmed to him through his Spirit-guided meditation on OT Scripture.

105. F. Vouga, 'Bulletin' 540. This original diversity is pushed to its most extreme formulation by E. Trocmé (*Jésus de Nazareth vu par les témoins de sa vie* [Neuchâtel: Delachaux et Niestlé, 1972]) who posits Jesus' own intent to foster different and conflicting images of himself - this, in spite of Mark 8:27-30.

106. F. Vouga, 'Pour une géographie théologique des christianismes primitifs', *ETR* 59 (1974) 149.

107. On this see E. E. Ellis in the preface to L. Goppelt's book *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) xvii-xix.

Consequently 1 Corinthians 15:8 provides another example of the inability of the one-sided approach of existential theology to render justice to the whole of Pauline thought. The chronological element will simply not go away by demythologizing it into the 'religious' category. Such a hermeneutical legerdemain merely produces an absurd redundancy in Paul's language - both ἔσχατος and ἐλαχίστος finally mean 'least'.

On the contrary, the syntax and theological context of this text call for a more nuanced interpretation where all the richness of the insights concerning the existential response of faith is seen to be mysteriously but surely associated with the divine plan of redemptive history. Paul is not just addressing himself to the subjective side of faith ('the gospel in which you stand'). He is equally concerned for its objective content ('Christ died and rose according to the Scriptures and appeared to Cephas and last of all to me'). Thus once again we are brought before the great mystery of the relationship of human responsibility to divine sovereignty. But only by holding them together can one do justice to this text, to Paul in general, and indeed to the whole of biblical faith.