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Transforming Images of Paul: A Review Essay of Alan Segal, *Paul the Convert*

Jewish scholars have produced much stimulating work on the New Testament, and their contribution to scholarship is thankfully accepted by their Christian colleagues. Dr Segal's study of Paul is among the most important of recent books on the apostle and deserves the extended treatment which it receives here from Dr Newman of Palm Beach Atlantic College.

In the post-Bultmann era, New Testament scholars and those who study Christian origins have felt their task to be very much like all the king's horses and all the king's men in the Humpty Dumpty nursery rhyme. What was pushed off the wall and cracked into a thousand disparate pieces before, during and just after World War II, scholarship has tried to put back together again. The attempts at reconstructive surgery have not proved too successful. The discipline of Christian origins, at least in some quarters, now appears on the verge of admitting defeat and thus celebrating its brokenness.

It is refreshing, then, to read a book such as Alan Segal's *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale, 1990; xvi + 368 pp.; $29.95). For in his reading of Paul, Segal, in contrast to the prevailing winds of 'hermeneutical suspicion,' provides a positive reading of ancient texts. However, to think that Segal has somehow returned or recaptured the naiveté of a by-gone decade is to miss the breadth of Segal's learning. By prudent use of methods developed in other disciplines—chiefly sociology, social-psychology, and structural anthropology—Segal links together material from the Jewish Scriptures, Jewish literature from the Second Temple period, the New Testament and the rabbinic material from the second century to argue for his rather coherent reading of Paul.

I

Departing from traditional paradigms, Segal argues that Paul ought to be connected with what preceded him: Paul should be understood against the grid of a Jewish mystical-apocalyptic heritage. Only when their antiquity is specifically confirmed by Christianity (or other early Jewish writings) should the rabbinic writings be employed as an interpretive grid for Paul. Since conversion-transformational language is an integral part of Jewish mystical-apocalyptic tradition and since Paul is the only Jewish mystic to leave confessional writings concerning his mystical praxis, Segal revalues Paul's conversion experience(s) and the effects of conversion upon Paul's theological strategy. Segal also reappraises what it means to belong to a community, particularly a Pauline Christian one, in the first century. In short, in his *Paul the Convert*, Segal provides a strong revisionist reading of both Paul and the disciplines of Pauline studies, a reading which enlightens and transforms—and all this from a Jewish scholar.[1]

Segal divides the eight chapters of *Paul the Convert* into three parts: 'Paul the Jew,' 'Paul the Convert' and 'Paul the Apostle.' To these eight chapters, Segal appends a summary of recent sociological research into the phenomenon of conversion, a far-ranging and quite full set of bibliographic notes, and indices of both scriptural literature and subject references. On nearly every page, Segal relentlessly pursues the significance of conversion, the change of community, for understanding the great apostle.

In chapter one, 'Paul and Luke,' Segal seeks to rescue the language of conversion from disdain and to demonstrate the appropriateness of conversion language for studying Paul. To do so, Segal must first address the differing accounts of Paul's conversion contained in Acts and in Paul's letters.

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[1] Segal's most important contributions to the study of Jewish, Christian and Gnostic religion of the first two centuries can be traced in the following: *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (SJLA 25; the Leiden: Brill, 1977); with N. A. Dahl, 'Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God,' *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 10 (1979): 1–28; 'Pre-Existence and Incarnation: A Response to Dunn and Holladay,' *Semeia* 30 (1985): 83–97; *Rebecca's Children: Judaism and Christianity in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1986); *The Other Judaisms of Late Antiquity* (BJS 127; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987). Cf. other Jewish studies of Paul, Joseph Klausner, *From Jesus to Paul* (New York: Macmillan, 1943); H. J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961); Samuel Sandmel, *The Genius of Paul: A Study in History* (New York: Schocken, 1970); Richard Rubenstein *My Brother Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

Though scholarship has detected differences in the two accounts, Paul is still often read in light of Luke. Luke's Paul is converted by a sudden, dramatic light-filled experience of the risen Lord and is immediately commissioned to be the apostle to the gentiles. Unlike Luke, Paul himself never describes the event outright, but simply uses the language of prophetic 'call' to describe his 'mission.' For Paul, conversion is not nearly so dramatic as Luke styles it.

Segal explains the differences between Luke and Paul in accordance with the sociological categories of peripheral and central power. Paul understood that he was peripheral to the power structure in Jerusalem, and he thus appealed to his conversion for legitimizing authority. By the time of Luke, the figure of Paul had moved to a more central position within church tradition, and thus the conversion did not represent a bid for power but a typical model for all gentiles to follow.

Though certainly exercising some creative talent in reconstructing Paul's conversion, Luke, according to Segal, did depend on good tradition—both Jewish and Pauline. Luke did not fabricate Paul's encounter with God. Luke modeled Paul's conversion after the extraordinarily vivid experiences of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and especially, Ezekiel. According to Luke, Paul saw the Glory of God (Kavod), God's man-like appearance, and this theophany of Glory formed the basis of the great apostle's mission. Paul himself styles his conversion in such language. According to both Luke and Paul, Paul's Christianity originated from his encounter with God's Kavod in Jesus.

To affirm, with Paul and Luke, that God's Kavod appeared and is responsible for conversion immediately raises eyebrows. However, both Luke and Paul, though in different ways, demonstrate the legitimacy of using 'conversion' language. By defining conversion as a change in community, Segal avails himself of modern sociological research in his analysis of Paul. Sociological research shows that a highly committed convert learns to interpret his/her transformational experiences from the community over a long period of time. Thus, Segal, having distanced Paul from the dramatic, light-filled experience of Luke, is able to study Paul from a modern sociological perspective. For Paul, conversion is a change in community which is expressed in spiritual, transformational language. Paul learned to interpret his change in community— i.e., his movement from Pharisaism to Christianity —through a process of education and mission in a gentile community.

The next task Segal sets for himself, executed in chapter two ('Paul's Ecstasy'), is to establish the religious background of

Paul's conversion and to locate Paul squarely in a tradition of
Jewish religious experiences.[2] Paul was both a mystic and a
convert; and, according to Segal, one is no better understood than
the other. Complicating matters even further, Paul was an
apocalypticist. The confluence of mystical and apocalyptic trans-
formational language and the move into a highly cohesive
sectarian community accounts for Paul's construal of Christianity.

In Galatians 1 and 2 Corinthians 12, Paul describes his
mystical experiences like any other first-century Jewish mysta-
goge (especially in his humble use of pseudonymity). Paul was a
practicing mystic who experienced many revelations similar to
his conversion experience. Certainly Paul, as a Pharisee, would
have been sympathetic to such mystical-apocalyptic perspectives,
especially at the points of angelic mediation and resurrection,
ideas which are associated with mystic praxis and tradition of
the Second Temple period.

According to Segal, the pervasive influence and continual re-
valuation of Ezekiel 1, God's appearance of the man-like Kavod,
forms the most immediate background for understanding Paul's
experience. Segal chronicles the well-documented tradition-
history of God's Kavod to Ezekiel by pointing to Philo, 1 Enoch
14, the 'Visions' ('Parables') of Enoch, 2 Enoch, 4QSibbSabb,
Ascension of Isaiah, 2 Baruch, and 3 Enoch. Segal also demon-
strates how ecstatic, mystical praxis, in either a descent ('theo-
phany,' 'prophetic call') or ascent ('throne vision') pattern,
functions to disclose apocalyptic knowledge.[3]

Though such heavenly journeys seem improbable to the modern
mind, Segal argues that Paul describes his conversion by use of
such mystical-apocalyptic language (e.g., 'form,' 'image,' 'light/
darkness,' 'glory,' 'being in Christ'): the chief angel of God, God's
man-like Kavod, appeared; Paul identified this manlike figure as
Jesus; and through mystical ecstasy, the apostle was transformed
into conformity with the image of the resurrected Christ. Paul
discovered God's Glory in the face of Jesus. Conversion led the
apostle to view the whole of the Christian life as *metamorphosis*,
i.e., transformation into Christ.

Chapter three investigates 'Conversion in Paul's Society.' In the
ancient world—curiously like the modern—there were many
religious choices for those who wished to be Jewish; each of the
choices represented differing degrees of sectarianism, group

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[2] Cf. Alan F. Segal, 'Paul and Ecstasy,' *SBLSP* 25 (1986) 555–80.
[3] See further, Alan F. Segal, 'Heavenly Ascent fin Hellenistic Judaism, Early
Christianity and their Environment,' *ANRW* II 23.2 (1980) 1333–94.

cohesion, and openness to Hellenism. At one end of the spectrum stood Philo's brand of liberal Hellenistic Judaism which did not require a high level of commitment or group cohesion; in fact, liberal Hellenistic Judaism could hardly be considered an identifiable group at all. At the other end of the spectrum stood the Essenes, a community comprised only of Jewish 'converts,' who were both highly committed and possessed an intense group cohesion. Pharisees and Sadducees occupied the middle-ground —accepting of gentiles, but still maintaining varying degrees of insistence upon Jewish identity markers, circumcision and the ceremonial laws.

For gentiles who wanted to become Jewish, the choices were just as numerous. Gentile response to Judaism could range all the way from disinterest (or even active persecution) to a status as a God-fearer or a proselyte. A God-fearer could associate and consider himself a part of the saved without taking upon himself the Jewish law, while for a proselyte conversion meant a complete re-socialization into Judaism.

After the first Jewish revolt, converting to Christianity became much more attractive than converting to any one of the many expressions of Judaism. This, in part, explains Christianity's phenomenal growth. Christianity became the avenue for spreading an apocalyptic brand of sectarian conversion. Mystical transformation, apocalyptic and messianic longing, and radical sectarianism are all coordinated in early Jewish speculation, and their confluence in Christianity, particularly Pauline Christianity, carried on this legacy. Paul takes mystical transformation intrinsic to sectarian Judaism and makes it part of Christianity: both Jews and gentiles must undergo mystical transformation before entering Christianity.

In the second major section of his book, Segal explores the exegetical consequences of Paul's conversion by defining the new community of faith (chapter four) and the way in which Paul engenders commitment and cohesion within the new community (chapter five).

Paul's exegesis derives from his conversion. Though proselytism is normally seen as a/the major social consequence of conversion, Segal points to Paul's hermeneutical acts as other means for vindicating the new experience. The autobiographical sections of Paul's letters demonstrate the revaluing that conversion enacted; such 'transvaluation' completely changed the goal of Paul's exegesis. The new goal, toward which Paul bends his Pharisaic past, is a new community without Torah and defined by faith, a unified community for Jew and gentile alike.

Paul's phrases 'works of the law' and 'faith' point to two different sociological groups—Pharisees and Christians. Segal defines 'works of the law' as observance of Jewish ceremonial (dietary laws, holiday observances, purity practices and circumcision). For Jews, 'works of the law' served as social markers that separated them from gentiles. When Paul changed communities, he learned that Torah no longer defined the community of Christians.

If conversion endowed Torah with new value, then conversion also changed the role of faith. When Paul made faith the equivalent of conversion, the apostle thereby developed a new vocabulary for Christianity. 'Faith,' as opposed to 'works of the law,' became the social identity marker for Pauline Christianity. For Segal, Paul is not engaging in an intellectual argument, but is justifying his, and his convert's, change of communities. Paul does not abandon his Pharisaic past, for he still interpreted like a rabbi; but, after conversion, Paul used his rabbinic training for a Christian solution—faith, and faith alone, defines community.

In chapter five, 'Paul's New Conversion Community Among the Gentiles,' Segal again applies theories from the modern sociological study of conversion. Segal notes that though conversion intensifies commitment, such a strong level of commitment fades without other forms of reinforcement. How are commitment and cohesion to be generated for the Pauline community of faith? Circumcision and ceremonial laws performed this task in Judaism, but Paul's transvaluation of Torah, rooted in his conversion, placed Torah in a new light. Segal points to purity language as the way Paul achieved the cohesion and commitment necessary for apocalyptic sectarian existence. Segal is relentless: purity language, too, grows out of conversion.

Paul introduced new practices of spiritual formation and transformation. 2 Corinthians 3–4 is a perfect example. Here Paul argues for transformation rather than law. Similar to the Qumran covenanters, Paul points to the Spirit as the mark of the apocalyptic community. It is through the resurrected presence of Christ, rather than the law, that one continues in the community.

Segal suggests that Paul's metaphor of 'veiling' employed in 2 Corinthians 3–4 does not only refer to a spiritual transformation but also to a social practice—the placing of a prayer shawl, a *tallit*, over one's head, a practice characteristic of mystical experience. Thus, veiling reflected ritual preparation for the experience of the divine among Jewish-Christian mystics. Unlike the leaders, or possibly the community, Paul worshiped with an unveiled face. Paul's polemic, then, was against those Jews, or

even Jewish Christians, who *required* veiling for participation in the community. For Paul, such a requirement denied faith. Such a denial, the equivalent to blinding by the god of this world, prevented the vision of the Kavod of God in Christ.

Segal uncovers other examples of Paul's use of purity language to build group cohesion and commitment—Paul's use of insider/outsider language, communal law, cultic codes, body metaphors, eucharistic and justification language all function to define and engender community. At the heart of Paul's theological (read sociological) enterprise is his own mystical apocalypticism which he democratizes among the gentiles. Paul's own conversion experience becomes the model for the gentile communities he founded and pastored.

The replacement of traditional Jewish social markers with faith and spiritual transformation caused no small stir in Judaism and Jewish-Christianity. Paul's vision for a unified community comprised of Jew and gentile ran loggerheads with traditional Jewish social identity. In the third part of his book, 'Paul the Apostle,' Segal turns his attention to the way in which Paul sought to solve the problems he himself introduced—the problems between the Jewish-Christian and gentile-Christian wings of the church.

In chapters six ('Circumcision and the Noahide Laws'), seven ('Romans 7 and the Jewish Dietary Laws') and eight ('The Salvation of Israel'), Segal focuses on Paul's great compromises. How could Paul's bold social strategy for a unified community based on faith conversion not obliterate traditional Jewish and, more importantly for the church, Jewish-Christian-identity? According to Segal, Paul learned to compromise in order to maintain his vision.

The accounts of the Jerusalem Conference contained in Acts 15 and Galatians 2 portray Paul's compromise. Segal observes that although what really went on (in detail) is unavailable, the positions taken do make sense—sociologically. Paul's argument that the ceremonial laws should be done away with is a threatening social position. Paul, however strongly he felt about such a position, was willing to compromise at certain points, as is demonstrated by his acceptance of the 'Noahide' laws.

The rabbis (of the third century c.e.) allowed for two, unified communities of the saved (righteous gentiles and faithful Jews) on the basis God's convenant. The New Testament, particularly Luke in Acts 15, dates this position to the first century. Unlike the Torah which addresses only the converts to Judaism, Paul is willing to accept the commandments as a Compromise position which did not rupture the church. According to Segal, Paul

accepted the Noahide commandments because they did not contradict or destroy his own vision for a unified humanity.

The same could be said for Paul's view of Jewish dietary laws. Since unity was his aim, Paul would not tolerate practices that would divide and distinguish within the church. Thus, circumcision and food laws, in so far as they were social markers, were to be abandoned. By taking (1) what is essentially a God-fearer position (gentiles can enjoy full conversion status without keeping ceremonial laws) and combining it with (2) highly cohesive Jewish apocalyptic sectarian views of community (like those found a Qumran), Paul stepped outside the traditional boundaries of Pharisaism. To many of his contemporaries, both Jewish and Jewish-Christian, Paul became an apostate—hence the latter half of Segal's sub-title to the book.

In Acts, Luke records Paul's failure to create a unified community based upon faith conversion. As reflected in the rabbis, Christianity departed from Judaism in its insistence upon giving worship to Jesus as Lord, a 'second power' in heaven.[4] The church was becoming increasingly gentile and less Jewish. Acts reflects that Israel has simply given up her place within the salvation plan of God. Segal muses that Paul, based upon his missionary experience, may well suspect the same.

However, Romans 9–11 Paul exhibits Paul's mature thinking on the future of Israel.[5] Paul maintains that Israel's refusal to convert is not incompatible with the promises of God; in fact, the division into Jewish and Christian communities actually serves the purposes of God. Jews outside of Christ will be provoked to inclusion through gentile belief. One day, in the eschatological future, God will eventually save all Israel. According to Segal, Paul's approach to the problems of circumcision, dietary laws and Jewish rejection reflects his attempt to hold on to a unified community based on conversion and to confront the reality of a division within Judaism.

II

Segal has written a highly engaging, wide-ranging, and uncommonly consistent book on Paul; there are many things which commend his analysis. Segal offers Jewish mystical-apocalyptic tradition as the proper grid by which, or through which, one should read Paul. Others read Paul in light of the rabbinic

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[4] See further Segal, *Other Judaisms*, 1–40 and *Two Powers*, 182–219.
[5] See further, Alan F. Segal, 'Paul's Experience and Romans 9–11,' *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (forthcoming).

literature of the third century c.e.; accordingly Paul becomes the preeminent rabbi, a rabbi who simply accepted Jesus as the Messiah. Older *religionsgeschichtlich* approaches sought to interpret Paul against the grid of Hellenistic mystery religions; here Paul is turned into the second founder of Christianity—a semi-gnostic who took the early Jerusalem preaching and transformed it into something that the Hellenistic world could understand. Instead of reading Paul as a third-century rabbi or the Hellenistic corrupter of the early kerygma, Segal construes Paul as a first-century Pharisee, one who was open to mystical experiences, angelic mediation and spiritual transformation. This appears to be a real advance in Pauline studies.

Segal's choice to read Paul within such a mystical-apocalyptic tradition yields immediate results for the origin of Paul's Christology. By focusing in upon the apocalyptic and mystic traditions, Segal has effectively isolated—probably in ways not stated before—the influence of God's dramatic, theophanic appearances for the origin of Paul's christological formulations. This theological trajectory began with the Jewish Scriptures, was nourishing by apocalyptic expectations and crystallized in early Christianity. Rooted in his experience of the resurrection, Paul employed the lingua franca of mystical-apocalyptic Judaism to identify Jesus as the image, form, wisdom, and righteousness of God. In particular, Segal harvests the significance of Ezekiel 1:28, the man-like appearance of the Glory of the Lord, upon Paul's Christology. Segal's careful diachronic reconstruction of the mystical-exegetical traditions surrounding God's Kavod explains Paul's interpretation of his Christophany. Paul's experience of Jesus as God's end-of-time Kavod forms the basis of his Christianity. This, too, is an advance in Pauline studies.

Segal's bold, and rather unfashionable, candor in relating experience to theology surprises. The discipline of Christian origins, rooted as it is in modern sensibilities, is reluctant to say that first-century experiences are the origin of anything,[6] much less to affirm that it is the foundation for Pauline Christianity. Scholars will deny, ignore, change, or reduce Paul's experience, but they are slow to plunder it for theology.[7]

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[6] However, see Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Jewish Monotheism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

[7] There are, however, some notable exceptions: Otto Michel, 'Die Entstehung der paulinische Christologie,' *ZNW* 28 (1929) 324–33; Joachim Jeremias, *Der Schlüssel zur Theologie des Apostels Paulus* (Calwer Hefte 115; Stuttgart, Calwer, 1971); Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (2d ed; WUNT 2/4; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1984).

For example, Victor Paul. Furnish in his essay recounting the last fifty years of scholarship declares that 'Historical analysis cannot rest content with any kind of view that finds the germ of Paul's theology in some private experience.'[8] By demonstrating the way in which conversion shaped Paul's gospel, his preaching of a mystical life, his community definition, and his ethical injunctions, Segal's work turns that statement on its head: scholarship—scholarship worthy of the name—cannot rest content *without* investigating Paul's experience. This, indeed, is a real advance in Pauline studies.

For recovering in Paul that which has been woefully neglected (Paul's experience), for discerning the tradition-historical background of Paul's Christology (Ezekiel 1:28), for unashamed reference to early Christian experience and for providing some coherence to Christian origins (mystical-apocalyptic Judaism), Segal should be thanked. However, what Segal invites in through the front door through the study of early Jewish and Christian experience, he allows to slip out the back door through sociological analysis of the early Christian community. Segal has not broken with the Bultmann tradition quite radically enough; for if Paul is dependent upon the community for his interpretation of the conversion event(s), then we are still left with a very Hellenistic interpretation of the event. Instead, I rather think Paul could (and probably did!) interpret his Christophany without the aid of a 'mythical' gentile community at Damascus.

1. In order for Segal's reconstruction to work, Paul must learn the interpretation of his conversion experience from a gentile community. Segal thus must distance Luke from Paul, for Luke presents Paul as having a dramatic, powerful, and quite singular event. Further, Luke presents Paul as immediately interpreting the event and preaching Jesus as Lord. This just will not do for Segal. He insists that Luke, in styling Paul's conversion, has exercised his own creativity.

However, in his analysis of Paul and Luke, Segal confuses various levels of reference to Paul's Christophany. There are at least three levels of reference: (i) a description of the event itself; (ii) a precise technical term used to refer to the event without description; and (iii) constructions which denote and connote the consequences of the event. There is no necessary conflict between the various levels of description. To describe the event in

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[8] Victor Paul Furnish, 'Pauline Studies,' in *The New Testament and Its Modern Interpreters* (eds. E. J. Epp and G. W. MacRae; Philadelphia/Atlanta: Fortress/Scholars, 1989) 332.

detail ('a light from heaven flashed about him' Acts 9:3; cf. 22:6; 26:13) does not necessarily imply a contradiction with technical references to the event ('revelation of God,' Gal. 1:12, 16; 'knowing Christ,' Phil. 3:8; 'Have I not seen Jesus,' 1 Cor. 9:1; 'he [Jesus] appeared also to me,' 1 Cor. 15:8) or the consequences of the event ('But whatever gain I had, I count as loss . . .,' Phil. 3:7–8). In fact, the technical and consequential references may well assume and be predicated upon a description. It is my strong suspicion that this is the case with Luke and Paul. Segal's own analysis, via his careful documentation that both Luke and Paul build on the tradition-history of Ezekiel 1:28, only reinforces such a suspicion. In any event, Luke and Paul cannot be employed as examples of dramatic and slow conversion; the two simply refer to the event at different levels and thus both may well agree that the conversion experience was dramatic and sudden.

2. Segal insists that Paul learned to interpret his experience within the confines of the Christian community. There are, however, three possibilities about how Paul learned to interpret his conversion: (a) Paul learned that Jesus is the exalted Lord before the experience; the experience confirmed it. (b) In and through the experience itself, it was revealed to Paul that Jesus is the exalted Lord. And (c), Paul had a experience; only later did he learn its interpretation. Segal addresses himself to these three options when he writes,

> Whether Paul identifies the figure purely on the basis of his vision or because of previous instruction in mystical and apocalyptic Judaism, either as a Pharisee or a Hellenistic Jew, or because he has been taught to do so by another Christian in his community, *is a question that admits of no practical solution.* But the question does not demand a specific solution, since we know how closely individual mystic experience adheres to communal rules. Paul's visions make most sense as a new Christian development within an established Jewish apocalyptic and mystical tradition. Paul or his close contemporary no doubt learned some of it and likely had experiences in a Christian community that confirm, *indeed educated,* his visionary experience that Christ was the figure on the throne. This is altogether natural; it is impossible to separate the traditional parts from the parts that are his own revelation, for the elements of apocalyptic and mystical revelation, as we have seen, are traditional in many respects. Only the identification of the Christ as the figure on the throne was novel by most Jewish standards, yet this would have been normative in Christian community.[9]

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[9] Segal, *Paul,* 320 n 64 [emphasis mine].

Segal, guided by modern sociological study of religion, opts for the third reconstruction. Paul has an experience and learns to interpret it over time.

Segal's position expressly contradicts Paul's own assertions about his conversion. In Galatians 1:12 Paul states emphatically that he did not learn the gospel from a man but received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul's emphatic claims to revelatory independence, reinforced by the use of two technical terms for reception of tradition or catechesis (*parelabone, edidachthen*), root his gospel, the preaching of Jesus as Christ and Lord, in his experience. This argues strongly for either positions (a) or (b) named above—but certainly not (c).[10]

If Paul learned to interpret his experience from the community, as Segal suggests, just how did Paul come to join a Christian community in the first place? Did Paul have an experience and then wander around looking for someone to help him interpret it? Why not join another Jewish community which cherished mystical-apocalyptic traditions? Why Christianity? Is it likely that Paul, the confessed persecutor of the church, would have joined a Christian community unless *before* his joining he was convinced that Jesus was the figure on the throne? When and how did he become convinced of this Jesus' exalted status? Segal does not allow for Paul, in light of his apocalyptic sympathies and in conjunction with what he knew about Christianity, to interpret his own experience.

Though Segal wishes to read Paul through the lens of a slow conversion process, he cannot refrain from saying that Paul's brand of apocalyptic messianism really emphasizes a 'stronger moment of decision' (113) than was commonly articulated in the first-century Diaspora. Segal even admits that one could join Christianity 'without the drawn-out period of education' (114). 'Sudden' conversions could occur because there was a long cultural tradition (Jewish mystical apocalypticism) explaining history in religious ways (God dramatically intervenes). The narrative horizon generated by the Jewish Scriptures thus functioned heuristically. Early Christian tradition, with which Paul was most likely familiar, reinforced the conviction that God has now acted

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[10] See Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 65: 'This seems to rule out any possibility of Paul's having receive instruction by other early Christian missionaries'; and J. Christiaan Baker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 46, 122–23. It is most unfortunate that Segal does not address himself to Gal. 1:12 in any exhaustive way; see the cryptic comments on pp. 36, 159, 161.

in Jesus. In this light, Paul's conversion experience could well have wielded a powerful pedagogical value: on the basis of his experience of resurrection, Paul discovered that Jesus was the Kavod of God, the exalted Lord. What need would there be for education for one who was already predisposed to this sort of explanation?

3. All of this strikes at the very heart of Segal's notion of conversion. Segal alternates between defining conversion as mystical transformation (a private personal experience) and as a change of community (a decision for re-socialization). In his discussion, Segal juxtaposes mystical transformation and communal change (see especially 105–10). Could it be that Segal confuses Paul's theologically pregnant conversion with a consequence of that conversion, his change in community?

For all his insistence on experience, Segal may be open to the charge that he dissolves the reorientation of Paul's symbolic world into simple sociological forces: Paul adopted a symbolic world because he changed communities. Certainly, social commitments and apocalyptic world views are highly correlated; however, determining the lines of influence between behaviour and belief is much more complicated that Segal lets on. The lines of influence are dialogical.[11] Having allowed for the exceptional in Paul's mystical-apocalyptic heritage, Segal appears reluctant to allow for the exceptional in Paul's life. For Segal, Paul's use of mystical-transformational language simply mirrors his existence within a gentile community (128, 182).

This line of reasoning strangely echoes Bultmann's approach to reading Paul. If Bultmann appealed to a 'mythical' Hellenistic community as the origin of Pauline Hellenism, then Segal appeals to the same community as the one which catechized Paul. If Bultmann erred by reducing all Christology to anthropology, then Segal errs by reducing Paul's Christology to sociology. If Bultmann fails to plumb the depth of Paul's theology when he reduces faith to a decision for authentic existence, then Segal impoverishes Paul's conversion by reducing it to his joining a new community. In the last analysis, Paul's conversion is simply a change in communities.

Despite these deficiencies, Segal has offered a major work on Paul's conversion which should be read and widely discussed.

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[11] Even Wayne Meeks cautions about determining the direction of influence between behavior and theology. See Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale, 1983) 164.

He has rescued mystical experience from scholarly disdain and restored it to a significant place in any discussion of Paul's theological strategy.