

On His Majesty's Secret Service: The Undercover *Ēthos* of Paul, God's Double Agent

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Character (*ēthos*) is an important factor in rhetoric, sometimes the most important.
— George A. Kennedy¹

This is how one should regard us: as assistants of Christ and administrators of God's
secret plans.
— Paul²

As part of a description of his “mission” (*diakonia*) in 2 Cor 6:3-10, Paul says that “in every way we establish ourselves as agents of God” (v. 4a), including “through weapons of rectification for the right hand and the left, through honor and dishonor, through defamation and affirmation” (v. 7b-8a). And later,³ he uses combat imagery with even more force: “For though we walk about in the flesh, we are not fighting in a fleshly manner. For the weapons of our warfare are not fleshly, but have power with God to demolish strongholds, demolishing arguments and every towering fortress erected against the knowledge of God, and taking captive every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5). These passages bring to mind a long footnote in M. Detienne and J-P.

Vernant's, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* that discusses the *topos* of

¹ George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 48.

² 1 Cor 4:1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. The phrase “administrators of God's secret counsels/plans” is suggested by Danker in the new BDAG, 698.

³ I mean “later” in the same letter since I am more and more inclined to accept the essential unity of 2 Corinthians on rhetorical grounds, though the arguments of this paper are not dependent on this decision. See especially J. D. H. Amador, “Revisiting 2 Corinthians: Rhetoric and the Case for Unity,” *NTS* 46 (2000), 92-111; idem, “Re-reading 2 Corinthians: A Rhetorical Approach,” in Thomas H. Olbricht, Anders Eriksson, and Walter Ubelacker, eds., *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002); see also James W. Thompson, “Paul's Argument from *Pathos* in 2 Corinthians” in Thomas H. Olbricht and Jerry L. Sumney, eds., *Paul and Pathos* (SBLSS 16; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001), 127-146; Frances Young and David F. Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 27-36.

the ambidextrous or “double” warrior. The complete warrior or athlete uses both arms, and every weapon or skill available. The final paragraph contains much that I find suggestive for understanding Paul’s *modus operandi* (*ēthos*).⁴

Georges Dumézil . . . was well aware of these aspects of warrior magic which confers [*sic*] upon warrior gods all the weapons of *maya*, ranging from cunning to a plurality of forms and the gift of transformation over and above their bodily strength. He writes: “The warrior must be able to be beyond laws, not only moral but even cosmic and physical ones; to defend order he must be in a position to pass beyond it, to step outside it—at the risk sometimes of yielding to the temptation of attacking it.”⁵

It is tempting to pick up on the theme of attacking law and order, both cosmic and physical, in order to launch into a discussion of Gal 3:23 – 4:11. But on this occasion I will highlight instead the theme of a plurality of forms. As we see from the continuation of the passage in 2 Cor 6, Paul’s efforts to establish himself as an agent of God “in every way” gives him a rather plural—to say the least—appearance: “as deceivers, yet true;⁶ as unknown, yet well known; as dying yet behold we live; as punished, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything” (vv. 8b-10). And since he establishes himself in every way, we can hardly be surprised that, like many agents, he is also a master of disguise (1 Cor 9:19-23).⁷ He becomes a Jew to Jews, a proselyte to proselytes, a Gentile to Gentiles,

⁴ *Ēthos* is defined by BDAG, 435, as “a pattern of behavior or practice that is habitual or characteristic of a group or an individual.”

⁵ M. Detienne and J-P. Vernant, *Cunning Intelligence in Greek Culture and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 98-99.

⁶ Or, “As imposters, yet genuine.” See further discussion of the passage in Mark D. Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric: Ambiguity, Cunning, and Deception in Greece and Rome* (ESEC 7: Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2001), 35. There is no justification for prefacing these words with “we are treated as” (RSV/NRSV) or similar equivalents that have the effect of protecting Paul from unintentionally or even ironically acknowledging that he is “a True deceiver.” The most egregious mistranslation of this verse is found in the newly updated and corrected (!) Living Translation (NLT): “We serve God whether people honor us or despise us, whether they slander us or praise us. We are honest, but they call us impostors.” Given the highly ambiguous and troubling aspects of Paul’s language in 2 Corinthians, it is no surprise that this very conservative “translation” retains a wealth of protective paraphrases throughout. On the Pauline protection racket more generally, see Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, pp. 84-86.

⁷ See Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 5-7, 35-37, 180-181, and esp. pp. 103-115.

weak to weak, even all things to everyone. Paul is not a simple agent of God, but a double agent.⁸

These and other passages describe some of the wily weapons of the undercover mission “profile” (*ēthos*) used by Paul to infiltrate and destroy the strongholds of “the god of this world” (2 Cor 10:4).⁹ But why all the subterfuge? Why not the more open and honorable direct frontal attack?¹⁰ Why is Paul a *double agent*? Why must there be an element of secrecy to his service? To answer these questions we must, on the one hand, fully comprehend and take seriously how suspiciously Paul viewed his world, and, on the other hand, recognize just how similar Paul’s deployment of the “weapons of rhetoric” was to the prevailing practices of his day. What I am striving for is a more fully apocalyptic and more fully rhetorical perspective on Paul.¹¹

⁸ I.e., one who has been “turned.” “The commonest substitute for planting one’s own agent is the ‘turning’ of an enemy agent. Turning an agent, that is to say, convincing a man working in another cause that he should change sides and continue active in the conflict, with all the added risks involved, is clearly a psychological operation of immense complexity” (“Christopher Felix,” *A Short Course in the Secret War: Annotated with a New Introduction by the True Author, James McCargar* [3d ed.: Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1992], 122). This quote comes from the chapter titled “CE [Counterespionage] versus Security, and Other Devilry.”

⁹ In the language of espionage, “profile” means all aspects of an operative’s persona.

¹⁰ On the distinction between a direct/honorable and indirect/dishonorable strategy as exemplified by Ajax and Odysseus, see Abraham Malherbe, “Antisthenes and Odysseus, and Paul at War,” in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), esp. pp. 98-101.

¹¹ Some recent studies that demonstrate in differing ways how intertwined apocalyptic, rhetoric, and ethics are in Paul include Duane F. Watson, “Paul’s Appropriation of Apocalyptic Discourse: The Rhetorical Strategy of 1 Thessalonians,” and Gail Corrington Streete, “Discipline and Disclosure: Paul’s Apocalyptic Asceticism in 1 Corinthians,” both in Greg Carey and L. Gregory Bloomquist, *Vision and Persuasion: Rhetorical Dimensions of Apocalyptic Discourse* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999). See also, Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). For a survey of the foundations of apocalyptic approaches to Paul and an intriguing hermeneutical critique, see R. Barry Matlock, *Unveiling the Apocalyptic Paul: Paul’s Interpreters and the Rhetoric of Criticism* (JSNTSS 127; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).

Paul: Conspiracy Theorist and Counterespionage Agent

Paul sees himself as a fully commissioned operative in a hostile world filled with intentional ambiguity, cryptic cunning, and diabolical deception. Scholars loosely refer to such a worldview as apocalypticism, but since this term is so heavily laden with religious connotations in biblical scholarship, we would do well to find a less explicitly religious analogy from time to time, especially since for Paul there certainly was no separation between the sacred and secular realms.¹² A modern world view that often blurs the sacred and the secular in a way similar to ancient apocalypticism is *conspiracism*, and it is within the framework of this conceptuality that I will describe Paul's worldview here. A basic primer on conspiracy theory is provided in the first three chapters of Daniel Pipes's *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where it Comes From*.¹³ This will serve as a convenient template. By no means am I suggesting that ancient apocalypticism and modern conspiracism are a perfect match, but as we will see, the similarities can be rather fascinating.

Pipes begins with a discussion of definitions, noting first that “in law, a *conspiracy* consists of a ‘combination or confederacy between two or more persons formed for the purpose of committing, by their joint efforts, some unlawful or criminal act.’”¹⁴ Conspiracies are real and include both “the *petty* and the *world*,” and several frightening examples of both can be produced from the twentieth century alone.¹⁵ But

¹² This is one point for which Romans 13 can be invoked somewhat unproblematically—for once—as a proof. Awareness of the political dimensions of Paul's gospel is growing. See, e.g., Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (The Bible & Liberation Series 6; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994), and Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997).

¹³ Daniel Pipes, *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where it Comes From* (New York: The Free Press, 1997).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20, italics his.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21, italics his.

Pipes defines a conspiracy theory as “the fear of a nonexistent conspiracy. *Conspiracy* refers to an act, *conspiracy theory* to a perception.”¹⁶ Unfortunately, defining things this way tends to imply that all conspiracy theorists are paranoid nuts and that no conspiracy theory could turn out to be true.¹⁷ But, as Pipes somewhat reluctantly admits, some conspiracy theories are actually confirmed.¹⁸

Pipes observes that “The world conspiracy theory . . . has a history, emerging from the distinctive history of Europe and dating back two and a half centuries, to the Enlightenment.”¹⁹ Technically this may be true of full-blown theories, but as he later acknowledges, “In its very furthest reaches, the conspiracy mentality can be traced back to the dualist religions of Iran or the mystery religions that swept the Roman empire.”²⁰ Quoting an article by Robert Wernick that appeared in the March 1994 *Smithsonian*, Pipes notes that “Some trace it back right to the very beginning: ‘If the chronology of the third chapter of Genesis is correct, conspiracy was the first spontaneous activity in which any creatures participated after the Creation, antedating even sex, which does not make an appearance till Chapter IV.’”²¹ Given that every example mentioned here has some

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, italics his.

¹⁷ The movie *Conspiracy Theory* (1997) presents us with the consequences of just such a scenario. In it, Mel Gibson plays a stereotypical conspiracy theorist who publishes an underground newspaper full of paranoid fantasies. And yet one of his theories turn out to be true, causing the parties involved in the conspiracy to threaten his life. Eventually he finds out that he is actually the victim of a mind control experiment, the effects of which are wearing off, but because he is the proverbial boy who cried wolf, it is almost impossible for him to convince anyone that his theory is true and his life is really in danger. In a post 9/11 world, it certainly gives one pause to realize that the attack on the World Trade Center might have been averted but for the failure of intelligence agencies to theorize a conspiracy on the basis of fragmentary though ominous evidence already available. So to protect the paranoid, I will use conspiracy theory and related terms less pejoratively than Pipes.

¹⁸ “In the pages that follow, I have done my best to separate conspiracism from conspiracy, reality from fantasy. Yet no one can be sure in every case which is which, and I make no claim to certainty” (Pipes, *Conspiracy*, 49).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 53.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 213.

close—even genetic—connection with apocalypticism, we immediately see that the comparison shows promise.²² Turning to modern manifestations, we find that

The theories usually contain three basic elements: a powerful, evil, and clandestine group that aspires to global hegemony; dupes and agents who extend the group's influence around the world so that it is on the verge of succeeding; and a valiant but embattled group that urgently needs help to stave off catastrophe.²³

As already mentioned, in apocalypticism there is no clear division between heaven and earth. So in an apocalyptic conspiracy theory the first element is a group of evil spiritual powers which under various names in ancient Judaism equate to Satan and his angels, while the second element consists of their human counterparts. Ancient mythical explanations vary for why these beings are here, but the apocalypticist has no doubt that the forces of evil appear to have the upper hand in this world and would like to achieve total hegemony.²⁴ Wittingly or unwittingly, humans carry out the plans of the evil powers. The third element group is, of course, the apocalypticists themselves. Their help not only comes from other select recruits like themselves, but ultimately from good spiritual powers, God and his angels.

Does Paul really see life in such dramatic and demonic terms? And, if so, can this aspect of his thought still be dismissed as non-essential (*adiaphora*) for understanding the *ēthos* he embodies and promotes? Perhaps a reminder of the pervasiveness of Paul's apocalypticism is necessary and worthwhile since some interpreters all too quickly marginalize, domesticate, or even totally ignore this dimension of Paul—some even intentionally. For example, Troels Engberg-Pedersen forthrightly labels the “rediscovery

²² The standard introduction to ancient apocalypticism is John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

²³ Pipes, *Conspiracy*, 213.

²⁴ Explanations based on Gen 6:1-4 seem to have been at least as, if not more, popular than those based on Gen 3. It is probable that Paul is alluding to elements of Gen 6 based apocalyptic speculations in 1 Cor 11:10. I take the recent popularity of alternative interpretations of this verse to be yet another manifestation of the tendency of many scholars to try to minimize the embarrassing apocalyptic st(r)ains in Pauline thought. One recent example of the tendency is discussed below.

. . . of Paul's apocalyptic frame of reference" by Käsemann and others "a deplorable development."²⁵ But to ignore or diminish Paul's apocalypticism, including his apocalyptic conspiracy theories, is to create conditions under which all aspects of Paul's theology and rhetor(eth)ic will be seriously distorted since its presence is, in fact, all pervasive and even constitutive. The rest of this section which emphasizes only the conspiracy aspects of apocalypticism will be enough to confirm this.

First of all, when Paul describes the reasons for his failure to visit the Thessalonians, he puts the blame squarely on Satan.

But since we were deprived of you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face; because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan impeded us (1 Thess 2:17-18).

And when he goes on to mention his sending of Timothy to them, he says,

²⁵ Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 19. Engberg-Pedersen does not deny that this "'theology' cum 'cosmology'" is present in Paul, but, like Bultmann, he is convinced that it is not "a real option for us." However, rather than retaining and reinterpreting the mythical framework in some way, as Bultmann did, Engberg-Pedersen brackets as much of it as possible and concentrates exclusively on an anthropological ethical core that Paul supposedly shared with the Stoics, one that Engberg-Pedersen thinks "is a real option for us." This is not the place to enter into a full critique of this unabashedly reductionistic proposal. (See the multi-authored review essay in RBL, esp. the remarks of Furnish and Stowers on this aspect of the book [15 June 2002 <<http://www.bookreviews.org/Reviews//TOC/Graphics/066422234X.html>>). I will point out, though, that this bracketing ultimately results in both a gross simplification of Paul's *ēthos*/ethics and a deafness to the sophisticated aspects of Paul's rhetoric. It leads to this conclusion: ". . . Paul must be read directly, philosophically, even naturalistically as a person who is speaking of *the world* as it is available to all partners in the dialogue, in exactly the same way as this was done by his fellow Jews (like Philo) and Greeks (like Plato or the Stoics.) The story (of the Christ event) might be a strange one, as Paul did not at all deny, but it was one to be accepted (or rejected) as any other account of the world. Paul's 'theologizing' stood in what we may call 'direct confrontation' with other accounts of the world, in the sense that they were logically operating at the same level. It was not secured logically beforehand in a way that would turn the dialogue into a sham" (304). This perspective does not do justice to the ironic discourse of Plato's Socrates, let alone that of Paul (see Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 15-24, 28-37). How one would square the assumptions about Paul's epistemology presupposed here with, e.g., 1 Cor 1-4 and 2 Cor 3-4, is unclear. Significantly, references to the Corinthian correspondence are almost entirely absent from Engberg-Pedersen's book. While I have some disagreements with the conclusions about Paul's rhetoric that J. Louis Martyn draws on the basis of Paul's apocalyptic epistemology (Given, "How New is New Creation Rhetoric? A Response to J. Louis Martyn's Concept of Paul's Apocalyptic Discourse," unpublished paper read at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the AAR/SBL in Denver), his stress on how different Paul's epistemological assumptions are from nomistic Jews (let alone Stoics!) is well taken (Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages" in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1997], 89-110).

For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I dispatched [Timothy] that I might know your faith, for fear that somehow The Tempter had tempted you and that our labor would be in vain (3:5).

Thus, in what is probably the earliest surviving letter of Paul, we find a strong awareness on his part that both he and his comrades face a formidable foe. And needless to say, if 2 Thessalonians is authentic, this other early letter of Paul powerfully underlines that awareness.²⁶ Satan is the hidden hand behind the coming of “the lawless one, the son of destruction” (2 Thess 2:3-10).

Second, in 1 Cor 2:6, Paul speaks of the “the Rulers of this age, who are being disempowered.”²⁷ Wink is probably correct that we should not choose between human and demonic rulers (*archontes*) here.²⁸ After surveying the strong evidence in favor of each, he concludes that “Surely then Günther Dehn is right when he says that 1 Cor. 2:6-8 actually represents in itself an immediate coincidence of heavenly and earthly activity, in which Pilate, the high priests, and the rest brought Jesus to death at the instigation of the higher Powers.”²⁹

Third, in 1 Cor 5:5, while handling the case of a man guilty of sexual immorality, Paul advises the Corinthians “to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh in order that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” This probably means that

²⁶ I find Kümmel’s arguments for authenticity convincing (Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (revised and enlarged English ed.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1975). Most decisive to me is the letter’s assumption that the Temple is still standing. Furthermore, the argument that the situation 2 Thess 2:1 presupposes, one in which letters are being forged in Paul’s name to exploit his authority, necessarily reflects a much later time, is very weak. While Paul was certainly not respected by all believers, at certain times and places he enjoyed an astonishing recognition of his apostolic status and authority (e.g., Gal 4:14 assumes this was once the case in Galatia). One result of Sumney’s recent study is a renewed awareness that many did recognize Paul’s apostolic status. See Jerry L. Sumney, ‘*Servants of Satan*’, ‘*False Brothers*’ and *Other Opponents of Paul* (JSNTSup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

²⁷ On the translation of *katargeō* as “disempower,” see Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 120.

²⁸ Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 40-45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

the man is to be expelled from the church (cf. v. 13).³⁰ Hopefully this will result in the salvation/health (*sotēria*) of both the individual and the congregation.³¹ Apparently Paul assumes that being thrown back into “this world” (v. 10), the domain of “the god of this world,” will have a sobering effect on the offender. Note also that vv. 9-13 show that Paul is far more concerned about threats from within than from without: “Paul is not afraid that social contact between a Christian and a non-Christian will pollute the church; but he does think that the disguised presence within the church of a representative from the outside, from the cosmos that *should* be ‘out there,’ threatens the whole body.”³² We will see more of this concern with “foreign agents” below.

Fourth, in 2 Cor 2:10, Paul speaks of forgiving offenses committed against him, apparently with the goal of maintaining solidarity. Then, in v. 11, he leaves no doubt as to where the temptation to do otherwise comes from: “. . . we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his schemes.”

Obviously the foregoing list of cases where Paul speaks of inimical spiritual powers could be expanded further. For example, the role of that personified Sin plays particularly in Romans could certainly be analyzed at length in conspiratorial categories. And other examples will come into play later in various contexts. But with 1 Cor 2:6 and 5:9-11 above, we have already anticipated the transition from the first to the second element of conspiracy theory, the “dupes and agents who extend the group’s influence

³⁰ This verse has generated great puzzlement. Some interpreters have found the terminology of “destruction of the flesh” and “saving of the spirit” difficult in this case, but this is precisely how Paul thinks of the salvation of every believer. More difficult is the question of how turning someone over to Satan could save them. Perhaps the best solution is the possibility that Paul’s concept of Satan still includes the divinely sanctioned assignment of chastising sinners in order to encourage repentance. See Wink, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 15-16.

³¹ See Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 168-174.

³² Martin, *The Corinthian Body*, 170.

around the world so that it is on the verge of succeeding.” The evidence that Paul assumes the existence of both types is very strong. Aside from a few recruited agents like Paul and the enemy agents, nothing less than all human beings are the duped victims of “the god of this world.” Of course there are plenty of people who are both duped and unwitting agents.³³ Paul would probably have put himself in that category before he “saw the light.”³⁴ But here I want to focus on what Paul has to say about full-fledged enemy agents such as “the dogs” one must be on the “look out” (*blepō*) for in Phil 3:2, as well as those creators of dissensions and impediments against Paul’s teaching who must be “scoped out” (*skopeō*) and avoided in Rom 16:17-18. Their link with the evil powers is clear since success in this surveillance mission betokens that “the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (v. 20). These are not operatives who remain on the outside, but insidious threats. The two most striking cases where Paul uncovers such “moles” are found in 2 Corinthians and Galatians. His most forceful exposure of enemy agents is his attack on “the mega-messengers” in 2 Cor 10:13-15.

For such are pseudo-messengers, deceitful agents, disguising themselves as messengers of Christ. And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is not strange if his agents also disguise themselves as agents of justice. Their end will match their deeds.

The second pertinent example comes from Galatians 2:4-5.

³³ E.g., the opponents of the Judaeans, Thessalonians, and Philippian believers (1 Thess 2:14-16; Phil 1:27-30).

³⁴ Paul, probably on the basis of his own pre-conversion clear conscience, grants that some people are sincerely wrong: “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for them is for salvation. I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but it is unenlightened” (Rom 10:1-2). One intriguing issue that will not be discussed in detail here is the way Jewish unbelief is credited to “the god of this world” in 2 Cor 3:12 – 4:4, but to “God” in Rom 9-11. I merely list some possibilities: 1) He was conflicted on the issue. 2) He changed his mind between the writing of the two letters. 3) He tacitly assumes that God is a silent partner in Satan’s “blinding” in 2 Cor 4:4 and/or tacitly assumes that Satan is a silent partner in God’s “hardening” in Rom 9-11. Cf. the way Satan is the source of deception in 2 Thess 3:9-10, while God is the source in vv. 11-12.

But because of the smuggled in pseudo-comrades, who infiltrated to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus so that they might enslave us—we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the good news might always remain with you.³⁵

These examples have a couple of interesting points of contact. As Paul continues to denounce the pseudo-messengers in 2 Corinthians, he soon refers to how the Corinthians tolerate it when anyone, in this case the pseudo-messengers, “enslaves” them (2 Cor 11:20). And just a few verses later he mentions the dangers he faces when “among pseudo-comrades” (11:26). In the Galatians passage, the pseudo-comrades want to enslave Paul and his Gentile comrades. Whether or not there is a Jerusalem connection between these two passages, it is clear that Paul thinks of the infiltrators he encountered in Jerusalem, Galatia, and Corinth in similar ways.³⁶

Finally, we can already see that Paul and his comrades constitute the third element of a conspiracy theory: “a valiant but embattled group that urgently needs help to stave off catastrophe.” Paul was not a lone ranger. Not only his fellow agents over which he functions as a commander, but also all believers in the cause are addressed as fellow combatants, “engaged in the same conflict (*agōn*) which you saw and now hear to be mine” (Phil 1:30). Commander Paul, the double agent, is leading the fight against a powerful conspiratorial syndicate known as S.A.T.A.N.A.S.³⁷ He may never have deciphered the exact title of the organization represented by the abbreviation, but his

³⁵ “The ultimate goal of all C.E. operations is to penetrate the opposition’s own secret operations apparatus; to become, obviously without the opposition’s knowledge, an integral and functioning part of their calculations and operations. C.E. thus differs from other general secret intelligence in having a single, specialized target” (“Felix,” *A Short Course in the Secret War*, 121).

³⁶ Of the opponents in 2 Corinthians, Sumney concludes that “While this anti-Pauline mission is broader than a single church (they arrive with letters of recommendation), there is no justification for associating it with the Jerusalem church” (*‘Servants of Satan,’* 307). While I find “no justification” a little strong in this case—“no certain justification” would seem a more accurate assessment—overall his critique of scholarship that confidently finds signs throughout the Pauline correspondence of a Jerusalem-based “Jewish Christianity” that constantly opposed Paul is warranted.

³⁷ Cf. 007’s arch nemesis S.P.E.C.T.E.R. (Special Executive for Counter-Espionage, Terrorism, Extortion and Revenge), the supremely evil organization scheduled to reappear in the 2002 Bond adventure, *Die Another Day*.

intelligence suggested that terms such as *anomia* (lawlessness), *apatē* (deception), *apōleia* (destruction), *apostasia* (apostasy), *nekros* (death), *nēsteia* (famine), *nomos* (law), *nux* (night), *sarx* (flesh), *skandalon* (scandal), and *schisma* (schism) may have been included. He strongly suspected that “N” stood for the ostensibly unlikely term *nomos*, but establishing the precise connection between S.A.T.A.N.A.S. and *nomos* proved quite vexing for Paul.

Unlike many conspiracy theorists, however, Paul’s confidence in victory was almost boundless because the head of operations (*theos*) had already decisively proven his superiority through the most cunning operation against S.A.T.A.N.A.S. ever conceived. While Satan’s typical incognito strategy was to disguise himself as one of his superiors (2 Cor 11:14), the head of operations sent the director (*ho kurios*) himself, his own son, on a covert mission disguised as a dupe (*doulos*, Phil 2:5-7).³⁸ Then, from an obscure position outside all known and recognized organizations, possibly after living many years as a “sleeper,” he led a popular non-violent uprising that seemed to end in abject failure worthy of any dupe (Phil 2:8). But through a miraculous rescue operation, his true identity was revealed and he was reinstated as the director. Paul’s firm conviction that these decisive events had occurred sustained him in all circumstances. And this exemplary operation undoubtedly left its mark on Paul’s own tactical theory and method.

One might think that someone as well-educated, somewhat privileged, and probably capable of considerable advancement in his culture as Paul would be an

³⁸ A “dupe” can be defined as “A person who is the tool of another person or a power” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*). Cf. Karl Heinrich Rengstorff, “*doulos*,” *TDNT* 2:261: “What is repudiated [by free Greeks] is service after the manner of the *doulos*, who not only has no possibility of evading the tasks laid upon him but who also has no right of personal choice, who must rather do what another will have done, and refrain from doing what another will not have done.”

unlikely leader in an apocalyptic movement. But apocalypticism, like conspiracism, defies clear-cut socio-economic and cultural categories. Pipes observes that “A survey of conspiracy theories in American public life shows that these tend to come disproportionately from two broad groups of people: the politically disaffected and the culturally suspicious.” The modern American examples he gives of the disaffected are inner city blacks and the rural, mainly midwestern, whites.³⁹ The culturally suspicious, on the other hand, often includes centrist, rich, and educated people, “including presidential candidates and important figures in popular culture.”⁴⁰ While older scholarship assumed that Jewish apocalypticism arose among the alienated, poor, and powerless, studies such as Stephen L. Cook’s *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* strongly suggest that many apocalyptic texts originated from the quite comfortable and relatively powerful priestly class.⁴¹

Conspiracy theories have a way of growing on a person, to the point that they become a way of seeing life itself. This is *conspiracism*, the *paranoid style*, or the *hidden-hand mentality*. Conspiracism resembles other “isms” in defining an outlook that can become an all-encompassing concern. . . . In complete form, it takes over the lives of the faithful and becomes a prism through which they see all existence.⁴²

Conspiracism is a religion for true believers. One can hardly read these words without thinking of the full sweep of ancient Jewish and Christian apocalypticism.

Apocalypticism was not mainstream. Indeed, many apocalypticists considered themselves more adept than other members of Judaism. Some, like members of the Dead Sea Scroll community, even thought of themselves as the only true Jews. They were the chosen ones privileged to know the deeper, hidden truths of their tradition.

³⁹ Pipes, *Conspiracy*, 2-9.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴¹ Stephen L. Cook, *Prophecy and Apocalypticism: The Postexilic Social Setting* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985), esp. pp. 1-84.

⁴² Pipes, *Conspiracy*, 213.

Conspiracism even claims priority over faith. In the words of one secret society theorist, those who have “probed the inner mysteries of this arcane tradition are the guardians of an Ancient Wisdom which is the secret teaching behind all established religions.”⁴³

Not all of Paul’s “mysteries” were, strictly speaking, arcane. Interpreters are fond of pointing out that “the mystery of God” (1 Cor 2:1), the good news, is for Paul “an open secret.” It was hidden in ages past, but is now available to all. It should be noted, however, that the clearest statements of the idea that the secret is open are in the textually doubtful doxology of Romans (16:25-27) and the probably Deutero-Pauline Colossians and Ephesians.⁴⁴ But even if such passages were accepted as essentially true to Paul, this perspective on Pauline secrecy is simplistic and misleading since it is only one side of the story. For just as Jesus’ “mystery of the Kingdom” is expressed openly but in the coded language of parables, deciphered only by and for “insiders” (Mark 4:11; cf. Matt 13:11; Luke 8:10; GThom 1, 13, 17, 62, 92, 93, 108, et al.), so among “the initiated” (*teleios*) Paul can “report intelligence, although it is not an intelligence of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are being disempowered.”⁴⁵ Rather it is “God’s intelligence, encrypted in a mystery, which God predetermined before the ages for our promotion (*doxa*), an intelligence none of the leaders of this world order acquired, for if they had apprehended it, they would not have crucified the director (*kurios*) of promotion” (1 Cor 2:7-8). And

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ In Eph 6:19-20, “Paul” requests that the recipients will “Pray also for me, so that when I speak, a message may be given to me to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it boldly, as I must speak.” So also Col 4:3-4. I also find it very difficult to imagine that the Paul we meet in the undisputed letters would ever ask for prayer that he might have a message.

⁴⁵ There are also layers of secrecy in the Jesus tradition. In GThom 13, Thomas is treated as an insider among the insiders. In an *old* twist on the popular saying, “If I tell you I’ll have to kill you,” after Jesus tells Thomas three things privately, his companions ask him what Jesus said. Thomas replies, “If I tell you one of the things which he told me, you will pick up stones and throw them at me; a fire will come out of the stones and burn you up” (James M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* [3d ed.; San Francisco: Harper, 1988], 128). Mark has at least one case where information is given only to certain privileged disciples (9:2-9). Surprisingly, despite the presence of a “beloved” disciple, the fourth gospel does not privilege particular disciples in this way, unless Judas in John 13:21-30 is the exception!

this is only the beginning since Paul is truly an international “man of mysteries.” As he puts it, “Even if I am unskilled in speech, I am not in knowledge. Certainly in every way and in all things we have made this evident to you” (2 Cor 11:6).⁴⁶ He had much more intelligence to share with the Corinthians when he wrote 1 Corinthians, but he could not do so because they were still lowly “staff agents” (1 Cor 3:1-3).⁴⁷ Beyond this, there were also some highly classified secrets—“for your eyes only”—that Paul could not share with anyone (2 Cor 12:3-4).

Not surprisingly, adoption of the outlook of conspiracism is no small step. It requires a change described by a term that will immediately occur to any religious studies scholar who reads the following passage:

Conspiracism implies an outlook very different from conventional knowledge; accepting it requires a radical shift in perception. While some enthusiasts reach their new faith through a slow but steady corrosion of prior beliefs, most who made this change speak of it as an epiphany in which they realize how hopelessly naïve they had previously been.⁴⁸

Clearly what we have here is a classic case of *conversion*, and converts are notoriously highly motivated.⁴⁹

Full-fledged conspiracy theorists devote themselves heart and soul to their faith, spending untold hours on learning about their chosen issue. . . . The truest believers devote their very lives to this cause. They engage in a compulsive and autodidactic inquiry . . . then proselytize others. The

⁴⁶ “It is not unnatural that men who specialize in affairs of such complexity should regard themselves somewhat as the Cabots of the intelligence world, speaking only to God. C.E. practitioners do in fact believe, with some justification, that C.E. is the queen of all secret operations. This view is based on the undeniable fact that, for the mere conduct of their daily work, C.E. men must of necessity know more than anyone else, not only about enemy operations, but also about the operations of their own service as well. It is this greater and broader knowledge which leads C.E. specialists to the belief—often, but far from always, mistaken—that they can and do control all other secret operations. In the sense of control of knowledge as used in Chapter II—knowing who knows what—the control is real; in the sense of direction of operations, the control is real only in proportion to the lack of alertness of their colleagues, allies or enemies” (“Felix,” *A Short Course in the Secret War*,).

⁴⁷ Staff agents of organizations like the C.I.A. are not entrusted with classified materials. See Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 95-103, on the rhetorical benefits of Paul’s strategy in 1 Cor 1-4.

⁴⁸ Pipes, *Conspiracy*, 23.

⁴⁹ On Paul’s conversion, see especially Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

ambitious among them publish the results . . . In some cases, this obsession pushes career and family to the side.⁵⁰

No one who has grappled with Romans, not to mention his other “weighty and strong” epistles, can doubt that Paul had spent years reflecting deeply on his new found faith, even if some observers both ancient and modern are tempted to conclude that his great learning had driven him mad (Acts 26:24). Indeed, his obsession did push career and family aside. Paul was not a tentmaker who devoted his spare time to furthering a cause, but a fully commissioned agent who used his trade skills to support himself when necessary.⁵¹ And 1 Corinthians 7 leaves no doubt where family ranked in Paul’s list of priorities. Marriage for an agent almost always leads to complications.

So far we have been reminded that both apocalyptic conspiracy theory and counterespionage figured prominently in the mission profile (*ēthos*) of Paul the double agent. Clearly the weapons of his fight are rhetorical. What else is he referring to when he speaks of “demolishing arguments and every towering fortress erected against the knowledge of God, and taking captive every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5)? So the issue for most interpreters today is no longer whether or not Paul’s discourse is rhetorically informed, but how far he was willing to go in using all the tricks of the trade. Since most interpreters consider him “a good man,” does that mean that some weapons are automatically off limits to him? We would do well to ask an expert weapons manufacturer who is also a man of conscience, a “good man,” one M. Fabii Quintiliani, or Q for short.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 23-24.

⁵¹ See Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980).

The Weapons of Q

Q introduces the final book of his *Institutio Oratoria* by saying it is the most difficult for him to write, and one senses almost immediately that he feels he has saved the most serious and important subject till the end.⁵² Here he claims to do something his predecessors have neglected: to “form my orator’s character (*mores*) and teach him his duties (*officia*).”⁵³ Q begins the first chapter with the paramount proposition that

... above all he must possess the quality which Cato places first and which is in the very nature of things the greatest and most important, that is, he must be a good man. This is essential not merely on account of the fact that, if the powers of eloquence serve only to equip for vice, there can be nothing more pernicious than eloquence to public and private welfare alike, which I myself, who have labored to the best of my ability to contribute something of value to oratory, shall have rendered the worst of services to humanity, if I furnish these weapons (*arma*) not to a soldier (*militi*), but to a mercenary (*latroni*).⁵⁴

Note immediately that the very first analogy for rhetoric that occurs to Q in this context comes from warfare. Providing a rhetorical handbook is like handing someone a loaded gun, indeed an entire arsenal. I will return to this subject shortly. Moving on for now, we observe that for the rest of this long chapter, Q not only argues that the orator must be a good man, but even insists that “no man can be an orator unless he is a good man.”⁵⁵ This audacious proposition eventually leads Q into an apology for Demosthenes and Cicero, two indisputably superlative orators—the second being Q’s idol—whose characters had often been attacked.⁵⁶ Then, recognizing that his defense may not be convincing to all, he grants for the sake of argument that a bad man might be discovered

⁵² *Inst.* 12:1-4. All translations are based on H. E. Butler’s LCL volume with frequent modifications. Book 12 is the perfect illustration of this paper’s epigraph. For an overview of Quintilian’s life and work, see Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric*, 177-186.

⁵³ *Inst.* 12.4.

⁵⁴ *Inst.* 12.1.1.

⁵⁵ *Inst.* 12.1.3.

⁵⁶ *Inst.* 12.1.14-22. Q considers Demosthenes the greatest Greek and Cicero the greatest Latin orator.

who is endowed with the highest eloquence.⁵⁷ This gives him the opportunity to distinguish further between the man who is merely eloquent and the orator,

. . . a man who to extraordinary natural gifts has added a thorough mastery of all the fairest branches of knowledge, a man sent by heaven to be the blessing to humanity, one to whom all history can find no parallel, uniquely perfect in every detail and utterly noble alike in thought and speech.⁵⁸

One might think that Q is describing a god and not a man.⁵⁹ After all, “orator” is “a sacred name” (*sacro nomine*).⁶⁰ Throughout this section, Q holds as a guiding principal the idea that the same heart cannot combine vileness and virtue, the same mind hold good and evil thoughts, or the same person be both good and bad.⁶¹ This anticipates his extended treatment of the necessity of perfecting a natural impulse to virtue through character formation in chapter two. Certainly, at least from the standpoint of mastery of all branches of knowledge and excellence of technique, if we were discussing secret agents, Q could only be describing the immortal 007. Nobody does it better.

But is 007 “a good man”? Or, for that matter, is 007’s Q a good man? For not only is 007 a “no holds barred” sort of combatant, ready to meet fire with fire, but Q is the one who supplies him with all manner of cunning and deceptive secret weapons designed to meet and trump all similar weapons in the field. It is precisely this issue that occupies the elder Q’s attention in the final part of chapter one.

I think I hear certain people (for there will always be some who had rather be eloquent than good) asking, “Why then is there so much ‘art’ in connection with eloquence? Why have you talked so much of ‘glosses,’ the methods of defense to be employed in difficult cases, and sometimes even of actual confession of guilt, unless it is the case that the power and force of

⁵⁷ *Inst.* 12.1.23.

⁵⁸ *Inst.* 12.1.25.

⁵⁹ Cf. Acts 12:21-22.

⁶⁰ *Inst.* 12.1.24. Later, when discussing the grand style, Q quotes Homer’s description of Ulysses approvingly: “‘With him then,’ he says, ‘no mortal will contend, and humans shall look upon him as on a god’” (12.10.65). In fact, “oratory” itself is a gift from the gods (12.11.30).

⁶¹ *Inst.* 12.1.4. Cf. Q (Luke) 6:45.

speech at times triumphs over truth itself? For a good man will only plead good cases, and those might safely be left to truth to support without the aid of learning.”⁶²

Now we can see clearly that Q’s remark near the beginning of book 12 about the risks to both public and private welfare in furnishing these dangerous weapons anticipated a more sustained defense (*respondeo*) of his own potentially subversive activities.⁶³ For what is Q’s *Institutes* if not a weapons manual? In this final and most self-reflective of the manual’s books, combat metaphors recur at strategic points.⁶⁴ Q must explain why good orators, who for Q are good people by definition, must employ weapons of such “cunning” (*ars*)? Even philosophers must use these “weapons of rhetoric.”⁶⁵ Why is it honorable for some people to be licensed to kill? Metaphorically speaking, of course.

First of all, “at times we should speak in defense of falsehood or even injustice, if only for this reason, that such an investigation will enable us to detect and defeat them with the greater ease . . .”⁶⁶ After using the Academicians’ practice of arguing both sides of a question as a positive example, Q almost predictably concludes with another military metaphor: “Consequently the ‘schemes’ (*nota*) of his adversaries should be not less well known to the orator than the councils of the enemy to a commander.”⁶⁷

⁶² *Inst.* 12.1.33.

⁶³ *Inst.* 12.1.34-45.

⁶⁴ “Arms” of rhetorical techniques (*Inst.* 12.1.1; 12.2.5 [*rhretorum armis*]; 12.3.4; 12.5.1; 12.5.2; 12.9.21); “military intelligence” of rhetorical strategy (12.1.35-36); “wrestling” of dialectic (12.2.12); “war preparation” of case preparation (12.2.5-6; 12.8.2-3); “defending the fatherland” of prosecuting bad citizens (12.7.3).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.2.5.

⁶⁶ *Inst.* 12.1.34. Aristotle takes a similar tack in *On Sophistical Refutations*. Underlying his attitude toward sophistical arguments is this basic philosophy: “Sophistry is not a matter of ability, but of intention.” See discussion in Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 24-26. As we will see, Quintilian clearly holds the same view.

⁶⁷ *Inst.* 12.1.35.

Secondly, there are even times when “a good person who is appearing for the defense should attempt to veil (*velit*) the truth from the judge.”⁶⁸ Since the sanctioned use of “the cover up” obviously sounds shocking, Q immediately credits it even to those regarded by antiquity as the greatest masters of wisdom.⁶⁹ He goes on to argue that “there are many things which are made honorable or the reverse not by the nature of the facts, but by the causes from which they spring.” This theme develops into a couple of passages worth quoting *in extenso*:

. . . we should assuredly take into consideration not solely and simply what is the nature of the case which the good man undertakes to defend, but what is his reason and purpose in so doing. And first of all everyone must allow, what even the sternest of the Stoics admit, that the good person will sometimes tell a lie, and further that he will sometimes do so for comparatively trivial reasons; for example we tell countless lies to sick children for their good and make many promises to them which we do not intend to perform. And there is clearly far more justification for lying when it is a question of diverting an assassin from his victim or deceiving an enemy to save our country. Consequently a practice which is at times reprehensible even in slaves, may on other occasions be praiseworthy even in the wise man.⁷⁰

This *a fortiori* reasoning that moves from trivial situations to matters of life and death elicits a series of questions which are used to introduce examples of cases where the “good” end justifies the “bad” means.

Suppose a man to have plotted against a tyrant and to be accused of having done so. Which of the two will be orator, as defined by us, desire to save? And if he undertakes the defense of the accused, will he not employ falsehood with no less readiness than the advocate who is defending a bad case before a jury? Again, suppose that the judge is likely to condemn acts which were rightly done, unless we can convince him that they were never done. Is not this another case where the orator will not shrink even from lies, if so he may save one who is not merely innocent, but a praiseworthy citizen? Again suppose that we realize that certain acts are just in themselves, though prejudicial to the state under existing circumstances. Shall we not then employ methods of speaking which, despite the excellence of their intention, bear a close resemblance to fraud? Further, no one will hesitate for a moment to hold the view that it is in the interests of the commonwealth that guilty persons should be acquitted rather than punished, if it be possible thereby to convert them to a better state of mind, a possibility which is generally conceded. If then

⁶⁸ *Inst.* 12.1.36.

⁶⁹ *Inst.* 12.1.36.

⁷⁰ *Inst.* 12.1.37-39.

it is clear to an orator that a man who is guilty of the offenses laid to his charge will become a good man, will he not strive to secure his acquittal?⁷¹

And even in the case of guilty persons who may not be so changed by acquittal, but whose exoneration will be of greater benefit to society than their punishment, the “good man, skilled in speaking” should use all possible means to defend them.⁷² Q’s last sentence of this chapter is a powerfully fitting summary of his entire discussion:

“Therefore, as new situations arise, the orator will change his oratory while maintaining his integrity of purpose.”⁷³

Lest there be any lingering doubt as to what “changing his oratory” (*flectetur oratio*) means in practice, we note that much later, when Q is describing those most difficult tasks for the orator, those that should never be turned over to an assistant (*advocatus*), they are listed as judging “what should be said, what concealed, what avoided, altered or even feigned” (*quid dicendum, quid dissimulandum, quid declinandum, mutandum, fingendum etiam*).⁷⁴ From his immediately ensuing remarks, it is clear that Q considers the making of such decisions to be of the very essence of good oratory. But most revealing of all is his advice about knowing when to wage war in the open field and when to use stealth:

. . . oratory will always be glad of the opportunity of maneuvering in all its freedom and delighting the spectator by the deployment of its full strength for conflict in the open field; but if it is forced to enter the intricacies of the law, or dark places whence the truth has to be dragged forth, it will not go prancing in front of the enemy’s lines nor launch its shafts of quivering and passionate epigram of the fashion that is now so popular, but will wage war by means of siege-engines and mines and traps and all the tactics of secrecy.⁷⁵

⁷¹ *Inst.* 12.1.40-42.

⁷² *Inst.* 12.1.43-44.

⁷³ *Inst.* 12.1.45.

⁷⁴ *Inst.* 12.8.5.

⁷⁵ *Inst.* 12.9.2-3.

Then, after explaining that oratory has reached such a highly developed state that one can no longer use the older orator's trick of strategically concealing one's eloquence, Q states that it is imperative that "cunning and stratagem should be masked, since detection spells failure. Only in this manner may eloquence exploit secrecy."⁷⁶

Undercover Disclosure

Therefore, having this agency as ones who have received mercy, we do not act badly.⁷⁷ On the contrary, we have given up disgraceful concealments, not operating by cunning or disguising God's word, but rather by a full disclosure of the truth we prove ourselves to everyone's conscience before God. But even if our gospel is undercover, it is undercover only among those who are being destroyed, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God (2 Corinthians 4:1-4).

While I was working on my dissertation in the mid-90s, my wife and I happened to run into Robert "Bob" Culpepper, one of our favorite theology professors at the seminary we had attended a few years earlier. He soon asked me about the subject of my dissertation. As I told him about my investigation of the ambiguous, cunning, and deceptive aspects of Paul's rhetoric, I could see that mischievous Cheshire cat grin begin to form for which he was famous. Anyone who had ever debated a point of early Christian theology in class with him was sure he had the entire NT—possibly the entire Bible—memorized, so I was not surprised by his swift response: "But Paul says he gave up all that!" Immediately, however, the mischievous grin turned into an ear to ear smile—a knowing smile.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ *Inst.* 12.9.5.

⁷⁷ On the translation of *egkakeō* as "to act badly" rather than "to lose heart," see Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 118.

⁷⁸ This is not to say that Dr. Culpepper was convinced by my position—he didn't say—only that he knew how "problematic" using 2 Cor 4:1-4 as a prooftext against Paul's use of cunning and deceptive rhetoric would be.

The first problem with 2 Cor 4:1-4 is, of course, that the queen doth protest too much. These denials are already problematized by the fact that they are addressed to the same audience to which he wrote 1 Cor 9:19-23. But only when we read them in context can we see what they might *really* mean. Paul has just exposed the agency established through Moses to the worst possible light. It is an agency of death (2 Cor 3:6). While foreshadowing the director of promotion (see above, p. 12),⁷⁹ Moses delivered a covenantal agreement that condemns and kills (3:7,9).⁸⁰ But the most disturbing aspect of Paul's depiction is Moses' attempt to veil that covenant's true "end," i.e., its temporary "splendor" and its deadly effect.⁸¹ So Paul unmasks him, compromising his entire operation (3:12-13). Here we would do well to remember that while Paul more than once holds up Abraham as a positive example, nowhere in the entire Pauline corpus does one find anything positive about Moses. Moses is instead singled out as the master of deception, *a deception that enhances his own long-lived reputation* (see vv. 14-15) *at the*

⁷⁹ While my language is playful, some interpreters have actually suggested that this is what Moses was doing, i.e. foreshadowing, in the sense of foreclosing and hiding, the presence of Christ.

⁸⁰ In 1 Cor 10:2, Paul presents Moses as if he were also, like Christ, a director under God, the head operations. I.e., Paul speaks the people being "baptized into Moses" in the same way they can be baptized into Christ.

⁸¹ See the translation and full discussion of this passage in Given, *Paul's True Rhetoric*, 118-126. As stated above (p. 12), Paul was vexed by the subject of the Law (*nomos*). And because everything he says on the subject was constructed for particular rhetorical situations, it may ultimately be impossible for us ever to know precisely where he stood on the issue at any stage in his career. In 2 Cor 2:14 – 4:6 his attitude towards the Old Covenant is so negative that one could easily get the impression that its introduction was not fully sanctioned by God (cf. Gal 3:19-20). It is death-bearing letter as opposed to life-giving spirit (2 Cor 3:6). But in Rom 7 he insists that it is not the Law in itself that is deadly but Sin which uses the Law to accomplish the exact opposite of what it was intended to bring about, i.e. "life" (v. 10). He even describes the Law as "spiritual" (v. 14)! On the one hand, while the exact identities of the opponents Paul faced in 2 Corinthians and Galatians are notoriously hard to pin down (see Sumney, *Servants of Satan*, 79-159), they both almost certainly stood closer to Judaism than Paul. So did his polemics against them cause him nearly to demonize the Law on these occasions, while his *real* attitude was more circumspect? On the other hand, while the exact makeup of the audiences Paul faced in Romans is notoriously hard to pin down (see Karl P. Donfried, ed., *The Romans Debate* [revised and expanded edition; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1991], esp. 3-244), most of them probably had a more positive attitude towards the Law than he did. So did his apology for his gospel, especially as it relates to Jews, Judaism, and the Law cause him to soften his harsh rhetoric on these subjects while his *real* attitude was more radical? And all of this is further complicated by Paul's hyperbolic tendencies (see Lauri Thurén, *Derhetorizing Paul: A Dynamic Perspective on Pauline Theology and Law* (WUNT 124; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

expense of others. So what is truly disturbing to Paul is not the fact that Moses masked himself and his agency—how could someone who admits he presents himself as all things to all people object to this?—but that he did it for the wrong reasons. Paul temporarily disguised himself and his message in order to “save” others, but Moses did so in order to enhance his own reputation. Of course in all of this Paul indulges in a serious misrepresentation of Moses’ motives and methods in the original story of the veil. What Paul is really aiming at throughout this passage is the—equally misrepresented?—motives and methods of the “mega-messengers” (cf. 2:17 – 3:1; 5:12; 6:11 – 7:1; 10:1 – 12:21).

But the second problem with 2 Cor 4:1-4 is that Paul does not stop with an unqualified denial that there is anything shady about his own agency. He goes on to grant that in the presence of certain people, “those who are being destroyed,” his message too is under cover! And appropriately enough, his rather veiled mode of expression in these verses leaves quite open the question of whether this veiling is the result of the god of this world having blinded the minds of unbelievers or is something Paul himself does intentionally when in their presence. The latter possibility would help explain why in the following verses (2 Cor 4:7-12) he uses the same sort of paradoxical language about his image with which we began (2 Cor 6:3-10).

The point of all the paradox is that Corinthians must stop judging by appearances. They must look beneath the surface to know what is *really* real (4:18), whether in the case of Paul, Moses, or any other agents. Paul knows his own *ēthos*, his profile, his *modus operandi* is misleading on the surface. In the first epigraph of this paper, George Kennedy reminds us that according to several ancient rhetoricians, *ēthos* is sometimes the

most important factor in rhetoric. Second Corinthians would have to be a quintessential illustration.⁸² Not just recent events involving rival agents, but the entire history of Paul's relationship with the Corinthians to this point has culminated in the need for a defense and commendation, an *apologia pro vita sua*.⁸³ That is why the very thesis (*causa/propositio*) of the letter is on the one hand an ethical boast and on the other hand a reading tip:

For this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with simplicity and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God—and all the more toward you. For indeed we write you nothing other than what you can read and also understand; I hope you will understand *till the end*—as you have already understood us in part—that on the day of the Lord Jesus we are your boast even as you are our boast (2 Cor 1:12-14).⁸⁴

If only the Corinthians will *completely* understand Paul, if they learn how to read not only his letters but *him*, then their consciences will know why his is so clear even while he admits—even revels in—the fact that there is a difference between what he appears to be and what is he is underneath.

Therefore, since we know the fear of the Lord, we “persuade” people, but what we really are is plain to God, and I hope plain to your consciences also. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you reason to boast about us, so that you may be able to hold forth against those who boast in appearance, not in the heart (2 Cor 5:11-12).

⁸² “The letter is about two closely related things. One of these, is the glory of God, the other is the reputation of Paul. Crucial to the whole is the relationship between these two themes, and perhaps it is no accident that the Greek word *doxa* means both reputation and glory” (Young and Ford, *Meaning and Truth in 2 Corinthians*, 12).

⁸³ Though, of course, he insists over and over again like a “good” philosopher that he is doing no such thing.

⁸⁴ I am wondering if “till the end” (*heōs telous*), which has usually been taken to mean either “completely” or “till the eschaton” might also mean till the end of what they are about to read and hopefully understand. Consider this passage from Isocrates, *Philippus* (*Or.* 5) 24: “My purpose in recounting all this is that if, in what I say at the beginning, anything strikes you as incredible, or impracticable, or unsuitable for you to carry out, you may not be prejudiced and turn away from the rest of my discourse, and that you may not repeat the experience of my friends, but may wait with an open mind until you hear to the end all that I have to say (*heōs an dia telous akousêis hapantôn tôn legomenôn*). For I think that I shall propose something which is in line with both your duty and your advantage” (George Norlin, LCL).

With this verse Paul begins to remind the Corinthians of a Christological perspective that provides the key to reading and *really* understanding both him and his letter. Simply put, it is this: *if one takes a surface view of Christ one will see only a sinner*. Paul himself once viewed Christ superficially, i.e., “according to the flesh” (*kata sarka*; 5:16). On the surface, Christ in the flesh was plainly a sinner. One hardly needs to be a maximalist where Paul’s knowledge of the historical Jesus is concerned to grant that he had surely heard things about him that would have offended a strict Pharisee. Indeed, how could he not know that Jesus had vitriolically attacked some of the Pharisees? Thus it is very likely that Paul considered Jesus a lawbreaker, even an agent of sin, who was justly condemned under the Law and cursed by being hung on a tree (Gal 3:13). So with a clear conscience and zeal he persecuted Jesus’ followers violently (*kata hyperbolē*; Gal 1:13), and he readily acknowledged that Christ crucified is nothing less than scandalous to Jews in general (1 Cor 1:23). But Paul came to understand that only by looking below the surface, beneath superficial appearances, *para-doxically*, can one see that “[God] made the one who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21).

But this did not change the fact that from the standpoint of Paul’s former life, Jesus *still* appeared to be “an agent of sin” (Gal 2:17). And Paul not only believed in Christ, but imitated him. That meant he himself had to take on a way of life that was bound to be paradoxical. Since the post-conversion Paul himself no longer does the works of the Law—at least not consistently, which could even look worse—he appears to many to be nothing less than an agent of sin (e.g., Acts 21:27-28). But Paul would hardly

have agreed. He knew in his heart of hearts that he was promoting righteousness while at least appearing to oppose God's Law!⁸⁵

But Paul the double agent was no less aware than Q that it is possible to be both a “deceiver yet true,” and “imposter yet genuine.” Paul is proud that he knows “the ‘schemes’ of his adversaries” (cf. *Inst.* 12.1.35 with 2 Cor 2:10). He even admits, at first openly but later more cautiously, that just like the enemy agents, he knows how “to veil the truth” in certain situations, at least temporarily (cf. *Inst.* 12:1.36 with 1 Cor 9:19-23 and 2 Cor 4:1-4). Indeed, his career as an agent was brought to an end when he was caught in the act of being an observant Jew to observant Jews (Acts 21:17-36).⁸⁶ But, true to form, throughout his appearances before various judges, he avoided the real issue of the case by throwing out a red herring (resurrection), and eventually challenged the jurisdiction of the court (*stasis translatio*). On occasion he may even have been more willing than Q to try the old orator's trick of strategically concealing one's eloquence (cf. *Inst.* 12.9.5 with 2 Cor 11:6), though since he tries it in the midst of a composition that parades his parodic mastery of his enemies' own eloquence (11:1 – 12:10), more likely its use is ironic, at least in this case.⁸⁷ He also knew how important “glosses” were in particular situations. If Galatians can be read as Paul's unvarnished opinion of Judaism and Law observance—as Gal 1:13 puts it, his former “way of life” (*anastrophē*, yet another synonym for *ēthos*)—then Romans can be read as a more “finished” production, one in which the rhetorical watchword was more obviously “what should be said, what

⁸⁵ Recall the quotation from Detienne and Vernant on p. 2 above.

⁸⁶ I will discuss this botched “clandestine operation” in which Paul gets “burned” on another occasion.

⁸⁷ Also, we should remember that feigning weakness is also one of Q's weapons. By it one can win sympathy as the underdog (*Inst.* 9.2.19; see discussion in Steven J. Kraftchick, “*Pathē* in Paul: The Emotional Logic of ‘Original Argument’,” in Olbricht and Sumney, *Paul and Pathos*, 66).

concealed, what avoided, altered or even feigned” (*Inst.* 12.8.5).⁸⁸ One could even argue that at the very heart of his mission lies the logic that “in the interests of the commonwealth . . . guilty persons should be acquitted rather than punished, if it be possible thereby to convert them to a better state of mind” (cf. *Inst.* 12.1.42 with Rom 5-8). Indeed, his insistence that God “acquits/rectifies the ungodly” was yet another thing that made him appear to be an agent of sin, *disempowering* God’s Law (Rom 3:31). This last example—though hardly the last that could be given—is a powerful (with God) illustration of how Paul cannot avoid being a double agent. In 2 Cor 3:7-14 he emphasizes how the old covenant has been “disempowered” by the arrival of the new (*katargeō* used 4x in vv. 7, 11, 13, 14) while in Rom 3:31 he insists that faith does not disempower (*katargeō*) the Law—*mē genoito!*—but rather establishes (*histēmi*) it! Is it any surprise then that Paul occasionally had to insist that he was not capable of anything (*panourgia*; 2 Cor 4:2; cf. 2 Cor 11:13; 12:16!)? Is it any wonder that some understood him to be saying “Let us do bad things so that good things may come” (Rom 3:8)? I could certainly imagine that in the right company and a less apologetic context Paul might say with a sheepish grin, “We do ‘bad things’ to get good results.” Cf. Matt 10:16: “Behold I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; so be cunning as serpents and innocent as doves.”

⁸⁸ See Johan S. Vos, “To Make the Weaker Argument Defeat the Stronger: Sophistical Argumentation in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” in Olbricht, Eriksson, and Ubelacker, eds., *Rhetorical Argumentation in Biblical Texts*, []. This is not to say that Galatians is not also a product of this recipe, only that Paul probably decided that “subtlety” was not right strategy in the Galatian situation. Also note that “can be” assumes that Galatians and Romans can be read differently. I am not unaware that the rather traditional understanding of Galatians suggested by “Paul’s unvarnished opinion of Judaism” (cf. Phil 3:1-11) is very much contested. Indeed, as a “Sanderite,” I myself contest some aspects of it. But, like it or not, no amount of scholarly revisionism will ever stop the average Bible reader from reading Galatians as drawing some sort of line between Judaism, something Paul was formerly “in,” and “the church of God” (*ekklēsia tou theou*). Verses like Gal 1:13 just won’t go away.

The bottom line is that what makes one a “soldier” or a “mercenary” according to Q, or an “agent of God” or an “agent of Satan” according to Paul is not which “weapons of rhetoric” one uses—for “*in every way* we establish ourselves as agents of God”—but what one uses them for.⁸⁹ One whose cause is just and whose heart is pure can don the undercover *ēthos* of a double agent in God’s secret service with a clear conscience: “For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth” (2 Cor 13:8; cf. 1 Cor 2:15).

⁸⁹ The nearly ubiquitous assumption that Paul’s negative comments about *sophia anthropōn* in 1 Cor 1:18 – 3:22 amounts to a rejection of most of the weapons of rhetoric betrays a total misunderstanding of Paul’s rhetorical strategy in 1 Cor 1-4. See Given, *Paul’s True Rhetoric*, 90-103. See also Joop F. M. Smit, “Epideictic Rhetoric in 1 Corinthians 1-4” [full ref. to be added later.].