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Through the Centuries



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# Galatians Through the Centuries

**John Riches**

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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To Emma, Helen and Susanna  
James, Tom, David, Jennifer, Hannah and Sophie





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# Series Editors' Preface

The Blackwell Bible Commentaries series, the first to be devoted primarily to the reception history of the Bible, is based on the premise that how people have interpreted, and been influenced by, a sacred text like the Bible is often as interesting and historically important as what it originally meant. The series emphasizes the influence of the Bible on literature, art, music, and film, its role in the evolution of religious beliefs and practices, and its impact on social and political developments. Drawing on work in a variety of disciplines, it is designed to provide a convenient and scholarly means of access to material until now hard to find, and a much-needed resource for all those interested in the influence of the Bible on Western culture.

Until quite recently this whole dimension was for the most part neglected by biblical scholars. The goal of a commentary was primarily, if not exclusively, to get behind the centuries of accumulated Christian and Jewish tradition to

one single meaning, normally identified with the author's original intention. The most important and distinctive feature of the Blackwell Commentaries is that they will present readers with many different interpretations of each text, in such a way as to heighten their awareness of what a text, especially a sacred text, can mean and what it can do, what it has meant and what it has done, in the many contexts in which it operates.

The Blackwell Bible Commentaries will consider patristic, rabbinic (where relevant), and medieval exegesis, as well as insights from various types of modern criticism, acquainting readers with a wide variety of interpretative techniques. As part of the history of interpretation, questions of source, date, authorship, and other historical-critical and archaeological issues will be discussed, but since these are covered extensively in existing commentaries, such references will be brief, serving to point readers in the direction of readily accessible literature where they can be followed up.

Original to this series is the consideration of the reception history of specific biblical books arranged in commentary format. The chapter-by-chapter arrangement ensures that the biblical text is always central to the discussion. Given the wide influence of the Bible and the richly varied appropriation of each biblical book, it is a difficult question which interpretations to include. While each volume will have its own distinctive point of view, the guiding principle for the series as a whole is that readers should be given a representative sampling of material from different ages, with emphasis on interpretations that have been especially influential or historically significant. Though commentators will have their preferences among the different interpretations, the material will be presented in such a way that readers can make up their own minds on the value, morality, and validity of particular interpretations.

The series encourages readers to consider how the biblical text has been interpreted down the ages, and seeks to open their eyes to different uses of the Bible in contemporary culture. The aim is to write a series of scholarly commentaries that draw on all the insights of modern research to illustrate the rich interpretative potential of each biblical book.

*John Sawyer*  
*Christopher Rowland*  
*Judith Kovacs*  
*David M. Gunn*

# Preface

I have long suspected that there is at least as much to be learnt about texts from examining the ways in which they have been read and have shaped the lives of their readers, indeed of whole communities of readers, as from our attempts to reconstruct their author's original intention. Schweitzer's two accounts of nineteenth-century interpretations of Jesus and Paul were for me a starting point for my own work; later, Ulrich Luz's commentary on Matthew showed the great gains in understanding which could accrue from a close study of a Gospel's history of effects. Margaret Mitchell's work on Chrysostom provided further encouragement, as have the circle around Daniel Patte. My own occasional sorties into the history of interpretation of Matthew, Romans and Galatians confirmed that there were significant discoveries to be made about the life and vitality of texts, and indeed the need sometimes to counter widespread views about their reception. It is interesting to reflect on the fact that while historical critics have been happy to accept a broad account of the deleterious effect of Lutheran interpretations of Paul on our understanding of his letters (deleterious not only in that they mask Paul's original intentions but also in their impact

on the churches' attitudes to the Jews), few have shown much interest in checking out the accuracy of such accounts.

To discover that Blackwell was planning a whole series of reception-historical commentaries on each of the books of the Bible and then to be allocated the commentary on Galatians was a cause for celebration. The last seven years during which I have worked on this project have both confirmed my belief in the gains to be made from a study of the reception history of a work like Galatians and brought many surprises. It has been my constant experience that a given reading of a passage initially appears relatively unremarkable, and yet, once seen in context and compared with other readings, earlier and later, will suddenly come into sharper focus, so that its vigour, its particular nuances and emphases begin to appear, and one can begin to see why this reading has spawned communities very different from those of its near contemporaries. If one compares John Chrysostom and Augustine (as we shall) and indeed Jerome (whom we shall not, for reasons of space), one can see how three very different communities of readers have emerged from their commentaries on Galatians, all written within a few decades and indeed a few hundred miles of each other. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that from these three readings have emerged, over time, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Western Catholicism and Protestantism (however much Catholics and Protestants may have fought over Augustine's heritage).

And, connected with all this, was the growing realization that biblical commentators, at least up until the time of the development of historical-critical studies, were all engaged in a kind of extended conversation, with each new generation engaging with its predecessors. Inevitably, in a work such as this, one can present only a few of the voices in such a conversation, and this must lead to a degree of oversimplification. Nevertheless, in working through the various readings which our chosen commentators offer of a particular passage, there is sometimes a quite remarkable sense of interaction between the different readings, as if each new period explores implications of what had previously been taken from the text. There is, that is to say, a remarkably continuous literary history stretching through the major commentators on this small but dynamic text. One other discovery deserves mention here, and this is the extent to which this literary history provides an insight into the development of Christian doctrine. It would be a great gain if commentaries like this could encourage historians of doctrine to give greater attention to the history of biblical interpretation.

Over the last 40 or so years there has been much debate among philosophers and literary theorists about the nature of texts and the respective roles of authors and readers. There have been sustained attacks on the notion of authorial intention, on the very notion of a text itself, while much light has been shed on the role of readers in determining the meaning of a given text. Certainly studies like this present volume make clear how important the role of the reader is in realizing the meaning of a text. I have found the work of the literary theorist and critic

Hans-Robert Jauss particularly helpful in trying to think about the relation of the commentator to the literary history he inherits, to his own social and cultural world and to the text he studies. Many issues remain open, however. It would be impossible to discuss a polemical letter such as Galatians, without referring in some way to Paul's intentions in arguing as he did, even if our reconstructions of that intention will always be contentious, and less than certain. And it is difficult to find quite the right words and analogies to describe the continuing vitality and influence of the text. It is true to say, with Robert Morgan, that texts are like dead men with no rights, so that interpreters can in a measure deal with them as they will. But does this particular phrase do justice to the constantly subversive nature of a text like Galatians, which seems to have a life and a will of its own? Similarly, to speak of the after-lives of texts like the biblical texts is rightly to affirm that they live on after their writing and continue to influence their readers; but it also seems to suggest a sense in which the real life of the text was *before* its reception, while the evidence is that a text like Galatians may sweep through whole countries with unprecedented force 1,500 years after its writing. We might be tempted to speak of the text as one voice in the conversation between commentators past and present, but only in the paradoxical sense that that voice can be heard only through the voices of others, sometimes distorted, sometimes muted, sometimes trumpeted. However that may be, it remains a powerful presence in the ongoing dialogue, with a vitality all of its own.

No book is written without the help of others. The Arts and Humanities Research Board and the University of Glasgow generously allowed me a year's study leave to work on this project. The AHRB/C were also patient and magnanimous in allowing me to finish in my own time and not according to the official timescale for such undertakings. A book like this is probably never finished, but at least I hope it is more nearly finished now than it would otherwise have been. To the editors of the series, Chris Rowland, John Sawyer, Judith Kovacs and now David Gunn, my thanks for their pioneering work in creating this series and for their particular advice and help with my volume. Judith Kovacs has gently pointed out errors and oversights, and made many constructive suggestions. It has been a pleasure and encouragement to meet with other contributors to the series. I have also profited greatly from collaboration with Daniel Patte and his colleagues in the Romans through History and Cultures meetings at SBL. It has been good too to meet with contributors to the *Novum Testamentum Patristicum* series, to be published by Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, who hosted some memorable discussions in Göttingen. My particular thanks to Tobias Niklas and Andreas Merkt, the editors, and to Martin Meiser, who generously allowed me to see drafts of his Galatians volume. Many colleagues and friends have helped in many ways, at seminars and in chance encounters, too many to list in full, among them, John Barclay, Stephen Chester, Troels Engberg Pedersen, Bridget Gilfillan-Upton, Judith Gundry-Volf, Ian Hazlitt, David Horrell, Joel Marcus and

Perry Schmidt-Leukel. The latter kindly drew my attention to the work of Nishitani. Betty Knott-Sharpe gave enormously generously of her time and expertise in assisting me with the Latin of Augustine, Jerome and Aquinas. The editorial staff at Blackwell, Rebecca Harkins, Andrew Humphries and Karen Wilson, have been patient and supportive over the course of the project. I am grateful to Charlotte Davies and Jean van Altena for all their careful and watchful work on the preparation of the typescript, and to Meg Davies for the index. To all, my sincere thanks.

There are, I fear, a greater number to whom I owe more than I am aware of, who have had to put up with my involvement and absorption in this project, when more of my attention and time might have been given to them. To my family, my colleagues in the Scottish Episcopal Church, to the editorial team of the *Expository Times*, Karen Wenell and Paul Foster, and to many others, warm thanks for their patience and support.

In the last seven years, while I have been writing this book, Emma, Helen and Susanna have given Nena and me (and brought up!) six wonderful grandchildren, James, Tom, David, Jennifer, Hannah and Sophie. It is to them that this book is dedicated.

*John Riches*  
*May 2007*

## **Preface to the Paperback Edition**

I am delighted that this commentary will now become more easily available to students of Galatians and to those who wish to teach courses on the reception history of Paul and Galatians. Understanding of the importance of reception history continues to grow within the circle of biblical scholars but there remains much to be done. The paradox of a discipline deeply committed to an historical reading of the biblical texts yet largely uninterested in the history of the construction of their meaning remains for the most part unobserved and unaddressed. The confidence with which over 150 years ago scholars like Lightfoot set out to discover the singular meaning of Paul's letter to the Galatians by historical and lexicographical study of the texts in their original context and without reference to the previous 1500 years of interpretation remains largely undiminished, despite the irreducible plurality of answers which such attempts have generated. This volume is offered again in the belief that a study of the reception of this remarkable text over two thousand years can contribute to a fuller appreciation of the richness and plurality of meaning which the letter has generated.

Five years ago this commentary was dedicated to our six grandchildren and their mothers. I would like take this opportunity to add to that dedication the names of Sam, Euan and Kate. May they all continue to thrive!

*John Riches*  
*June 2012*



# Abbreviations

ANF	Ante-Nicene Fathers
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, series latina
CF	<i>The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church</i>
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
EH	<i>The English Hymnal</i>
Fort.	Augustine, <i>contra Fortunatum</i>
JThS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LW	American edition of <i>Luther's Works</i> . Philadelphia and St. Louis, 1955–
NPNF <sup>1</sup>	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 1st series
NPNF <sup>2</sup>	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, 2nd series
PG	Patrologia Graeca

PL	Patrologia Latina
RGG <sup>3</sup>	<i>Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart</i> . Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck). 3rd edition 1957–62
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and its World
ST	Thomas Aquinas, <i>Summa Theologiae</i>
TRE	<i>Theologische Real-Enzyklopaedie</i>
WA	<i>D. Martin Luthers Werke</i> . Kritische Gesamtausgabe. Weimar, 1883–
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZThK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>
Augustine, <i>ep.</i>	<i>epistulae</i>
Augustine, <i>Civ. Dei</i>	<i>City of God</i>
Augustine, <i>Faust.</i>	<i>Contra Faustum</i>
Augustine, <i>Simpl.</i>	<i>Ad Simplicianum</i>
Calvin, <i>Instit.</i>	<i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>
CH and DN	Pseudo Dionysius, <i>Celestial Hierarchy and Divine Names</i>
Clem. Alex. <i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Stromateis</i>
CR	<i>Corpus reformatorum</i>
DS	<i>Enchiridion symbolorum, definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum</i> . Ed. H. Denzinger and A. Schönmetzer
Eusebius, <i>h.e.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Exc. ex Theod.</i>	<i>Excerpts from Theodotus</i>
<i>Gosp. Phil.</i>	<i>The Gospel of Philip</i>
Ignatius, <i>Magn.</i>	<i>Epistle to the Magnesians</i>
Irenaeus, <i>AH</i>	<i>Against the Heresies</i>
Jerome, <i>ad Gal</i>	<i>ad Galatas</i>
Jerome, <i>ep.</i>	<i>Letters</i>
LXX	Septuagint
<i>mend.</i>	<i>De mendacio</i>
Origen, <i>CJ</i>	<i>Commentarium in Johannis</i>
Origen, <i>Comm. Joh.</i>	<i>Commentary on John</i>
<i>Ps. Clem. Hom</i>	<i>Pseudo-Clementine Homilies</i>
Seneca, <i>ep.</i>	<i>epistulae</i>
Tertullian, <i>Marc.</i>	<i>Against Marcion</i>

# Introduction

## Aims and Method, Summary of Findings, Galatians as a ‘World-Building’ Text

### Overview

This is a book about books about a letter written in the first century by a Jewish radical who turned his world upside down. It is, to put it somewhat differently, a literary history of a – very short – text, which has its origins in a formative moment of religious history in Asia Minor out of which a new world religion emerged. What is intriguing in this history is to see how, like a proxy for its author, this letter continues to exert a formative, often disruptive and subversive, influence on Rome and Byzantium, on Reformation and post-Reformation Europe, in a way few other books can rival. From these defining moments in human history the shock waves flow out to encompass, in the course of two millennia, the whole globe: the Americas, Asia, Africa, Australasia. One has only to think of the influence of Calvin’s reading of Paul to become aware of the power that flows from the reception of this letter.

Rather unusually, this volume of the Blackwell reception historical commentary series takes the form almost exclusively of a literary history. Other texts of the Bible will exert their influence through forms of human creativity other than literature: visual art, music, drama, film. Galatians' influence is carried predominantly through the written and preached word. In particular, the literary history which we are attempting to trace is dominated by the commentary form. This fact in itself says something about the particular way in which the letter has been received and made its impact on those communities who have taken it to heart. Other literary histories, say those of the novel or the sonnet or tragedy, operate by way of imitation, either of formal innovations (the confessional novel) or of particular instantiations of the genre (Racine's and Goethe's *Iphigenia*) or more generally by quotation and allusion. Biblical narratives lend themselves readily to such imitation and retelling: Genesis has a long literary history from Jubilees to Thomas Mann's *Joseph and his Brothers*. Paul's letters certainly find their formal imitators in the deutero-Pauline letters (those now thought to be wrongly attributed to Paul), but this is not the way that they would be principally received. The first commentary on Galatians to appear in the East was written by Origen in the first half of the third century, with the real explosion of commentaries occurring in the second half of the fourth century. Of these we shall pay close attention to the commentaries, from the East, of John Chrysostom (c.395) and, from the West, of Augustine (398). What is significant about the commentary form is that it provides an arena for readers both to wrestle with the precise meaning of Paul's compressed and often ambiguous text *and* to engage in dialogue with other readers in the tradition. This dialogue continues right up to the nineteenth century, until it is broken off by historical critical interpreters, including even those who know the tradition well, like Lightfoot. Such readers will in the end dialogue only with those who employ the same historical tools as themselves. Yet, no matter how narrowly or widely the circle is drawn, debate and engagement with other commentators is an integral aspect of the commentary form, and one of its continuing sources of attraction to writers. It is, however, the elusiveness and difficulty of Paul's text which makes the commentary form so essential to the reading of Galatians: how are we to resolve the ambiguities of Paul's arguments, to half-guess the nature of the arguments to which Paul is replying, without attempting to piece out its meaning sentence by sentence? The continuous commentary on the text forces the commentator to address these difficulties and puzzles and to offer a solution. Moreover, the commentary form not only allows the writer to resolve some of these puzzles for the benefit of him/herself and of the readers of the commentary; it allows the commentator, consciously or otherwise, to fill out the gaps and resolve the ambiguities in the text by drawing on her (though there are few female commentators) own experience and beliefs. In this commentators

will draw both on experiences and beliefs which have been nurtured within the Christian community and on those which have their roots in communities and movements of thought outside the church. In this way, commentators create new social worlds, help to nurture new communities for whom this text has a defining quality.

It is significant that the first great burgeoning of commentaries occurs as the people of the Mediterranean embark on the deep cultural transition from the world of Antiquity to that of Catholic Christianity/the Great Church. This growth in commentaries marks the moment at which the enormous potential of the biblical writings is fully grasped and the first steps to its realization taken. For Augustine, 'such is the depth of the Christian Scriptures that, even if I were attempting to study them and nothing else, from boyhood to decrepit old age, with the utmost leisure, the most unwearied zeal, and with talents greater than I possess, I would still be making progress in discovering their treasures . . .' (*ep.* 137.7; quoted in Brown 1967: 263). As Brown comments, Augustine is implying that 'the Christians, too, possessed a classic as inexhaustible and as all-absorbing as Vergil and Homer had been to the pagans'. The task was to open those treasures to his Christian readers in such a way as to enable them to build their own, new world. Galatians provided an open invitation to such an undertaking: had not its saviour rescued believers 'from this present evil age' (1:4), and did not Paul conclude his letter with the proclamation of a 'new creation', which meant that the old order and its laws no longer 'counted for anything' (6:15)?

However, at the same time as Chrysostom and his fellow Antiochene commentators and Augustine in North Africa were constructing new worlds to replace the old world of pagan Antiquity, they were also locked in conflict with those who would provide their own alternatives: Augustine with the dualist Manichees, Chrysostom with the Jews. And while Galatians was potentially an embarrassing ally when confronting the Manichees, it was easily (all too easily?) co-opted in the struggle against Chrysostom's Jewish rivals in Antioch. Paul too had faced those with very different ideas as to how to shape the emerging new world, and his polemic against his Jewish-Christian opponents is a feature of the letter which will be powerfully attractive for those who seek its support in their attempts to shape their own communities. For Chrysostom, the connection between Paul's Judaizing opponents in Galatia and the Jewish community in Antioch was not far to seek; Augustine would make the connection between the world of Antiquity and Paul's opponents in terms of their love of honour and glory, of their carnal understanding of Law and their slavish desire for the rewards that it conveyed. And these more analogical connections will remain part of the repertory of Christian commentators for the next thousand years and more.

If the fourth century marks one of the major cultural changes in the history of Europe, so too does the Reformation, and here we can observe with much greater clarity the way in which this small letter provides ‘the fuel of a blast furnace’ as Brown says of the Bible as a whole for Augustine (1967: 263). Galatians was the book that Luther prized above all others in the Bible, naming it, after his wife, his ‘Käthe von Bora’. With its sharp divisions between the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith, it enabled him to drive a wedge between late medieval theology and the new understanding of God’s justice through which he sought release from the terrors of conscience which beset him as an – Augustinian – friar. Such indeed is the power of Luther’s reading of Galatians, that his own commentary now becomes one of the principal channels of the letter’s influence, referred to by Bunyan in terms remarkably similar to those that Luther had used to refer to the letter itself:

Well, after many such longings in my mind, the God in whose hands are all our days and ways, did cast into my hand (one day) a book of Martin Luther; it was his Comment on the Galatians; it also was so old, that it was ready to fall piece from piece if I did but turn it over. Now I was pleased much that such an old Book had fallen into my hand; the which, when I had but a little way perused, I found my condition, in his experience, so largely and profoundly handled, as if his Book had been written out of my heart. This made me marvel; for thus thought I, This Man could not know anything of the state of Christians now, but must needs write and speak the experience of former days.

Besides he doth most gravely also in that Book, debate of the rise of these temptations, namely, Blasphemy, Desperation, and the like; showing that the Law of Moses as well as the Devil, Death, and Hell hath a very great hand therein: The which, at first, was very strange to me; but considering and watching, I found it so indeed. But of particulars here I intend nothing; only this methinks I must let fall before all men, I do prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians (excepting the Holy Bible,) before all the Books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded Conscience. (Bunyan 1907: 41)

One should not suppose that the readings which commentators offer of Galatians are all by any means subversive or revolutionary. We shall look at those which address a Christian audience very secure in its grip on power and its place in society, which nevertheless seeks to clarify its own self-understanding through vigorous debate and questioning. Aquinas’s commentary is in many ways a model attempt at reconstructing Paul’s arguments and addressing the theological questions which they raise. Similarly, those who live in the period immediately after Luther’s break with Rome will struggle both to come to terms with the changes in cosmology and anthropology which Luther’s reading of Galatians effected and to tame a text whose revolutionary dynamism could easily threaten their uneasy grip on the societies which emerged in this period.

Much will depend on the interpretation of Paul's often cryptic statements about the Law, a term which itself becomes elusive: what is it to speak of 'fulfilling the law of Christ' (6:2)? And how are such statements to be set alongside injunctions to 'walk in the Spirit' (5:25)? How, indeed, are injunctions about walking in the Spirit to be taken, in the light of Paul's references to the Galatians' being 'led by the Spirit' (5:18)? For Calvin and Perkins such statements require to be clarified, and their own positions buttressed against those who found in them a licence to challenge the newly established authority of the Reformed Churches.

Puritans like Perkins sought readings of the letter which would provide, among other things, social stability and probity in a society which was officially Christian. Those Christians who lived in the aftermath of the upheavals of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries must, by contrast, have felt almost swept away by the subversive and revolutionary zeal of their times. Yet, if they were not to be simply dismissed by the 'cultured despisers' of the times (the phrase is from Schleiermacher's *Speeches to the Cultured Despisers of our Times*, 1996), they needed to show how the Christian spirit continued to reflect the deepest spirit of the times. Baur sought to do this historically by showing how the Christian literature of the first (as he thought) two centuries gave expression to a new universal God-consciousness which reflected the major socio-cultural changes occurring throughout the Mediterranean. The subsequent history of the church was a struggle to give true expression to this new universal consciousness, which was at some times more obscured than at others, which emerged into greater clarity with the Reformers, and was further refined in the work of the historical critics of the nineteenth century. This provided the basis for a 'cultural Protestantism' which was deeply imbued with a sense of history – the sense, that is, that it was heir to and the vehicle of the great forces of history.

All this is no more than to point up some of the key moments in this remarkable history. From each of the figures whom we have mentioned, great branches reach out, from the Middle East, from Africa, from Europe, linking the most diverse parts of the world, taking root on other continents, in turn putting out new shoots and re-rooting themselves afresh on new lands. Any account we can give can offer no more than the briefest outline of the relationships between some of these key moments, one in no sense complete but nonetheless indicative of the extraordinary connectivity between such readers and readings.

## Questions of Method

The question for the literary historian is how to give a coherent account of the reception of a particular text which explains the sometimes quite extraordinary

diversity of literary and social manifestations linked to it. To what extent are such manifestations, in our case the very varied commentaries on Galatians, of which we shall focus on only a relatively few major examples, and the emergence of new societies and cultures to which they are linked – to what extent are such manifestations the product of the text itself (diversity resulting from the *Sinnpotential* of the text itself, Luz 1989: 81), and to what extent are they the product of the changing circumstances, economic, social, political, cultural, philosophical, under which they are read?

As Hans Robert Jauss has argued, literary texts have a dialectical relationship to the political, social and economic realities of their times. They are hardly simply the ideological reflections of such realities: how then would one explain, in the light of the relatively slow rate of change on the economic and political level, the often remarkable rate of change of literary production, formally and substantively? Part of the answer must be that literature is not just *weltabbildend* but also, importantly, *weltbildend* (Jauss 1970: 144–207): it does not simply, that is to say, *reflect* or imitate the world out of which it comes, but is itself involved in the *shaping* of that world. And, in an important step, which moves the debate beyond the theoretical parameters of earlier, Marxist and formalist discussions, its world-building function is seen to be mediated through its interaction with the reader, through, that is to say, its reception at any given time by a particular public. Any attempt to write a literary history, whether of a national literature, a particular genre or, as here, a particular work, must take account of the power of a work to shape its readers, to create a new readership, new in the sense that its sensibilities, its understanding of the world and society and of individual lives as located in society – but also as set within a cosmos which may include angels and demons, gods and God – have been informed and re-formed by their reading of the work, however that process of reception takes place. This power of a text to shape the ‘horizon of expectations’ of its readership is what gives its reception history its particular character: each generation of readers comes to the text with a different set of understandings, sensibilities and expectations, and each interaction between the text and its ‘new’ readers creates again a new readership, just so long as the text retains its power to engage and transform: thereafter it joins the vast army of the laid aside and forgotten. But this interaction is not one-sided: the text shaping and changing the reading public again and again, till the point is reached that the text no longer resonates with the public’s horizons of understanding. The reading public also brings its prior understanding and expectations to the text and gives power to the text through the meanings it constructs out of it. ‘The historical life of a literary work is inconceivable without the active participation of its addressee’ (Jauss 1970: 169).

Central, then, to the writing of the literary history of a given work is the under-



standing of how it is received over time. The way a text is read within a particular community depends on the expectations (the 'horizons of expectation') with which the readers approach it. These in turn are generated by the 'prior understanding of the genre, the form and the thematic of previously known works and by the contrast between poetic and practical language' (Jauss 1970: 174). In the case of our letter one might say, first, that for most of its history Galatians has been approached generically as a work of Sacred Scripture, belonging to the church's canon, consisting of the Old and New Testaments. Secondly, in formal terms, the work has been universally taken to be an apostolic letter addressing particular concerns of the early church, though there have been considerable differences of view about the precise nature of the letter's argument. Thirdly, there has been widespread agreement that the letter's central theme was the question of the continuing observation of the Old Testament laws, though again there has been a considerable variety of view about the relative prominence of the other theological, ethical and anthropological topics which it addresses. Its language, fourthly, has generally been regarded as biblical in character, with commentators being alert to Paul's use of scriptural quotation and allusion. However, while throughout the history of reception of the letter there has been a wide awareness of Paul's debt to rhetorical styles of speech and to contemporary idiom, such awareness is clearly related to the state of knowledge at any given time of the popular form of Greek and the ancient rhetorical conventions that Paul used.

Such broad areas of prior understanding, such 'horizons of expectation', will certainly take somewhat different form at different times. To read a text as a canonical text, as Moshe Halberthal has pointed out, may well be to change its meaning; for the text, which may have advocated views which would be regarded as heretical by the orthodox interpreter, 'must be justified in the eyes of the expositor' (Halberthal 1997: 24). It may be that Galatians enjoins its readers not to allow the Law to determine their ethical choices and action, but such a view may be unacceptable to those whose communities look to the Law to provide stability and order in their societies and therefore requires to be challenged, reconstructed. However that may be, there are certainly different expectations held by orthodox Christian commentators about what one would expect to find in a canonical letter, which depend on the state of Christian orthodoxy at any given time. Greater differences will occur in commentators like Marcion, who have very different canons, rejecting the writings of the Old Testament and much of the New, and in historical critical scholars who set aside the text's canonical status and approach the text as any other ancient religious text, a text from a strange world, written in an ancient and dead language. Here the danger is that philological and historical enquiry may displace, even, at an extreme, outlaw the attempt to uncover the theological, ethical and anthropological sense

of the text. Again, there are important differences between those who read the letter to the Galatians as one among 13 Pauline epistles, as traditionally held, and those who, whether they choose to read the texts canonically or not, want to distinguish between authentic and inauthentic 'Pauline' letters.

Important as is the interpreter's prior understanding of the text's genre, much of the drama of the struggle for the meaning of the text will come from the simple engagement with the obscurity, ambiguity, openness, pregnancy and elliptical nature of some of Paul's utterances. Examples are not difficult to find. When Paul says that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any use but a new creation/creature (*kainē ktisis*, 6:15), is he referring to a new world with a new creator distinct from the creator of the old world? Is he referring to a new creature within the existing creation, and if so, is this creature a new principle: faith working through love, justification by faith, or a new person brought about by the workings of these principles? (And are those workings principally the work of the Spirit or of the believer?) Or is the sense somewhere in between: the birth of the new creation is the result of the Saviour's death which has put an end to this present evil order of things and inaugurated a new world no longer based on the old oppositions of Law and not-Law but of flesh and spirit?

It is not difficult to see how such different readings will inspire and in turn be inspired by very different visions of Christianity and lead to the development of very different kinds of community. What is difficult, if not impossible, to say is where the weight of influence lies: is it on the social and political constellation of events within which the text is read, or is it on the hearing of this text in a particular situation? In the trials of Luther's life does Galatians speak to him differently in 1516–17/19 and 1531/5? Or do we have to say that the different readings are the result of changes in his own prior understanding? While answers to such questions are not to be had, the task for the historian is to see where the correlations lie: how Luther's readings find their 'ecological niches' in the changing circumstances of his life, and how they each in turn illuminate aspects of his favourite text. They would hardly have the power that they do if that were not so; this is one of the constraints of the commentary form: that its power and attraction are a function of the fit between the commentator's overall understanding of the text and the text itself. However compelling an account of Christian faith and living a commentator may offer of the text, it will ultimately commend itself only insofar as it also offers a compelling reading of the text itself.

So what of the text itself? What is so remarkable about this short letter of six chapters that it has enjoyed such a remarkably rich history of influence? Part of its power lies in the sheer passion with which it is written. Paul, the founder of the church in Galatia, is attempting to combat the influence of teachers operating in Galatia whose doctrines would in his opinion completely undermine 'his'

gospel. Such is the life-giving power of the message which Paul has received, that anything which contradicts it is accursed (1:9!), and destroys the new life of the Spirit of God which he and the Galatians have experienced (3:3). The question at issue is at root a simple one: should Gentile converts be circumcised and obey all aspects of the Jewish Law, including all the liturgical and dietary regulations? This is what the teachers are claiming, and Paul's response takes its starting point in the fact that his converts have experienced life in the Spirit of God (what more could one ask for?) by listening to his preaching and *not* as a result of their observance of the Law (3:4). And, to make matters more threatening for Paul, this is not just a local dispute; similar issues have surfaced in the recent past in dealings between the churches at Antioch and Jerusalem, which had seemed to have been resolved (2:9–10) but which then surfaced again in an angry flare-up between Paul and Peter in Antioch, where Paul accused Peter of hypocrisy and which, it appears has yet to be resolved (2:11–14). So the theological issue of the nature and continuing status of the Law is linked to a further issue of personal authority: who, in this new, dynamic movement has the power to resolve such disputes? By what authority does Paul seek to counter the views of Peter and the church leaders in Jerusalem, who were after all, disciples of Jesus in his lifetime?

Paul's response to this crisis in his life and the life of the church is in three parts. In the first two chapters, he defends his own personal authority by arguing that he has received his gospel directly from God, 'through a revelation of Jesus Christ', and not 'from or through human beings' (1:11–12). This is done in the form of a narrative which describes his early ministry and encounters with the Jerusalem church, arguing that he was in no way dependent for his gospel on their instruction (at most they had compared notes after some years, 1:18) and setting out his own consistency of teaching and behaviour, by contrast with that of Peter (2:1–14). Discussion of his dispute with Peter leads him to open up the issue between them: whether justice, right standing with God, life in the presence of God, is dependent on faith in Christ or on observance of the Law (2:16), and this leads into a passage of almost mystical intensity (certainly one greatly loved by the mystics) in which Paul speaks of the intimacy of his union with Christ (2:20).

The second section contains a cluster of arguments supportive of Paul's view that the new life in Christ derives from faith in Christ and not from observance of the Law. These may be rather differently analysed, as we shall see, but fairly clearly they start with Paul's appeal to the Galatians' own experience of new life in the Spirit *before* they began to observe the Law (3:2–4) and then put great emphasis on the view that the new life that they have received as sons of Abraham was promised to Abraham's offspring because of his (Abraham's) belief in God (3:6). The offspring about whom the promise is made is Christ; believers share in the promise because, at their baptism, they have been united by faith

to Christ and are therefore sons of Abraham. In this way God's overarching purpose is made good. The giving of the Law, by contrast, was only a temporary measure to hold things under control until such time as faith should come (3:23). In chapter 4 the arguments are directed to finding suitable analogies for the state of those who lived before faith by comparison with the present state of believers. Here Paul deploys a complex double comparison between slaves and free sons and sons before and after reaching their minority. Slaves clearly live a life deprived of liberty and are at the mercy of their masters; free sons, by contrast, enjoy the freedom of heirs, but only once they come into their majority. As minors, their situation is not different from that of slaves, except insofar as their prospects are concerned. The implication seems to be that to take up observation of the Law would be to go back to a state of slavery, as the state of Jews under the Law (though being heirs) was effectively that of slaves. Paul tries another analogy, that between Abraham's two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, one born from a free woman, Sarah, and one from a slave, Hagar. We shall see how complicated this analogy becomes in the application. The section ends with the conclusion: for freedom Christ has set us free, clearly excluding further subjection to the Law for believers.

The third section, while still turning over some of the arguments in the previous two chapters, moves on to set out the implications for the Galatians' manner of life of what Paul has said so far. The believers' grounds for hope lie in their faith, in which love is at work (5:5). They must not abuse their freedom from the Law, as if that meant they could do whatever they liked, but rather they must serve one another in love (5:13), being led by the Spirit (5:18). As such, they will not be under the Law, but neither will they be slaves to the flesh producing its works (5:19–21). Rather, they will walk in the Spirit and bear its fruit (5:22–3). The letter concludes with a series of injunctions and Paul's final great exclamation, as it were the distillation of all that he has been fighting for in the course of this passionate letter: 'Far be it for me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation' (6:14–15). This remarkable vision of the cross as the source of release from the toils of the old way of life and of radical newness of life drives the letter and accounts for much of its often disruptive power.

## The Principal Commentators

### *Marcion*

Marcion was born in Sinope, a Greek city in Pontus on the southern shores of the Black Sea, c.85 CE, probably the son of the local bishop, who, it was said, excommunicated him for heresy. Pontus was also home to Jewish communities, and the Jewish (proselyte) Bible translator Aquila appears also to have been born in Sinope at the same time. Harnack speculates that Marcion and his father were converts from Judaism, and that this explains his extreme anti-Jewish stance, which goes beyond Paul's rejection of the Law to embrace 'the lawgiver and the Old Testament'. Others have suggested that Marcion was influenced by Gnosticism or Greek philosophy. However that may be, Marcion moved to Rome, became a member of the church, and, after some years, in 144 CE presented his teaching to its 'presbyters and teachers, the disciples of the disciples of the apostles' (Hippolytus, *Syntagma*, reconstruction in Harnack 1996: 24\*–5\*). This led to his condemnation and his founding of his own church, which remained a serious threat to Catholic Christianity (the church of the as yet undivided orthodox Christians) until the latter's emergence as the official church of the Empire in the fourth century. Certainly, it seems likely that Marcion's theology is driven by his concern to clarify the relationship between Christianity and Judaism and, within that complex of problems, to determine the role and authority of the Law and the Old Testament. While according to some traditions Marcion was influenced by the Gnostic Cerdo, Harnack and others dispute this and see him as a church theologian whose interests lie in clarifying the grounds of Christian theology (Harnack 1996: 196, n. 1; Aland 1992: 98).

None of Marcion's writings survive. We are dependent for our knowledge of his works and beliefs largely on the account given of his thought in polemical writings of Catholic theologians, and to a degree on citations of works of his followers in heresiologies. His principal works were his edition of the Bible, which consisted of a much edited version of the Pauline corpus (the *Apostle*) and the Gospel of Luke, and his *Antitheses*. The latter consisted not only of a series of sharply formulated contrasts between the teaching of the Old and New Testaments, but also, of an exposition of his canon, as is evident from Tertullian's discussion in *Marc.* 4 and 5 (ANF 3. 345–475; see *Marc.* 5.2–4; ANF 3. 431–8 for Tertullian's discussion of Marcion's views on Galatians which, sadly for us, tells us more about Tertullian than Marcion). Marcion set out to achieve 'such a severance of the law from the gospel as should divide the Deity into two, nay, diverse gods – one for each Instrument, or Testament as it is more usual to call it; that by such means he might patronize belief in "the Gospel according to

the Antitheses”, so at least Tertullian thought (*Marc.* 4.1; ANF 3. 345). The work certainly contained strikingly formulated antitheses contrasting the teaching of the two Testaments, but, as Marcion’s only literary work, it must also have been the source for Tertullian’s knowledge of Marcion’s exegetical writing (Aland 1992: 92), discussed in the commentary below.

Marcion is guided in his preparation of an authoritative canon of Scripture for his church by his theological beliefs, which in turn are principally derived from his radical reading of Paul. There is a circular process at work here, in that Marcion’s understanding of Paul is based on his own version of Paul’s letters, which omitted the Pastorals and Hebrews (traditionally ascribed to Paul), that is to say, on a version from which he has already carefully removed what he sees as Jewish interpolations alien to Paul’s true gospel. Marcion would have argued, however, that this process is based on a historical understanding of the situation of the early church out of which the particular version of the texts which he received had arisen. His revision, that is to say, is based on his reading of Galatians 1 and 2 (May 1989: 209 has suggested that Marcion took these two chapters as a kind of historical introduction to the Pauline corpus). Specifically, it is based on Paul’s account of his conflict with Peter, which he prefaces by distinguishing his gospel from the ‘other’ gospel, which is a perversion of his true gospel, Gal 1:6–7, 11. This perversion, Marcion believed, took the form of additions to the text of the genuine Pauline letters and to the true Gospel (of Luke) as well as of the creation of other Gospels altogether.

This is a bold reading of Galatians 1 and 2, which offer Marcion only limited assistance in identifying what the original, as he supposes, uninterpolated form of the texts might have been. Such help as he derived from Galatians 1 and 2 appears to have come principally from Paul’s account of the nature of his dispute with Peter, specifically from Paul’s discussion of two kinds of righteousness in 2:16, and only partly from the particular nature of the dispute about Law observance which was the occasion of the letter. What Paul opposes with such vehemence is the imposition of Law observance on his Gentile converts, and this clearly places a large question mark over the Law and, by extension, its author: why then the Law? This is clearly in principle grist to Marcion’s mill, but Paul’s arguments in (our) chapter 3 attempt to give a place to the Law in the overall plan of salvation in Christ, and perhaps not surprisingly our evidence suggests that Marcion omits the whole passage, 3:15–25, where this question is explicitly raised and discussed, as well as the earlier section, 3:6–9, about the faith and blessing promised to Abraham, which frames Paul’s account of the – albeit temporary – purpose of the Law. Tertullian omits any discussion of these passages in his treatment of chapter 3 (*Marc.* 5.3; ANF 3. 434–5). Jerome, probably following Origen, claims that Marcion omitted 3:6–9, but makes no specific comment about 3:15–25 (PL 26.377). Clearly, however, 3:13, ‘Christ redeemed