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# THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

Evan Fales

Personal interaction with Jesus is often taken by Christians as evidence, even proof, of Jesus' victory over death. A noteworthy example is St. Paul's conversion experience and report of other "appearances" of the risen Lord, which play an important part in some scholarly arguments for the actual bodily resurrection of Jesus. Here I examine the evidential credentials of Paul's religious experiences in the light of his *Sitz im Leben* and current sociological understanding of mystical experience. Using Paul and some contemporary data, I then draw out some lessons concerning how epistemologists ought to proceed in assessing the evidential import of a mystic's revelatory claims.

*"There is something deeply mysterious about Paul's conversion experience, something that will never be available to scientific analysis."*

— Alan F. Segal<sup>1</sup>

It is unclear whether Segal finds Paul's conversion mysterious because Paul's descriptions pose problems, because the historical record is so sketchy, or because Segal thinks mystical experience itself resists scientific understanding. Here are the texts:

1 11 For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many my own age ..., so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who set me apart before I was born, and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to [*sic.*: in] me, in order that I might preach him to the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia....



2 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem... I went up by revelation; and I laid before them... the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running... in vain. And... those who were of repute added nothing to me... and when they perceived the grace that was given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me... the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. (RSV, Gal. 1:11 – 2: 9)

9 But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples... went to the high priest... Now as he journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. And he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; but rise and enter the city, and you will be told what to do." The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened he could see nothing... And for three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank...[After he was cured] For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus. And in the synagogues he immediately proclaimed Jesus, saying "He is the Son of God."... When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him, ... but his disciples took him by night... And when he had come to Jerusalem he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him... But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord... So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists; but they were seeking to kill him. And when the brethren knew it, they... sent him off to Tarsus. (Acts 9:1 – 30)

We shall also have occasion to refer to two other accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts (Acts 22 and 26), and to his list of post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus (I Cor. 15).

Here are questions: Who was Paul? What did he in fact experience? What were the consequences, for Paul, of having had this experience? What could Paul learn from that experience about Jesus of Nazareth?

These will seem peculiar questions for a philosopher to be examining. They are more properly the province of the historian. Surely it would be more sensible for a philosopher interested, as I am, in the credibility of mystical experience as a source of knowledge to pursue these matters by turning to living mystics. I shall be doing a bit of that as well in what follows. But, confessing trespass into the historian's jurisdiction, I nevertheless begin with Paul. As one of the first, and perhaps the single most prominent convert to Christianity, Paul stands, for Christians, as a model both of conversion and of spiritual intimacy with the risen Lord. Paul is a paradigm. What can the modern study of mystical experiences (ME's) tell us about Paul? I will use that question as a gateway to a broader one: how

much, in general, can we hope to learn about the phenomenology and epistemic credentials of ME's from the reports of those that have them?

To be sure, Paul does not tell us, in any extant writings, about the content, or even the circumstances, of his encounter with Jesus; for this we must rely upon Luke, apparently quoting Paul. Nevertheless, what Paul does say, and the contrast with the Lukan accounts, can tell us some significant things about Paul. So I shall argue. Let me alert the reader in advance that I shall, in engaging the Pauline and Lukan texts, be employing, for cause, a hermeneutics of suspicion. The reasons for this I shall shortly reveal.

Let us begin with three puzzles that concern chronology rather than the content of Paul's conversion experience. The first two puzzles have to do with Paul's post-conversion agenda. In Gal. 1, Paul tells us that he was "called" by Jesus to preach to the Gentiles, and that he did not "confer with flesh and blood" – i.e. did not consult with, or seek the imprimatur of, the Jerusalem leadership of the Church to pursue this calling – but went straightaway to Arabia. Paul does not say how long he stayed in Arabia, or what he did there, but the implication is that he was engaged in preaching to the Gentiles, and that this mission lasted possibly as long as three years. Only then did he consult with the Jerusalem Church, and only with its two leaders, Peter and James, after which time he again went away for fourteen years, confirmed in his authority to preach, to the Gentile regions of Syria and Cilicia.

This account conflicts in two striking particulars with the account we find at Acts 9. For there we are told that, after escaping an assassination plot by the Jews in Damascus, Paul went to Jerusalem, not Arabia. In Jerusalem, he spent time conferring, not just with Peter and James, but with all the apostles, convincing them of the sincerity of his conversion by preaching "against the Hellenists." Perceiving that he was under threat from these Hellenists, Paul goes to Tarsus, then Antioch (in Cilicia). In Acts 22, Luke quotes Paul confirming essentially this account in testimony before the Roman tribune, but in his testimony to Agrippa, he adds (Acts 26:20) another detail not mentioned in Galatians, namely that he preached "throughout all the country of Judea."

Did Paul preach in Arabia for some time on the sole authority of his vision before submitting himself to scrutiny by the Jerusalem Church, or go directly to Jerusalem from Damascus? Did Paul submit his credentials to just Peter and James, or to the whole Jerusalem congregation? And – a more minor point – did his mission include all of Judea or not?

The third main puzzle is presented by I Cor. 15:6, where on the face of it Paul is offering evidence that Jesus is risen by giving the Corinthians a chronologically ordered list of those to whom the risen Christ has appeared, beginning with Peter and ending with his own conversion experience. A noteworthy entry in this list is an appearance "... to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep." This mention of a public appearance is puzzling for two reasons. First, remarkable though it must have been, it is to my knowledge nowhere else attested in any extant ancient source. It is especially surprising not to find mention of it in Acts.<sup>2</sup> Second, it is nearly use-

less as evidence: Paul does not tell the Corinthians where this appearance occurred, nor does he name any of the "brethren." Furthermore if, as we might reasonably suppose, the event took place in Judea or Galilee, it would have been something of a fool's errand for any Corinthian to attempt to confirm it. Not only are the witnesses unnamed, but Judea is some 800 miles as the crow flies (an arduous journey taking perhaps a good fortnight in those days) distant from Corinth. The bearing of this passage on my argument will emerge presently; I shall suggest that Paul has something besides evidence of the Resurrection in mind.<sup>3</sup>

In other essays I have defended the applicability of the work of the anthropologist I. M. Lewis on mysticism to Christian mysticism – at least where mysticism "goes public." Here I want to consider as well the much more private religious experiences of many ordinary Christians. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the role of mystical experience in defining the public persona of an individual can come in degrees. At one end of the spectrum we find those whose ecstasies are not only widely broadcast, but play an essential part in social recognition of the mystic as a religious leader or authority. At the other end, there are no doubt individuals who have such experiences, but never intimate this to anyone else. Still, if a mystic relates her experiences to even just one other person, this brings them – and the mystic's station as one favored by such experiences – into the social arena, even if in only a limited way. Lewis is primarily concerned with how mystical states enter into the ways social relationships are formed or altered.<sup>4</sup> And Paul was a public mystic if ever there was one; accordingly, I shall begin by asking how Paul fits the models of mystical practice discovered by Lewis.

It will be necessary first to state as briefly as possible some of the central results of Lewis' comparative studies of mysticism. Looking at a broad sweep of cultures in which mystical traditions flourish, Lewis has found that mysticism has especial importance in two types of social contexts, and accordingly, he draws a distinction between central mysticism and peripheral mysticism.

Central mysticism occurs in societies in which positions of social or political power are filled competitively on the basis of merit rather than ascriptively (rather than, for example, on the basis of the social status or position of one's parents). Merit in these contexts is a matter of acquiring charisma – the ability of a candidate individual to impress others with his leadership abilities, wisdom, and the like. Often, charisma is in turn connected to the ability to make, convincingly, the claim that one has been chosen by the gods. And here, mystical possession by the god or gods of the central cult (the "official" cult) can serve as a sure sign of divine favor.

Naturally, someone who is vying for a sought-after social status can easily come under suspicion of having manufactured such a visitation from a central god. As such status is conferred with the understanding that the position is to be used in the service of the general welfare, not for private gain, a candidate must be able to deflect such suspicion. There are several strategies for doing this. For example, those who are subject to divine visitation often describe the experience as frightening or debilitating, and themselves as unwilling "victims" of the divine call. Indeed, at the time

such visitations begin, the budding mystic often appears to be ill or mentally disturbed, though with time – especially if the visitations are socially recognized as genuine – this helplessness is replaced with increasing mastery of the relationship with the divine (and with peers).

Peripheral mysticism is found among groups that are socially marginalized or dispossessed. It typically involves possession by supernatural beings that are represented to the broader society as demonic. Once again, the possessed individual is an unwilling victim. But this time, he or she typically assumes, while possessed, the persona or demeanor of someone who has social power, and displays behaviors that are either disruptive or socially inappropriate for someone of lowly station – including the making of demands on behalf of the oppressed upon those who dominate them.

The cure for this malady is typically exorcism, which must be performed by someone who has previously been possessed by the demon in question, and has acquired mastery over such spirits. The demon demands a *quid pro quo* as the price of eviction; and this compensation typically takes the form of better treatment of the victim by those who oppress him or her. Exorcism is often also an induction ritual that recruits the victim to the fellowship of others who have been possessed. Thus the cult of the demonic spirits consists of the socially dispossessed who have been supernaturally possessed. Possession is a strategy, often successful, for pressuring those in power that works because (a) the afflicted cannot be blamed for his or her misbehavior, and (b) the powerful can save face in acceding to the demands made upon them for, after all, these demands come, not from social inferiors, but from potentially dangerous demons.

The strategy can, however, fail. If the demands are too strident or overreaching, the response from those in power may be repression, using force if necessary. Thus, peripheral possession finds its natural home in social contexts in which marginalized groups are neither demoralized nor driven to contemplate outright rebellion, but live in an uneasy state of tension and negotiation over social resources. For obvious reasons, peripheral mysticism is viewed with suspicion – or worse – by the powers that be; and it reflects frustrations that can easily spill over into overt rebellion.<sup>5</sup> Also not surprisingly, the spirits that are exoterically depicted as demonic are, often enough, valorized as benign or beneficent within the esoteric ideology of their cults.

I have painted with broad strokes the stereotypical features of central and peripheral mysticism. However, mysticism does not always conform precisely to these patterns. For example, as I have elsewhere tried to demonstrate for Teresa of Avila and other Reformation Christian mystics, peripherals can be possessed by central deities. This is – as Teresa was acutely aware – a dangerous matter.<sup>6</sup> But the alternative within Teresa's social context – claiming demonic possession – would have given her no authority, gained her nothing, and have been only somewhat less dangerous. Even so, Reformation mystics – especially women – who were too incautious in the claims they made about supernatural gifts, or too bold in the demands they made upon their oppressors, could come under attack. When they did, one available strategy was to claim that their powers and visions had in fact been produced by the devil, who had deceived them.

Proper repentance did not in general get such a mystic entirely off the hook,<sup>7</sup> but it could hold at bay the flames of an *auto de fe*. Thus the Reformation mystics (both Catholic and Protestant) were, in fact, peripheral mystics forced by circumstances to deploy an unusually risky strategy.

By now, my reader may have become impatient with all this talk about mystical strategies and competition for power or pressures upon those who possess it: what about the deep religious faith of the mystics; what about the profoundly significant and powerfully transformational mystical experiences themselves? I have so far said nothing about these matters – matters which will, no doubt, seem of paramount importance. But nothing I *have* said commits us to any view about this. In particular, nothing I have said commits us to any view as to the veridicality or evidential standing of ME's. I have only claimed – and this is supported by a substantial body of empirical evidence – that when mysticism goes public, it does so in ways that involve negotiations concerning the power, social status, or access to resources and rights for individual mystics or for groups with whose interests they identify. Direct commerce with the gods is a source of power and authority; and those who can make a socially recognized claim to such commerce do in fact do so in contexts in which competing social interests are at stake.

With this background in mind, let us return to Paul. The first question that Lewis' study of ecstatic religion might prompt, naturally, is how, if at all, does Paul fit the social profiles and contexts of public mysticism indicated above? As we shall see, answering this question is not an entirely easy task, because Paul appears to provide an especially complex – but consequently interesting – case.

We know, unfortunately, almost nothing about Paul's background prior to his conversion. What we do know must be gleaned from what little Paul tells us, in his letters and indirectly via Luke. Before he converted, Paul was known as Saul of Tarsus. That suggests that he was born and raised in Tarsus, a city populated, we may assume, mainly by gentiles and Hellenized Jews. Yet Paul tells us that he had a strict Pharisaic upbringing. The Pharisaic party, the most popular of the first-century Jewish sects, at least in Judea, was "zealous for the law," and hence less open to Hellenistic influences than would have been true for some other groups of Jews, including the Sadducean party and many in the Diaspora.<sup>8</sup> That Paul could speak of himself as being "of Tarsus" also suggests that his family ranked among the more prominent in the city.<sup>9</sup> These few hints do suggest, however, that Paul was a young up-and-coming figure in the party of the Pharisees in Jerusalem at the time of his conversion. Certainly he was a master polemicist and a gifted thinker. He was also deeply motivated – one might say consumed – by religious concerns (which, at the time, could not be separated from political concerns<sup>10</sup>). We may surmise, then, that with respect to his Jewish identity, Paul was a potential candidate for a position of influence within the chaotic Jewish political scene.

But how much room was there "at the top"? Did charisma matter? Israel's self-understanding of its history suggests a rather complex picture.<sup>11</sup> In the era of the Judges, Israel was, by tradition, a "big man" society in which leadership was gained through merit and charisma. The (reluc-

tant) transition to monarchy is also marked with this feature: both Saul and David were “chosen” by God prior to public acceptance, and ascriptive kingship lasted only for one generation before rebellion split the kingdom. The prophets, likewise, achieve authority because they are singled out by God; sometimes, like Paul, they claim to have been destined for this “in the womb.”<sup>12</sup>

Yet on the other hand, the priesthood was hereditary, and only Levites were admitted. There was a political furor in Israel when John Hyrcanus, who was not a Levite, assumed the role of high priest. Indeed, the Pharisees seem to have been at the center of opposition to Jonathan.<sup>13</sup> Yet given the turbulent political situation in first-century Judea – e.g. the recurrent appearance of messianic claimants – it can safely be said that there was plenty of opportunity for sectarian movements in which leadership and charisma were closely connected.

Although he may have been a rising star within the party of the Pharisees, Paul deserted – rather suddenly, as he tells it – to the camp of an enemy sect. Here I want to pose a question that does not admit of an easy or quick answer. Can we, quite *apart from the apokalypse* (revelation) in which Jesus first appeared to him, make sense of Paul’s conversion to Christianity? Although doing justice to this matter would take me far beyond the scope of this paper, I want to suggest in very brief compass why I believe the answer to that question is ‘yes.’ Paul’s (extra-mystical) reasons for casting his lot with the Christians can illuminate, I think, both his conversion experience and his subsequent activity within the Church.

A number of writers have suggested that early Christianity, and Paul’s theology in particular, is in significant measure a response to the political circumstances in which Jews found themselves, and cannot be separated from political ideology.<sup>14</sup> These writers agree – and I believe they are correct – that the Pauline Christ is presented as a challenge to Caesar, and that his Kingdom is offered as a replacement for the Roman Imperium. I do not believe the scholars in question go far enough in pursuing the implications of this claim, but for our present purpose, it will suffice to observe that Paul’s understanding of the arrival of the Messiah cannot be divorced from the question that dominated the Jewish political thought of his day: what does it mean that the Children of Israel, the Chosen People to whom Yahweh promised earthly dominion (e.g. Is.66), have been crushed, dispersed, and culturally overwhelmed by the enormous, apparently invincible power of Rome? How, indeed, can Jews survive as a faithful people in the face of the Roman juggernaut?

For the Pharisees, the preservation of Jewish identity was deeply dependent upon careful observance of Torah. But Paul seems to have seen in Christianity a different possibility, one that substitutes for faithfulness to Torah faith in a righteous, legitimate King whose Kingdom is open not just to Jews but to Gentiles – hence, to the Romans themselves. Though it is a drastic oversimplification, one might say that Paul’s response to the Roman problem was: if you can’t beat them, convince them to join you.<sup>15</sup> In the end, this idea was actually successful – though it took nearly three centuries longer than Paul seems to have anticipated.<sup>16</sup>

But in this line of thought (or at least in respect of its implications for a



mission to Gentiles), Paul seems to have moved significantly beyond the Jewish Christian thinking of his day, and certainly beyond the views of the Church leadership in Jerusalem. A proper discussion of this way of looking at Paul would have to address Paul's complex and nuanced attitude toward the Jewish law; and it would have to say much more about the political dimensions of Paul's thought and post-Pauline Christianity.<sup>17</sup> That discussion must be for the present set aside. Nevertheless, we have grounds for two important conclusions: (1) Anyone who was heavily invested, as Paul was, in first-century Pharisaism, would have been deeply concerned with the problem of Jewish cultural, religious, and political survival, and hence very much aware of the political dimensions of rival sect ideologies; and therefore (2) Paul would, if he came (slowly or suddenly) to recognize in Christianity a potential for a more powerful response to Roman hegemony, have had strong reason to switch his allegiance, quite aside from the experience of a celestial call.

Paul did not merely convert to Christianity. He sought prominence both as a leader of the missionary effort and as a preeminent interpreter of the gospel. He faced a daunting challenge. Not only was he an outsider, a Johnny-come-lately to the fold, but he was known and feared as a former enemy. He was, one might suppose, the last sort of person to whom Christians would look for authoritative teaching.

Casting our eyes back to the social categories that Lewis associates with public mysticism, how shall we classify Paul? Paul's social position, it appears, was unusually complex. Paul was a Roman citizen, hailing from a Gentile city. He was a diaspora Jew, who returned to Jerusalem. And he was a newly minted Christian. As a Roman citizen, he had a legal identity that conferred the privileges of membership in the ruling society. Yet, as a Jew, he was, *vis á vis* Rome, a member of a sometimes despised minority, a relative "outsider." But, also as a Jew, he seems to have enjoyed "insider" status *vis á vis* the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem. Having converted to Christianity, he was anathema to the Jews – but also an object of suspicion, at best, to fellow Christians. And that suspicion must have been dramatically heightened for the Jewish Christian leadership by Paul's views about the (non)application of Torah to Gentile converts, and the soteriological role of Torah generally. He seems to have had especially difficult relations with Peter and James. What Paul most needed, if his viewpoint was to become influential, was to move from the periphery to the center in the eyes of his fellow Christians. Whatever else they did, his experience on the road to Damascus and subsequent ecstasies would have promoted that end. It appears, indeed, that the Christian movement was at this time undergoing a gradual transition from charismatic leadership to hierarchy. As the "last" of the apostles, Paul was, in a sense, the last of those to whom (canonical) charisma had flowed directly from heaven.

In sociological terms, then, Paul was in a complexly anomalous position. In terms of Lewis' distinction between central and peripheral mysticism, it is not a straightforward matter to say what kind of mystic Paul is. His experience of a Jewish messiah maps – though awkwardly enough to be heretical – onto the central ideology of Israel.<sup>18</sup> For this he immediately earns the enmity of the Jews. Almost as immediately, preaching in Jerusalem, he

earns, according to Luke, the enmity of the “Hellenists,” apparently Jews, who, like Paul, had rejected the necessity of close adherence to ceremonial laws and Temple worship,<sup>19</sup> but for whom accommodation with the Roman/Hellenic world possibly meant assimilation. So within the Jewish political landscape, Paul has situated himself as neither an anti-Roman nationalist nor an accommodating compromiser.

Among Christians – a peripheral Jewish sect – Paul was a newcomer with a repugnant past who had just claimed to have the kind of experience that would establish his credentials in the central cult. Within Roman society, no doubt, none of this would initially have meant much, except to those whom Paul converted and taught. Yahweh himself – to say nothing of Jesus – would from a Roman perspective have been considered a foreign deity, peripheral if not marginal; but also, clearly, a deity with high ambitions.

Yet through the complexities, we can see that the central theme of Lewis’ work – that public mysticism mediates the struggle for recognition and authority – shines through clearly. As he enters the fold, Paul is triply marginal: as a Jewish Roman, as a Christian Jew, and as a former enemy with divergent, even divisive, views. Paul’s hope is that he – or his soteriology – can become triply triumphant: first as mainstream within the Christian movement, second, as a testimony to Jews, and third, as a testimony to Gentiles and the Roman Imperium.

I want now to suggest that Lewis’ approach can illuminate the Pauline and Lukan presentations of his conversion – and the differences between them. Paul’s most immediate problem is to gain acceptance for his teaching by the Gentiles to whom he directed his mission, and to be recognized as a peer by the Church elders in Jerusalem. Perhaps the latter could have forgiven his former persecutions – indeed, he must have been a prize “catch” for the movement – but Paul had sharp disagreements, at least with Peter and James, over whether circumcision and kosher food laws are to be demanded of Gentile converts. More generally, this can be understood as a dispute over the importance of obedience to Torah – that is, “works” – to salvation. Thus it is critical to Paul to be able to claim for his teaching an authority independent of the Jerusalem church (and of Torah), and especially Peter and James.

It is exactly this that Paul claims, on behalf of his “call” on the road to Damascus, in Gal. 1. He does not preach “man’s gospel;” nor was he “taught it,” but received it by revelation. The clear implication of his going away to Arabia is, surely, that he went to preach this gospel, presumably to Gentiles, *before* receiving any official approval or commission from the apostles in Jerusalem. He has clearly been challenged about this (“before God, I do not lie!”); and indeed, Luke, even while recognizing the central importance of Paul, says nothing about this, but has Paul go directly to Jerusalem to submit to inspection by the whole Christian congregation there.<sup>20</sup> As Paul would have it, he went only after three years, and then only to present his already-established credentials to Peter and, secondarily, James.<sup>21</sup> It is, according to Paul, another fourteen years before he again travels to Jerusalem – goes “by revelation,” i.e., presumably at God’s behest – to be vetted by the entire congregation.

Quite similar considerations may shed some light on I Cor. 15:6, which is puzzling, in part, because this appearance of the risen Christ to “more than five hundred brethren” is not elsewhere attested. Because such appearances are clearly linked to authority in the early Church, it is a reasonable speculation that not just the *fact* of having been visited by Christ, but the *order* in which these appearances were granted to his followers would reflect something of their relative importance within the Church. Paul, omitting any mention of the women at the empty tomb, gives pride of place to Peter, as indeed he must. With due humility, he also presents himself as the last of those to whom the divine commission has been granted – “as to one prematurely born” [*lit.*: ‘as to an abortion’]. What is of interest, if we look at the passage in this way, is the location of James on the list. Although he was reckoned with Peter to be at the head of the Church, here he appears after the five hundred on the list, and just barely prior to Paul himself. It is much to be wished that we had some independent account of the post-Resurrection appearances with mention of James.

Should Paul have been able to expect that an appeal to his having met the Lord would gain a sympathetic hearing from the Romans? That appears more doubtful. Yet in Luke’s telling, Paul did garner at least partial support from Roman officials (Acts 22, 26), even if the role of Paul’s claimed theophanies in that achievement is impossible to determine. From the point of view of a Roman administrator, Paul was not a peripheral claiming demonic possession to excuse bad behavior, nor, like Teresa, was he a peripheral aspiring to be seen as possessed by a central deity. He was a semi-peripheral possessed by a peripheral deity that aspired to centrality. Lewis did not have occasion to examine this possibility. Yet it was a topos familiar to Israel (e.g. the stories of Joseph, Esther, and Daniel).

I have little doubt that many Christians would find the foregoing reflections upon Paul’s conversion experience to be, not only ungenerous, but really beside the point. That point, I presume, would be directed not only to the profound change that Paul underwent, but to the question whether he did not in fact see the risen Christ. But here, agreeing perhaps with Segal, I must disappoint. There is something deeply mysterious about Paul’s experience, not because of its religious character, but because our evidence is simply – and no doubt irremediably – too thin. That is true of the phenomenal content of Paul’s experience, which is described only by Luke, and by him in inconsistent ways. In particular, Lk. 9 and 22 say that Paul is told by the divine voice to rise and go into Damascus, where he will receive further instructions (from the Damascene Christians). But Lk. 26 accords much more closely with Gal. 1, for there Luke has Paul tell Agrippa that the voice itself instructed him, giving him his commission to preach to the Gentiles. Allusive brevity equally characterizes Paul’s other allusions to ecstatic experience; most prominently, the heavenly journey he reports in the third person (and with ironic humility) in II Cor. 12.<sup>22</sup>

We cannot say, either, whether Paul’s vision provided him with good evidence that Jesus was taken alive into heaven. For we know too little about the circumstances. Prior to his Damascene encounter, did Paul know that Jesus was supposed to have been raised from the dead? It seems likely that he did. He had – so he tells us – taken upon himself the mission of

persecuting the Christians; presumably, he undertook to educate himself concerning their beliefs. At I Cor. 15:3 – 5 he repeats what many scholars suppose is a credal formula concerning the crucifixion and resurrection, one that is thought to have originated in the earliest stratum of the Christian church. He tells us he “received” this – including the information that Jesus appeared to Peter and the twelve. But he does not tell us how much of this he knew, or had heard, before the trip to Damascus.

However, and to my mind more importantly, we do not have to suppose even that Paul *believed* he had actually seen the risen Lord, in order to account for his claims about his vision. It is a further question – and one I cannot begin to enter upon here – whether Paul’s conversion and subsequent career (to say nothing of I Cor. 15) can be explained only by supposing that he believed, in any case and for whatever reason, that Jesus was bodily raised from the dead.<sup>23</sup>

A proper study of this question would require a much more extensive treatment of Paul’s theology and its political dimensions. For present purposes, I am relying upon the work of Horsley, Segal, Wright, and others to make the case for this political dimension. To be sure, Wright thinks that Jesus did appear to Paul, and Segal thinks Paul’s theology sprang out of his conversion experience.<sup>24</sup> But the fact that Paul had strong political reasons for his theology makes it just as possible to suppose the reverse: that Paul had the experiences, or rather described them in the way he did, because he had the political insights. In saying this, I am not accusing Paul of dishonesty, as some of my reflections below will show. What this possibility does do is to partly disarm arguments that begin with the conversion of Paul, move on to the “sudden transformation” of the disciples after the discovery of an empty tomb, to conclude with the suggestion that the only, or best, explanation for these “facts” is an actual resurrection.<sup>25</sup>

Whatever may have happened on the road to Damascus, it is clear that Paul underwent an intellectual transformation. This did not involve merely rejecting the Pharisaic response to Roman domination in favor of a (then) current Christian view, but an inspired recognition that Christianity offered, in germinal form, a response that, in Paul’s new understanding, could be transformed into a powerful ideology and a powerful, effective social movement. There is no good evidence for the usual assumption that this revolution in Paul’s thinking *resulted from* a meeting with a risen Jesus. A fuller investigation of this point, which I must forego, would adduce evidence to show that the introduction of revolutionary social ideas is commonly accompanied by a divine imprimatur communicated by way of ME’s, and that revelatory language in ancient Near Eastern societies can consistently be understood as displaying this pattern. This is a perfectly natural extension of Lewis’ findings of the connection between ME’s and the acquisition of social authority.

Because of the role that Paul’s ME’s played in his career as a Christian evangelist, it is, I have suggested, not possible to know much about these experiences, or even about how they affected his religious understanding. Although Paul’s case is a rather special one, I want, by way of recounting a couple of other more pedestrian cases, to draw the moral that, without intimate knowledge of the mystic and his or her context, we should be very

circumspect about what conclusions can be drawn concerning the evidence his or her experiences provide for a supernatural realm.

To see that this should be a matter of concern, let us remember that philosophers are fond of quoting a few first-person descriptions of ME's, often taken conveniently from William James' *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and proceeding straightaway to draw inferences predicated on the assumption that the cited mystics have given accurate, sincere descriptions of the phenomenology of their experience and of its effects upon them, and that they are sound of mind and spirit. That – to take just one example – is the procedure of Gary Gutting who, after presenting some quotations from James and from a recent interview study by Hay,<sup>26</sup> adds "There is every reason to believe that at least a very large number of such reports are candid, that the experiences reported did in fact take place."<sup>27</sup> Perhaps so; but whatever reasons Gutting has in mind, they can hardly derive from an intimate knowledge of the individuals upon whose testimony he relies. *The Varieties of Religious Experience* was a pioneering work, and in its day, it did considerable service by collecting a variety of such reports. But the details of the reporters' circumstances and histories are either lost or not known except as reported by themselves. One of James' principal sources of information was a collection of data published by E. D. Starbuck.<sup>28</sup> Other reports were culled mainly from religious testimonials and autobiographies. (Even so, as we've seen in the case of Paul, much of interest can sometimes be gleaned from such reports. But philosophers do not in general linger over such details.)

To illustrate the potential pitfalls of simply accepting such reports, let me draw on an example from my own experience. Many years ago, we had a neighbor who, if I may so speak, was a poor white Southerner. He had moved, with his large family, from Virginia to Pennsylvania, in search of a better life. But life was hard in Pennsylvania as well. He had some-time employment in a factory, as I recall, but struggled on the side to establish himself in his chosen calling, which was preaching. He told me the Holy Spirit spoke to him; in fact it was the Spirit that had told him to relocate to Pennsylvania.

As I was interested in the phenomenology of religious experience, I asked him what it was like to hear the Holy Spirit tell him to make such a move: did he literally hear a voice coming from somewhere? No, he said; it was more like a feeling inside him. What sort of a feeling? Well, it seems he had been struggling for some time with the decision whether to move or not, and suddenly, he saw clearly that he should. In short, he understood this inner conviction as the work – the voice – of the Holy Spirit.

It was only later, reflecting upon this gentleman's description, that it occurred to me that not only had *he* wrestled with this difficult decision to move, but, in all likelihood, he had faced the problem of convincing a reluctant, perhaps positively resistant, family. Under these circumstances, a word from the Holy Spirit could not only seal his own inclinations, but do wonders to still the doubts of wife and children. Not that his circumstances had in fact visibly improved thus far; but at least he, and his family, could feel at peace (I presume) with the risky choice he made.

Now of course I do not *know* whether my reconstruction of my neigh-

bor's circumstances is accurate. But the evidence (together with similar examples I shall not detail) at least suggests it. Suppose I am right. Should we conclude that Mr. X was being *disingenuous* with his family (and with me) in claiming to have heard the Holy Spirit? I think not, for something more subtle may easily have happened. People use a variety of strategies, often unconsciously, to reduce uncertainty, cognitive dissonance, and the sense of risk associated with making choices in information-poor circumstances – just the sort of situation Mr. X faced. Many of these strategies – e.g. augury, dream interpretation, and the like, involve implicit or explicit appeal to the supernatural. It is not too much of a stretch to suppose that, in the course of agonizing over his options, Mr. X found himself leaning toward a desire to move, and finally found within himself a resolve to do so, which, as he lacked any convincing external reasons for that choice, he understood in terms of the action of the God to whom he had, no doubt, been praying. I am not sure even that, under these circumstances, we can accuse Mr. X of culpable *self-deception*.

Mr. X is only one case; Gutting draws upon many. That brings with it the difficulty of significant variety of content, which Gutting, like some others,<sup>29</sup> attempts to handle by taking a restricted range of ME's as evidence for a very minimal, syncretistic claim about the existence of a supernatural person. But for many Christians, religious experience serves a much more particularistic end, the end it allegedly served for Paul: because they have come personally to know Jesus, they know that he lives – hence was resurrected.<sup>30</sup> As James astutely observes:

The conversions which Dr. Starbuck ... has in mind are of course mainly those of very commonplace persons, kept true to a pre-appointed type by instruction, appeal, and example. The particular form which they affect is the result of suggestion and initiation.<sup>31</sup>

The influence of culture can be conceived in different ways. Steven Katz argues that ME's are permeated by cultural concepts. Much like Durkheim, he thinks of culture as determining the structure of thought by imbuing it with categories that, like Kant's, provide the necessary conditions for experience itself – but that, unlike Kant's, are neither a priori nor universal. Katz's view contrasts with James'. For Katz, culture and training provide the skeletal structure of thought, determining where and how thought and experience articulate reality. That suggests a rigid framework. James has it that culture and training provide *habits* of thought. The difference between them is like the difference between the biological processes that form the skeleton of a person, and the training that transforms that human body into a skilled soccer player.

My position is closer to James'. But I want to emphasize that, beyond the role of habits of thought, we must not underestimate the capacity of the human mind to shape thought, and perhaps experience itself, in ways that are responsive to present needs, desires, and emotions. As a defender of the given in experience I do not, in saying this, mean to be suggesting that experience contains no components that are not distinguishable apart from concepts, or wishes, or the like. But there is perhaps no domain of human

experience that is more sensitive to these influences than religious experience. That, indeed, helps to explain the power these experiences have in our lives.

The conclusion I mean to draw is a rather simple one. In order to evaluate the strength of a ME as evidence for a religious claim, we must understand the mystic's report of that experience. In order to understand the report, we must understand the reporter. In order to understand the reporter, we must ordinarily do more than simply to accept, at "face value," the report itself. No one, I take it (except possibly the Akawaio Caribs) would accept at face value an Akawaio shaman's report that he had traveled while in trance into the sky or over the mountains to consult with the spirits dwelling there. I trust that most would also be hesitant to claim, with no hint of figuration, that it even *seemed* to the shaman that he was doing this. But if so, we should treat with equal caution Paul's apparent claim to have been assumed into the third heaven.

Lest I leave the impression that I am wedded to what, at the outset, I called a hermeneutics of suspicion, I should hasten to add that I in no way mean here to suggest that every ME is situated within a personal history that gives scope to the sorts of sociological influences that are analyzed by Lewis, and that I have attempted to apply to the case of Paul. Indeed, having mentioned Mr. X, let me note two other individuals – quite close friends, both highly educated – who have generously described to me in some detail their theistic ME's. In neither case do I find Lewis' framework readily applicable. But absent such intimate acquaintance, we should not be too quick to think ourselves entitled to draw epistemic conclusions from the reports given by our sources.

What information, over and above a mystic's report of an ME we see as relevant will be conditioned, naturally enough, by how one thinks that ME might be explained. A theist will incline toward the view that theistic ME's, at least, are produced by God for the purpose of communicating with His creatures; a theist might therefore find to be relevant facts about the mystic pertaining to moral reformation, dedication to God, and the like. One who is prepared to entertain purely psychological or sociological explanations will, of course, find other information significant as well. Under the circumstances, I suggest that, faced with what is after all an essentially empirical question (*viz.*, What causes ME's?), the responsible thing to do is to consider the information relevant to all the explanatory hypotheses that have been brought to the table.<sup>32</sup>

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#### NOTES

1. Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 134.

2. Grasping at straws, some scholars have attempted to identify this appearance with the Pentecostal visitation by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). This seems unlikely – see N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), pp. 324 – 5; but see Richard C. Carrier, "The Spiritual Body of Christ

and the Legend of the Empty Tomb," ' 8.4, in Richard Price and Jeffrey Lowder, eds., *The Empty Tomb: Jesus beyond the Grave* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2005), and in personal communication. If Carrier is right, 'five hundred' may be a copyist's misreading of 'fifty,' (as in 'Pentecost'), which makes identity possible. Acts 2 is evidently meant to describe Jesus' predicted baptism of the brethren with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Lk. 3:16, Mt. 3:11), but Jesus himself is not said to appear. If Paul is referring to the Pentecost event, my argument concerning I Cor. 15:6 will be weakened. Even so, we note that Paul places James near the end of the list. (If Paul is referring to the Pentecost event, other questions immediately arise. The number of witnesses is now unknown, but presumably well below five hundred. More crucially, either the appearance traditions Paul received contain significant error, or else the early Christian community – and Paul – could understand the Pentecost visitation, by what Luke describes as the Holy Spirit, as interchangeable with encounters with the risen Jesus. The latter would certainly call into question a significant body of scholarly opinion that takes the Resurrection to imply an empty tomb.)

3. Pace Wright, *Resurrection*, pp. 325 – 6 and Chapter 18, esp. p. 710 f., and others who have lined up behind the view that Paul is here just giving evidence – good evidence at that – for the Resurrection.

4. I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1989).

5. As often occurs, or comes close to occurring, with millenarian cults such as the Melanesian cargo cults and the Ghost Dance cult of the Plains Indians in the U.S. Another example is the Münzerite movement in Reformation Germany (see Steven E. Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century* [New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1973]; also, Andrew Weeks, *German Mysticism from Hildegard von Bingen to Ludwig Wittgenstein: A Literary and Intellectual History* [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993], pp. 152-3).

6. Just how dangerous is vividly illustrated in an interesting paper by Gábor Klaniczay, "The Process of Trance, Heavenly and Diabolic Apparitions in Johannes Nider's *Formicarius*," available at <http://www.colbud.hu/main/PubArchive/DP/DP65-Klaniczay.pdf>. Teresa went under investigation by the Spanish Inquisition, and had it not been for the friendship of powerful patrons such as King Philip of Spain, she might have fared ill. Her unusual beauty and charm, it seems, served her in good stead – not to mention an extraordinary, and canny, understanding of human psychology. Klaniczay details a series of functional correspondences between Asian shamanism and Medieval/Reformation mysticism, and offers evidence for possible historical links.

7. E.g. Magdalena de la Cruz and Benedetta Carlini. For Magdalena (of whom Teresa was aware), see, e.g. Stephen Clissold, *St. Teresa of Avila*. (London: Sheldon Press, 1979), pp. 46-7. For Benedetta, see Judith C. Brown, *Immodest Acts: The Life of a Lesbian Nun in Renaissance Italy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

8. However, Paul tells us (Acts 22:3) that as a youth he studied the law under Gamaliel, presumably the same Gamaliel, a prominent liberal teacher in Jerusalem, who rescued the apostles from execution by the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-40)!

9. See Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, *Portraits of Paul: An Archaeology of an Ancient Personality* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), pp. 17 and 24 – 6.

10. See Richard Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg PA: Trinity Press International, 1997), and N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992).

11. How accurate the histories contained in the Hebrew Bible are is of course a matter of controversy. But what matters here is how Israel understood its history:



it is traditions, more than the actual past, that is operative for a society.

12. See, e.g., Jer. 1:4-5, Is. 49:5.

13. See Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, xiii, x, 5. Josephus, however, does not describe the opposition as owing to the Maccabean lineage not being Levite.

14. See, e.g., Richard A. Horsley ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), Alan F. Segal, *Paul*, and N. T. Wright, "Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire," (lecture to the Center of Theological Inquiry, Princeton, NJ, 2002), at [http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/reflections\\_volume\\_2/wright.htm](http://www.ctinquiry.org/publications/reflections_volume_2/wright.htm). For the political implications of Jewish (e.g. Pharisaic) belief in bodily resurrection, see N. T. Wright, *New Testament*, pp. 185 – 202, esp. p. 200, and pp. 321 – 334, esp. p. 328. The political implications of a savior-king's resurrection (however allegedly novel the idea) would have been strikingly more profound.

15. The political contrast between Paul's Pharisaic background and his new-found Christianity is dramatic. Pharisees were not entirely uninterested in welcoming Gentile converts (Segal, *Paul*, Chap. 3), but they saw conversion as a binding to Torah. Paul saw in Christianity the possibility of a different, more expansive principle of union between Jew and non-Jew under the lordship of Yahweh. Fellowship with Christ meant abandoning the distinction between Jew and Gentile, slave and master, even male and female (Gal. 3:28). Israel's prophetic tradition announced a day when Israel would conquer and rule a world of vassal states for Yahweh. Paul's Jesus, as a son of David (Rom. 1:3), rules a kingdom that reconfigures the tribal boundaries of Israel and relocates the Temple itself within each worshipper (I Cor. 3:16), and in this way re-conceives the vision of the Prophets. Jesus, as son of a universal God, rules a kingdom that re-conceives equally the hegemony of Rome, itself a tribal imperium.

16. There is considerable controversy over how Paul understood the inauguration of the kingdom of Jesus in relation to contemporary events, but there is reason to think (Rom. 13:11 – 14, I Thess. 4:13 – 18, 5:1 – 9, I Cor. 7:29 – 31) that Paul anticipated (as did Jesus: Mt. 12:40) an immanent *parousia*. If so, Paul's heavenly commerce seems not to have informed him, or informed him correctly, on this important matter. On interpreting the relevant passages, see Segal, *Paul*, pp. 161 – 2; also Helmut Koester, "Imperial Ideology and Paul's Eschatology in I Thessalonians," p. 166, Neil Elliot, "The Anti-Imperial Message of the Cross," p. 181, and Horsley, "Paul's Counter-Imperial Gospel: Introduction," p. 146, all in Horsley, *Paul and Empire*.

17. I offer some indications concerning the latter topic in Evan Fales, "Taming the Tehom: the Sign of Jonah in Matthew's Gospel," in Price and Lowder, *Empty Tomb*.

18. Segal, *Paul*, makes a strong case for the view that Paul's descriptions of his spiritual experiences owe a large debt to Jewish traditions of *merkabah* mysticism, and that his conception of Jesus as the son of man and Son of God also has deep roots in these traditions. It would, indeed, be extraordinary if Paul's experiences (or at least his descriptions of them), no matter how "revolutionary" they seem from the perspective of later Christianity, were not powerfully influenced by the mystical traditions of the culture in which he was raised.

19. See Segal, *Ibid.*, pp. 199 – 200.

20. Thus Segal: "Paul's letters are full of the conflict that separated him from Peter and James. Further, almost no Pauline letter forgets to mention Paul's status as an apostle through God, underlining his constant need to establish his credentials in the face of Jesus' personal wishes in appointing only his immediate disciples as apostles." (*Ibid.*, p. 191) Moreover, Col. 4:14 and II Tim. 4:11 attest a close bond between Paul and the presumed author of Acts (as does the generally sympathetic

portrayal of Paul by Acts). The authorship of Timothy is disputed, but supposing it at least to reflect correctly Paul's attitude toward Luke, we may infer that anti-Pauline partisanship would not account for Luke's divergence from Paul's chronology.

21. George Nickelsberg has suggested, in conversation, that this discrepancy between Gal. 1 and Acts 9 can be explained by supposing Paul to have forgotten his first visit to the Jerusalem Church (a visit during which – so Lk. 9:29 – Paul was under threat of death). A less plausible explanation than this is hard to imagine. Segal, *Ibid.*, p. 70 recognizes the authorizing force of Paul's vision.

22. Some have doubted whether Paul is referring to himself. Here I shall assume that he is. It is distantly possible that Paul's reference to the "third heaven" is a jab at the Romans. In the theology of Virgil's *Aeneid*, the third heaven is the domain of Venus who, as the mother of Aeneas, is the patron goddess of the Caesars (this was suggested to me by Alan Nagel). It is in any event a fair surmise that Paul is referring to the third of the seven heavens known to Jewish mysticism, the heaven associated with the heavenly Jerusalem (b Talmud *Chagigah* 12b; cp. John's imagery at Rev. 21) and with Paradise and containing a heavenly Tree of Life (*The Revelation of Moses* 37:4-5, 40:1-2; my thanks to Richard Carrier for these references).

23. I shall be told: men don't die for a lie. However, it is nothing new that a man may well lie on behalf of a cause in whose service he is willing to die. Is Paul such a one? Perhaps: but see below.

24. For Wright, see *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Chap. 8, esp. p. 397. For Segal, see *Paul*, p. 69 and Chap. 4. Segal thinks that, through his dying and being reborn in Christ, Paul had the experience of being set free from the law. I am suggesting that it may more nearly have been the reverse. I agree with Segal that the requirements of the ceremonial law (circumcision and dietary codes) set Jews apart from Gentiles and thus made the mission to the Gentiles more difficult. But Paul's rejection of "works" goes much deeper. The ceremonial laws of Torah were emblematic of the standing of Israel as God's Chosen People. A rejection of Torah as necessary to salvation is therefore a rejection of this distinction. The prophets envisaged a world united under Yahweh, with His lordship effected through Jewish dominion. Paul envisions something different: a union among equals, where there is no master and no slave. That is one reason why the rejection of "salvation by works" has such profound political implications, and why, quite apart from his mystical experiences, Paul might have arrived at such a position in a more ordinary way.

25. This line of argument, with various bells and whistles added, is a popular current apologetical strategy of defenders of the resurrection. Subscribers include Wright (see *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Chap. 18), William Craig, *Assessing the New Testament evidence for the historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1989), Gary Habermas, *The Historical Jesus* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1996), p. 152f., and many others. Apologetes will want to insist that Paul converted, and had a profound influence upon early Christianity, *because* he was commissioned and empowered by Jesus. I have not directly shown that theory to be false. But it *is* a theory; and it is not, I am arguing, the only serious explanation of the textual evidence. To my mind the question isn't even whether Paul believed the Resurrection, but what he *meant* by this. In a sense, we cannot assess the value of Paul's vision as evidence for the Resurrection until we determine this.

26. David Hay, "Religious Experience Amongst a Group of Post-Graduate Students – A Qualitative Study," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 18 (1979): 164 – 182. While there is no particular reason to doubt the sincerity of Hay's informants, his methodology is open to criticism. The central question asks subjects whether they have "ever been aware of ... a presence of power, whether you call it

God or not, which is different from your everyday self?" Subjects were shown a list of sample ME reports to clarify the meaning of this oddly phrased question. There is no way of determining whether or how this sample might have colored the reports Hay's subjects gave of their experiences. Another key question: "Did the power seem personal or impersonal? *Clarification: did the power seem to be communicating with you as a person or not?*" (Italics Hay's). Oddly, the "clarification" is grammatically ambiguous. In any case, the sample reports published by Hay are rather striking in how few and vague their characterizations of interaction with a "person" are, and how unclear they are whether the interaction involved a perceptual awareness. Moreover, as many as ten or more years had elapsed in some cases since the occurrence of the reported experience. Concerning other methodological difficulties attending studies of the kind done by Hay, see Evan Fales, "Scientific Explanations of Mystical Experiences II: The Challenge of Theism," *Religious Studies* 32 (1996): 297-313, esp. p. 309.

27. Gary Gutting, *Religious Belief and Religious Skepticism* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), p. 144.

28. E. D. Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Study of the Growth of Religious Consciousness*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1912). Because he was a psychologist, Starbuck speculates about the psychodynamics of ME's, but rarely provides any information about the social background of his subjects.

29. E.g., John Hick, *The Fifth Dimension: An Exploration of the Spiritual Realm* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1999).

30. Although he does not focus on the evidential question (which he takes as settled) Luke Timothy Johnson's *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998) well exemplifies this way of appropriating the Resurrection. I have seen this used as an argument in a formal debate concerning the Resurrection. The experience of a personal "presence," which Gutting focuses upon, can be produced by stimulating the temporal lobes of the brain with magnetic fields; see Michael Persinger and F. Healey, "Experimental facilitation of the sensed presence: Possible intercalation between the hemispheres induced by complex magnetic fields," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Diseases* 190 (2002): 533 – 541, and Michael Persinger et al., "The sensed presence as right hemispheric intrusion into the left hemisphere awareness of self: An illustrative case study," *Perception and Motor Skills* 78 (1994): 999 – 1009.

31. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (New York: Macmillan, 1961), p. 168.

32. I am indebted to Richard Carrier and Daniel Larkin for their comments on a draft of this paper.