PAUL IN THE MEDIEVAL TRADITION
PAUL AND THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

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In recent decades, Pauline scholarship has moved away from a unilinear view of the Apostle Paul’s impact on the history of the Church and of Christian doctrine, a view that would tell the story of the reception of Pauline thought in terms of an obvious development from Paul via Augustine to Martin Luther and the central tenets of modern Protestant theology. The reason is not only the renewed emphasis on the Jewish Paul in post-Holocaust exegesis, or the post-Vatican II ecumenical climate in which biblical scholarship has become a cooperative enterprise which crosses denominational lines and does not allow formerly church-dividing emphases to dictate the result of historical investigations. Equally important has been the recognition of multiple strands of reception from the very beginning of the Christian era. The canonical Paul of the Pastoral and the Petrine Epistles was by no means the only legitimate continuation of Paul’s legacy. Nor was the Paul of the earliest centuries primarily the “apostle of the heretics,” of Gnostics, Marcionites, and Manicheans. Rather, all sorts of people who regarded themselves as Christians claimed to preserve the Pauline heritage and to guard it from corruption. Multiple “Pauls” were alive and well. They distanced themselves from each other and inspired theological convictions sometimes diametrically opposed one to the other. What the living Paul strove for but largely failed to achieve, namely, to become “all things to all people,” the dead Paul managed to accomplish quickly.

With regard to the “real Paul” of modern historical scholarship, Kris- ter Stendahl’s seminal essay of 1963 charged that Augustine in the late fourth century already misread Paul as the model of his own personal struggles and that Luther followed his lead by extolling Paul’s theology as the answer to his existential question: “How do I find a gracious

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1 Albert Schweitzer in his history of Pauline scholarship, *Paul and His Interpreters*, 1912, had warned already that the Reformers read their own ideas into Paul.

2 The term was coined by Tertullian.