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Jacques Dupont, O.S.B., "The Conversion of Paul, and Its Influence on His Understanding of Salvation by Faith," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.176-194.

## CHAPTER XI

# *The Conversion of Paul, and Its Influence on His Understanding of Salvation by Faith*

Jacques Dupont, O.S.B.

This study was presented during a colloquium held at Rome, at the monastery of St. Paul-outside-the-Walls in April, 1968. The French text is due to appear in the series *Analecta Biblica*, published by the Biblical Institute of Rome. (The English translation was made by Ralph P. Martin).

The title of my essay will recall that of that excellent study, published in 1953 by Ph.-H. Menoud: "R v lation et tradition, L'influence de la conversion de Paul sur sa th ologie."<sup>1</sup> In that article, as in the one which appeared in 1964 in the *Festschrift* for E. Haenchen,<sup>2</sup> Menoud thought that Paul's aberration while he was still a Pharisee and a persecutor of the church was to be found precisely in his messianic belief.<sup>3</sup> Paul was furious at seeing Christians identify the Messiah promised by God with an individual who was put to death on the cross as a man accursed by God. On the road to Damascus he then received the revelation that Jesus was indeed the Messiah who was promised to Israel; it is, therefore, a truly messianic revelation which led to his conversion. Beginning from that fact, Paul saw what was needful to reinterpret the shameful death of Jesus: in his office as Christ, he bore the curse which rested on sinners; his death was the price for human redemption. These explanations locate Paul's conversion in a change of mind which he underwent in regard to the Messiah. After he had passionately denied that a crucified man could be the Messiah, he came to grant that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and, as a consequence, re-thought all his messianic ideas.

The way in which Menoud thinks of Paul's conversion is found in other writers. It is very similar to the interpretation which M. Goguel had already proposed.<sup>4</sup> But it is not the only one to be considered.

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Instead of being placed as an afterthought and regarded as a consequence, the transformation of Paul's soteriology can be set at the beginning and can become the immediate occasion of the revelation at Damascus. It is the Christian understanding of salvation by Christ which Paul had to deal with before his conversion, and the appearance at Damascus would have

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<sup>1</sup> In *Verbum Caro* 7 (1953), pp. 2-10 = "Revelation and Tradition. The Influence of Paul's Conversion on his Theology", in *Interp* 7 (1953), pp. 131-41.

<sup>2</sup> "Le sens du verbe πορθεΐν. Gal. 1, 13, 23; Acts 9, 21" in *Apophoreta. Festschrift f r Ernst Haenchen* (BZNW 30) (Berlin 1964), pp. 178-86.

<sup>3</sup> "When Paul speaks of his past life, he does not describe his conduct as a moral or spiritual failure but as an aberration concerning the Messiah," *loc. cit.*, p. 4 (ET, p. 134).

<sup>4</sup> M. Goguel, *Introduction au Nouveau Testament*, IV, I (Paris, 1925), pp. 183 f. *La naissance du christianisme*, Paris, 1946, pp. 99 ff. (ET *The Birth of Christianity* [London, 1953], pp. 81 ff.). Cf. A. D. Nock, *St. Paul* (London, 1938), p. 74; H. G. Wood, "The Conversion of St. Paul: Its Nature, Antecedents and Consequences," *NTS* 1 (1954-55), 276-282 (278).

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convinced him not only that Jesus was the Messiah but more precisely that he is the one on whom the salvation of all men depends.

The article published in 1959 (in *ZThK*) by U. Wilckens under the title "Die Bekehrung des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem"<sup>5</sup> follows this line. The author emphasizes that, according to Paul's own witness, it was his devotion to the Jewish law which turned him into a persecutor of Christians. The Jews' offence because of the Christian message is connected less with the affirmation of Jesus' messiahship than with the attributing to Jesus of a saving role which robbed the law of all its value in the purpose of salvation. Violently hostile to the Christian faith because of the importance which he attached to the law as a way of salvation, Paul was converted on the road to Damascus. He recognized in Christ the only principle of salvation to the exclusion of the law. Both before and after his conversion, faith in Christ seemed to him incompatible with faith in the law. The choice had to be made: Christ or the law. There could be no compromise. The dilemma presented itself in an essentially soteriological perspective. It was a question of knowing whether salvation came to men by Christ or by the law.

In brief, these are the two different views on Paul's conversion and the orientation which each gives to his theological thought. The title given to my paper indicates sufficiently the way in which, in my view, the matter should be tackled, as stated with succinctness by Wilckens.<sup>6</sup> I shall not deal further with the state of the debate, which has been comprehensively surveyed up to 1962 by B. Rigaux.<sup>7</sup>

## I

My study relies on the witness of the epistles: in effect, 1 Corinthians, Galatians and Philippians. In view of the method to be followed, the

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refusal to summon the witness of Acts<sup>8</sup> and of 1 Timothy 1:12-14<sup>9</sup> need not be justified. It is preferable not to run together references from different backgrounds.

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<sup>5</sup> *ZThK* 56 (1959), pp. 273-93. Cf. W. Pesch, "Die Bekehrung des Apostels Paulus nach dem Zeugnis seiner Briefe" in *Bibel und Kirche* 16 (1961), pp. 36-38.

<sup>6</sup> Wilckens adopts the thesis of D. Rössler according to which the apocalyptic circles would have had an understanding of the law which was different from that of the Pharisees and the rabbinical tradition. Paul would have shared the apocalyptic view. We must be satisfied to refer on this matter to the criticisms brought by A. Nissen, "Tora und Geschichte im Spätjudentum. Zu Thesen Dietrich Rösslers," *NovTest* 9 (1967), pp. 241-77.

<sup>7</sup> B. Rigaux, *Saint Paul et ses lettres* (Studia Neotest., Subsidia, 2) (Paris-Bruges, 1962), pp. 63-97.

<sup>8</sup> There is an excellent recent study by G. Lohflnk, *Paulus var Damaskus. Arbeitsweisen der neueren Bibeiwissenschaft dargestellt an den Texten Apg 9, 1-19; 22, 3-21; 26, 9-18* (Stuttgarter Bibeistudien, I) (Stuttgart, 1965) = *La conversion de saint Paul. Demonstration de la méthode récente des sciences bibliques a propos des textes (Actes, 9, 1-19; 22, 3-21; 26, 9-18)* (*Lire la Bible*, II) (Paris, 1967).

<sup>9</sup> There is an analysis of this witness in C. Klein's *Die zwölf Apostei. Ursprung und Gehalt einer Idee* (FRLANT 77) (Göttingen, 1961), pp. 133-39.

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The texts to which appeal is made are often short and not very explicit. Two, however, are more developed, and I shall have to refer to them often in the course of my treatment. It will be useful to go over at once what these are.

1. In the opening of the epistle to the Galatians,<sup>10</sup> Paul is anxious to stress his apostolic authority; he, therefore, insists upon the divine origin of the mission with which he has been entrusted (1:1), and then he insists upon the divine origin of the gospel he preaches and proclaims to the Gentiles. This gospel had not come to him from men but as a revelation of Jesus Christ (verse 12). Verses 13-16 specify the circumstances of this revelation. Paul begins by recalling his manner of life as a Jew (verses 13-14);<sup>11</sup> he persecuted to the utmost God's church and laid it waste;<sup>12</sup> he was more advanced<sup>13</sup> in the Jewish faith than most of his contemporary fellow-Jews, being possessed of an outstanding zeal for the ancestral traditions. Taken together, these two verses lead us to suppose that there was a connexion between the violent animosity of Saul directed against the Christians and the fervour of his zeal for the traditions of Judaism.

Verses 15-16 speak of the change which then followed. The profound cause of this must be sought in the divine "good pleasure" (εὐδοκία). Out of this wholly gracious goodwill, God had chosen Paul; he had set him apart from before his birth. This election resulted in a call. The one whom God had chosen was called by his grace.<sup>14</sup> The call was presented to Paul in the form of a manifestation of God's Son, as a "revelation"<sup>15</sup> which to a certain degree anticipated the glorious manifestation of the end-time. For Paul the revelation of the glory of God's Son was a call from God, a summons. It was granted to him with a view to a mission: "that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles." While the

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text does not specify the thought, yet we may believe that insofar as he became the apostle of the Gentiles Paul found himself inevitably in conflict with the Jewish tradition which up to then had been so precious to him.

The sequel which developed emphasizes Paul's independence of those who were apostles before him. Although his gospel had not originated with them, they recognized its authenticity and confirmed by their sanction the message entrusted to Paul for the sake of the Gentiles.

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<sup>10</sup> In addition to the commentaries (especially that of H. Schlier), we may mention the study we have made of Galatians 1-2, "Saint-Paul, témoin de la collégialité apostolique et de la primauté de saint Pierre" in *La Collégialité épiscopale. Histoire et Théologie* (Unam Sanctam, 52) (Paris, 1965), pp. 11-39.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. G. Klein, *Die zwölf Apostel*, pp. 128-32.

<sup>12</sup> On this verb, see the article by Ph.-H. Menoud cited on p. 176.

<sup>13</sup> On this verb, see G. Klein, *Die zwölf Apostel*, p. 130, n. 632.

<sup>14</sup> Paul was a recipient of "mercy": 1 Cor. 7:25; 2 Cor. 4:1.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. A.-M. Denis, "L'investiture de la fonction apostolique par 'apocalypse'. Etude thématique de Gal. 1, 16," *RB* 64 (1957), pp. 335-62 and 492-515, in addition to our observations on this article: "La révélation du Fils de Dieu en faveur de Pierre (Mt. 26, 17) et de Paul (Gal. 1, 16)" *RSR* 52 (1964), pp. 411-20.

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2. Chapter 3 of the letter to the Philippians is marked by a controversial tack. I will avoid entering into those discussions which have plagued the interpretation of this section and, in particular, the precise identity of the enemies Paul deals with.<sup>16</sup>

The opening verses of the chapter indicate that these people wanted to induce the Philippian Christians to be circumcized.<sup>17</sup> In verse 3 Paul replies: "It is we Christians who are the circumcision; we have worship inspired by God's Spirit, and it is we who exult in Christ Jesus instead of reposing our trust in the flesh." In order to make his thought clear the apostle offers himself as an example. Because of the Philippians' affection for him the personal argument would no doubt be one which would surely appeal to them.

He begins by remarking that he possessed, before his conversion, all the advantages which his opponents were claiming in order to place their confidence in the flesh. Verses 5 and 6 list these advantages which fall into two groups. First, those which he owed to his birth.<sup>18</sup> He had been circumcized on the eighth day; he belonged to the nation of Israel, the tribe of Benjamin; he was a Hebrew, the son of a Hebrew father. Then, there are those advantages which arose from his personal conduct. In regard to the law, he was a Pharisee; in respect of zeal, a persecutor of the church; in regard to the righteousness demanded by the law, he showed himself beyond reproach.

Set against these advantages from a Jewish point of view, there is the "revolution" (in verses 7-11) which happened at the time of his conversion.<sup>19</sup> All that he attributes to his "active" life becomes sharply a "passive"; all that to him was "gain" or "profit" is seen as a "loss" according to the new set of values which had been revealed to him at that moment. Various

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expressions describe this set of values which finds its highest boon in the knowledge of Jesus Christ,<sup>20</sup> or in gaining Christ, or being found in him as the possessor of a righteousness which is not gained by the practice of the law but which comes from God through faith in Christ. And, finally (vv. 10-11) it means "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection" which implies "fellowship in his sufferings,"<sup>21</sup> being conformed to his death" with an eye to attaining the "resurrection of the dead". This is the new perspective which came to Paul and which caused him to treat as "filth" all that he had previously boasted of as a Jew.

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<sup>16</sup> This matter has recently been investigated with great care by J. Gnilka, "Die antipaulinische Mission in Philippi," *BZ* 9 (1965), pp. 258-76. We also may note W. Schmithals, "Die Irrlehrer des Philippenerbriefes," *ZThK* 54 (1957), pp. 297-341; H. Koester, "The Purpose of the Polemic of a Pauline Fragment (Philippians III)," *NTS* 8 (1961-62), pp. 317-32; (P. Feine, J. Behm) W. G. Kümmel, *Einleitung in das neue Testament* (Heidelberg, 1963), pp. 239-41 (ET *Introduction to the New Testament* [London, 1966], pp. 235-7); V. P. Furnish, "The Place and Purpose of Philippians III," *NTS* 10 (1963-64), pp. 80-88; A. F. J. Klijn, "Paul's opponents in Philippians III," *Nov Test* 7 (1964), pp. 278-84.

<sup>17</sup> J. Gnilka, *art. cit.*, p. 261.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. 2 Cor. 11:22. See Gnilka, pp. 262 ff.

<sup>19</sup> See Gnilka, *art. cit.*, pp. 264-73.

<sup>20</sup> We may call attention to J. T. Forestell, "Christian Perfection and Gnosis in Phil. 3, 7-16," *CBQ* 18 (1956), pp. 123-36.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. G. Bouwman, *De brief van Paulus aan de Filippiërs* (Het N.T.) (Roermond-Maaseik, 1965), pp. 81 f.

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It should be observed that, in this explanation, contrary to that given in the epistle to the Galatians, Paul does not view the Damascus event in relation to his apostolic mission. He describes it as a discovery of that which contains the pith of Christianity and is therefore true for every Christian. This viewpoint was evidently dictated to him by the teaching he wishes to give to the Philippians; they must realise that the place held by Christ in the Christian faith transforms into its opposite that which seemed advantageous from the Jewish point of view.

Verses 12-14 add a third consideration to the two antithetical statements of verses 4-6 and 7-11. The movement of thought matches very well that in the epistle to the Romans, where chapter 5 complements the antithetic statements of 1:18-3:20 and 3:21-4:25; and the last part of chapter 8 (vv. 18-39) comes after the antithesis which sets the administration of the law (7:7-25) against that of the Spirit (8:1-17).<sup>22</sup> The Christian's state is defined not only by contrast with the state of man under the law's regime. It must be understood equally and so essentially as a "not yet"; it is the state of expectation and hope in the face of eschatological fulfilment. The Christian finds himself in a state of tension set up between what he has already received and what remains the object of his hope. To explain this, verses 12-14 appeal to the athletic imagery of running a race. The verbs λαμβάνω and καταλαμβάνω quite naturally favour the imagery, having to do with "receiving a prize" and "laying hold on a trophy".<sup>23</sup> τελειοῦμαι should be taken in this context as "reaching the winning-post".<sup>24</sup> So we can translate verse 12: "Not that I have already carried off

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the prize or yet reached the winning-line, but I am pressing on, endeavouring to lay hold on the prize, since I have myself been laid hold on by Christ Jesus." The goal to which Paul bends his efforts is that described in the previous verses: to know Christ and the power of his resurrection, 'to arrive at (through suffering and death) the resurrection of the dead, which is a sharing in the glorious state of the risen Christ. Paul's path to this goal starts from a being "laid hold on" by Christ: Christ seized him as an athlete lays hold on the prize of his victory.<sup>25</sup> If Paul is now on the race track, as he describes it in verses 13-14, he has to thank this "start" which came with the Damascus event.

We can pass on more quickly to the rest of the chapter. At verse 17, Paul invites the Philippians to find their example in him in contrast to the people who preach circumcision and behave as enemies of the cross of Christ (vv. 18-19). Verses 20-21 return to the Christian hope. Christians are awaiting their salvation in the glorious coming of their Saviour, the Lord

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Dupont, "Le problème de la structure littéraire de l'Épître aux Romains," *RB* 62 (1955), pp. 365-97.

<sup>23</sup> After καταλαμβάνω there is no occasion to supply δικαιοσύνην as Klijn has proposed, *Nov Test* (1964), p. 281.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. J. Huby, *Saint Paul. Les Épîtres de la Captivité* (Verbum Salutis, VIII), 14th ed. (Paris, 1947), p. 351; J. Dupont, *Le Discours de Milet, testament pastoral de saint Paul (Actes 20, 58-36)* (Lectio divina 32) (Paris, 1962), pp. 98-10.; G. Delling, art. τελειόω *TWNT* VIII (fasc. 2. 1965), p. 85; F. W. Danker, "Romans V. 12: Sin under the Law," *NTS* 54 (1967-68), pp. 424-39 (433). In making the sporting metaphor begin with v. 12 we are in agreement with K. Barth, *Erklärung des Philipperbriefes* 6th ed. (Zürich, 1947), p. 106 (ET *The Epistle to the Philippians* [London, 1962], p. 106) against V. C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motive. Traditional Athletic Imagery in the Pauline Literature* (Suppl. *NovTest* XVI) (Leiden, 1967), pp. 539-53, who makes the metaphor begin at v. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Huby, *Les Épîtres de la Captivité*, p. 352.

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Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly bodies and conform them to his body of glory.<sup>26</sup> We must ask whether it is not necessary here, as in verse 12, to have in mind the revelation of the Damascus road. The salvation spoken of in verse 20 matches that which Paul had seen realistically when God showed his Son to him.

This is the text on which I rely, along with Galatians 1, in seeking to pinpoint the theological thought of Paul before his conversion and the revolution which Christ's appearance occasioned for him.

## II

Martin Dibelius, I should agree, is correct when he says that, if one is to gain a true meaning of Paul's experience on the Damascus road, it is necessary right away to understand the motive which made him, according to his own witness, a persecutor of Christians.<sup>27</sup> That my essay is devoted particularly to what Paul tells about his attitude before his conversion need then occasion no surprise. First of all, we are struck by the way Paul describes his spiritual state when he was a Pharisee; then, he speaks of "zeal" which made him a persecutor of the church. We shall inquire, next, whether his way of speaking of the scandal of the cross throws light on his past life as a Jew. We conclude with an attempt to see how his

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account of the Damascus experience throws light on what were the consequences of the event for his theological thought.

### A. Saul, the Pharisee

A number of features of Pharisaic theology provided Paul with reasons for being satisfied with himself

1. He emphasizes, at the start, the pride which membership of the elect race gave him: "of the race of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew son of Hebrew parents" (Phil. 3:5; cf. 2 Cor. 11:22 and Rom. 11:1). The description of Galatians 2:15 is even more to the point: "We who are Jews by birth and not these Gentile sinners." While Gentiles, by their state, are sinners and "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3), Jews, because of the election and thanks to the fathers, are loved by God (Rom. 11:28). And later, when he had become a Christian and apostle to the Gentiles, Paul would remain deeply convinced of Israel's prerogatives: "To them belong the filial adoption, the glory, the covenants, the law-code, the cult, the promises; to them also belong the fathers, and it was from them, in natural descent, that the Christ was born" (Rom. 9:4-5). These verses are evidence of the beliefs in which Paul was schooled, his pride as an Israelite, and the confidence he drew from them in God's presence.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Like Phil. 2:6-11; cf. N. Flanagan, "A Note on Philippians 3,20-21," *CBQ* 18 (1956), pp. 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> M. Dibelius-W. G. Kümmel, *Paulus* (Sammlung Göschen, 1160) (Berlin, 1951), p. 46 (ET *Paul* [London, 1953], p. 46).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. K. H. Schelkie, "Paulus vor Damaskus" in *Bibel und Leben* 8 (1967), pp. 153-7 (154).

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2. Within the elect nation Paul was aware of belonging to a spiritual elite: he was a Pharisee. "Concerning the matters of the law, a Pharisee" (Phil. 3:5), i.e. adhering to the most strict and rigorous obedience (cf. Acts 22:3; 26:5; likewise 23:6) and most firmly attached not only to the letter of the law but to the ancestral traditions (cf. Gal. 1:14) which spelled out the meaning of the law and protected its observance as though by a hedge of complementary prescriptions.<sup>29</sup>

3. That was not all. Paul was a fanatic among fanatics. Without wishing to compare himself with the great teachers, he notes with satisfaction that he was "more advanced in the Jewish religion than many of his fellow contemporaries" (Gal. I :14). He stood out from others by an exceptional zeal (περισσοτέρως).

4. Philippians 3:6 gives the last word: "concerning the righteousness according to the law, found to be beyond reproach" (κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος).<sup>30</sup> The exertion with which he observed scrupulously the law's prescriptions, interpreted in their most

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rigid sense, led him to attain a perfection which was without lapse or defect.

In all the evidence none is found which expresses a recollection of his being restless, tortured by an unattainable ideal. As he saw himself, Paul was, at the eve of his conversion, a man well satisfied, contented with his membership of the elect race and of an elite group of his people, and confident of attaining by his religious observance an ideal of righteousness which would make him beyond reproach in the eyes of God, men and his own conscience.

It does not seem necessary to comment on the fact that one cannot succeed in opposing against this perfectly clear witness the description which Romans 7 gives of the wretched state of a sinful man under the law's regime. It is admitted, since the dissertation which W. G. Kümmel published in 1929,<sup>31</sup> that we should not look for, in this passage, the reverberation of an experience Paul underwent in Judaism. It is rather the reflection of a Christian theologian who is meditating on the mystery of sin with the experience of redemption as his starting-

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<sup>29</sup> On the connection between law and tradition in the Judaism of the first century, see W. G. Kümmel, "Jesus und der jüdische Traditionsgedanke", *ZNTW* 33 (1934), pp. 105-30 (116-18) = *Heilsgeschehen und Geschichte. Gesammelte Aufsätze 1933-1964* (Marburger theologische Studien, 3) (Marburg, 1965), pp. 15-35 (24 ff.).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. M. Goguel, "κατὰ δικαιοσύνην τὴν ἐν νόμῳ γενόμενος ἄμεμπτος (Phil. 3, 6). Remarques sur un aspect de la conversion de Paul", *JBL* 53, (1934), pp. 257-67. See too W. Grundmann, art. μέμφομαι *TWNT* IV (1942), pp. 576-78 (ET *TDNT* IV, 1967, pp. 573-4).

<sup>31</sup> W. G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (Untersuchungen zum NT, 57) (Leipzig, 1929). Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (Neue theologische Grundrisse), (Tübingen, 1953), p. 185 (ET *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 [London, 1952], p. 188). For the different interpretations given to this chapter, see the excursus "Zur Geschichte der Auslegung von Röm 7, 7-25" in O. Kuss, *Der Römerbrief II* (Ratisbon, 1959), pp. 462-85.



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point. I am glad on this point to refer to the works of Fr. Lyonnet<sup>32</sup> and to a recent article by J. Blank.<sup>33</sup>

### ***B. The Zeal of the Persecutor***

1. Paul associates the violence with which he had persecuted the church with the "zeal" which motivated him at that time. There is a link between his passion to keep the law in an irreproachable way and the ardour with which he opposed primitive Christianity. In Philippians 3:6, after he has given his rank as a Pharisee to prove his attachment to the law ("concerning the law, a Pharisee") he adds: "concerning zeal, persecuting the church" (κατὰ ζήλος, διώκων τὴν ἐκκλησίαν). One can see in his activity as persecutor the display and proof of his "zeal". Galatians 1:13-14 says the same thing. In persecuting murderously and working havoc on the church of God, Paul showed to what remarkable degree he was full of zeal for the tradition which he inherited from his ancestors. We see here that the zeal found its real objective in "the traditions of the ancestors" which, on the understanding of the Pharisees, formed the whole of the religious scheme of Judaism with the law as the basis but

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inseparable from the traditions which interpreted and complemented it.<sup>34</sup> So one can appreciate that it was Paul's devotion to the law in its entirety which made him a persecutor hostile to the Christian church.

It is not without interest to observe how the same mode of expression is found in Acts 22:3-4 in the speech of Paul to the inhabitants of Jerusalem when they gathered against him: "At the feet of Gamaliel I was trained in the punctilious observance of the law of our fathers and was full of *zeal for God*, just like all of you today: I persecuted this Way [Christianity] to death, binding and casting into prison both men and women." What made Paul a persecutor was his zeal for God,<sup>35</sup> his ardent devotion to the law given to the fathers and observed with "exactitude" by the Pharisees.

2. To throw light on what Paul says of his "zeal"<sup>36</sup> in relation to his activities as a persecutor, it is helpful to turn to 1 Maccabees 2. Messengers of Antiochus Epiphanes have been sent to the small town of Modin to organize an idolatrous sacrifice and to compel the people to commit apostasy. Mattathias proudly declares that he will not obey the king's commands: "As for me, my sons and my brothers, we will stand by the covenant of our fathers. God will save us from surrendering the law and the ordinances" (vv. 20, 21). But not everyone shows the

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<sup>32</sup> S. Lyonnet in J. Huby-S. Lyonnet, *Saint Paul. Epître aux Romains* (Verbum Salutis, X), 2nd ed. (Paris, 1957), pp. 601-04; "L'histoire du salut selon le chapitre VII de l'Épître aux Romains" in *Bib* 43 (1962), pp. 117-51.

<sup>33</sup> J. Blank, "Der gespaltene Mensch. Zur Exegese von Röm 7:7-25" in *Bibel und Leben*, 9 (1968), pp. 10-20. See too P. Grelot, "Péché originel et redemption dans l'Épître aux Romains", *NRT* 90 (1968), pp. 449-62.

<sup>34</sup> See W. G. Kümmel in the work quoted on p. 182.

<sup>35</sup> In Rom. 10:2 Paul recognizes that the Jews have a zeal for God, but it is an unenlightened zeal. They are concerned simply to establish their own righteousness.

<sup>36</sup> Full survey of these texts in A. Stumpff's article, ζήλος *TWNT* II (1935), pp. 879-90 (PT *TDNT* II, 1964, pp. 878-88). This article should be complemented by the evidence drawn from the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs* and the Qumran texts.

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same determination: a Jew approaches the altar to make sacrifice: "When Mattathias saw it, he burned with zeal and his heart was stirred. He gave vent to righteous anger; he ran and killed him upon the altar. At the same time he killed the king's officer who was forcing them to sacrifice, and he tore down the altar. Thus he burned with zeal for the law, as Phinehas did against Zimri the son of Salu. Then Mattathias cried out in the city with a loud voice, saying: 'Let every one who is zealous for the law and supports the covenant come out with me!' And he and his sons fled to the hills and left all that they had in the city. Then many who were seeking righteousness and justice went down to the wilderness to dwell there" (1 Macc. 2. 24-29, RSV).

This scene is characteristic. The attitude of Mattathias himself is inspired by his fervent devotion to the law. His zeal for the law becomes devastating wrath when he sees an Israelite committing an act of apostasy. In commending Mattathias' exploit, the narrator does not shirk from comparing it to that of Phinehas who, in the Bible, is the prototype of zeal. Phinehas was the priest who, at Shittim, killed with a thrust of a spear the Israelite and the Midianite woman who were indulging in sacred prostitution. This outstanding proof of zeal secured for him the promise of a priesthood which could never be lost to him or his descendants. (Cf. Num. 25:1-18; Ps. 106:31; Ecclus.45:23; 1 Macc.2:26,54; 4 Macc.18:12.)

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We should observe that alongside Phinehas the Bible quotes other examples of zeal. The prophet Elijah gave evidence of zeal when at Horeb he called for vengeance on the enemies of God (1 Ki. 19:10, 14; Ecclus. 48:2; 1 Macc 2:58); king Jehu, when he slaughtered all the family of the ungodly Ahab (2 Ki. 10:16); and the patriarch Simeon himself, who showed his zeal in slaughtering the inhabitants of Shechem (Jud. 9:4).

The close of chapter 2 in 1 Maccabees contains the speech of Mattathias to his sons before his death. It is above all an exhortation to give proof of "zeal": "Be zealous for the law, my children, and give your lives for the covenant of our fathers" (v. 50). He recalls the great examples of the past, in particular of those to do with zeal, examples of Phinehas (v. 54) and Elijah (v. 58).<sup>37</sup>

This chapter of Maccabees enables us to understand better the nature of Paul's religious zeal in regard to the law and the ancestral traditions. At the same time it enables us to grasp the reason for the zeal which made him a persecutor of Christianity. His conduct makes it clear that Christianity seemed to him to be apostasy in regard to the law, and the Christian faith to be a denial of his ideal of the strict observance of the law's requirements. He sought to uproot Christ's religion because he had a conviction that it was incompatible with the religion of the law and with the place he accorded to the law in the plan of salvation.

To judge by Acts 21:20-21, the reaction of Saul the Pharisee to Christianity would therefore seem similar enough to the reaction of Jewish Christians of Jerusalem to Paul's teaching. James forewarned Paul, on his arrival at Jerusalem, of the danger he was running. There were

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<sup>37</sup> We may observe too *Test. Asher* 4:5 where it is the good people who give the impression of being fierce, "but in everything they are pure because they are inspired by a zeal for the Lord in abstaining from the things which God hates and are forbidden by the commandments"; 1QH 14:14: "I am full of zeal against all the workers of iniquity and the men of deceit."

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in the city myriads of Jews who had become believers, but they continued zealous for the law (ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου). Moreover, they had heard it said that Paul induced the Jews of the Dispersion to defect from Moses, no longer to have their children circumcized and no longer to follow the traditional customs. If Paul had not found a way of quashing these rumours, the fanaticism of Jewish Christians would have turned upon him just as his own fanaticism at an earlier time had led to his persecuting the Christians. Their faith had seemed to him to be at odds with fidelity to the law.

3. An objection must be considered here.<sup>38</sup> It does not seem, in fact, that the early Christians had so soon reached a conviction concerning the radical disparity between their faith in Christ and the attachment which they continued to show to the law. The disparity did not show itself until much later, thanks to the penetration of Paul's teaching itself. The notions which the believers had originally cannot have been very different from those of

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the Jewish Christians mentioned by James to Paul on the occasion of the latter's final visit to the holy city. It is thus a weak explanation that Paul's zeal for the law made him a persecutor of Christians at a time when there were those who did not think that their faith in Christ should call in question their fidelity to Judaism. If we grant that Paul was able in those earlier years to imagine the conflict which was certain to be produced in the later time, does this not credit him with an unlikely prescience?

To avoid this difficulty while doing justice to Paul's witness, Wilckens proposes that Paul had a conception of the law which was different from that of rabbinic theology and which had links with the theological tradition of apocalyptic. Other solutions, less hazardous,<sup>39</sup> have been proposed. I will content myself with three observations on this matter:

- (a) We should not forget that Paul wrote twenty years after the events. It would be normal for these ideas to be more precise than they were at the time of which he speaks.
- (b) As far back as we can trace, the Christian faith attributed a redeeming value to Jesus' death. Wilckens has no difficulty in granting that Paul would know an interpretation which considered the death and resurrection as acts of God "for us," for men's salvation.<sup>40</sup> This salvation, available by grace, is therefore independent of the law.

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<sup>38</sup> Cf. U. Wilckens, *Die Bekehrung*, pp. 278-81.

<sup>39</sup> See above, p. 227.

<sup>40</sup> Wilckens observes, to begin with (p. 280): "Since then the synoptic tradition in its entirety, and more especially Luke and John in their particular way, see the real scandal of the Jews in regard to Jesus in his messianic pretension as such, and consequently proclaim the recognition of Jesus' messiahship as the decisive factor in the conversion to Christianity, Paul made *the* scandal of the Jews when faced with the gospel the fact that the law had lost its worth in salvation history; and consequently he proclaimed, as the pith of what messiahship means, the death and resurrection of Jesus seen as a saving action of God ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν, i.e. for all men, both Jews and Gentiles."

Guided by a remark of G. Bornkamm (in *Das Ende des Gesetzes*, 2nd. ed. [Munich, 1958], p. 40), Wilckens adds this significant comment: "The title of Messiah/Christ does not at all in Paul mean the messiahship of Jesus as such. Nearly always he uses the term Χριστός in the kerygmatic formulae which show the death and resurrection of the Messiah in their saving significance — i.e. where the sense is always determined by this ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν which points to salvation history" (*ibid.*). The point at issue is to discover the perspective characteristic of

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- (c) Wilckens does not take account of a fact on which several authors, Bultmann especially,<sup>41</sup> insist, namely, the fact that Paul was brought into contact with the Christian faith through the mediation of the Hellenistic community. What exactly do we know of the thought of "Hellenistic-Christians"? It would not perhaps be wise to evaluate them solely by Stephen's speech in Acts 7. In any case, one matter is not in doubt: they were Christians who founded the church at Antioch at a date which must be close to that of Paul's conversion. The community at Antioch was very quickly distinguished by the

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presence of Christians who were Gentiles by extraction and untouched by either circumcision or Jewish observances. It would not be rash to conclude that the Hellenistic Christians from whom Paul had known the Christian message had ideas on the subject of the law less orthodox from a Jewish point of view. Otherwise, how would they have been able to arrive at the conviction that faith in Christ was enough to make a person a member of the community of salvation, without it being necessary to maintain the practice of the law? Surely this aids our understanding of the devoted attachment of Paul to the law which turned him into a persecutor of Christianity.

### *C. The Stumbling-Block of the Cross*

The conclusion we have so far reached may seem negative enough: before his conversion Paul thought of Christianity as incompatible with the religion devoted to the law. One would like to know more directly the estimate he passed on the Christian message. That estimate will be clarified when we see what he wrote on the matter of the stumbling-block of the cross.

The texts to be examined fall into two groups. First of all, there are those which locate the scandal of the cross in the difficulty which it made for the belief that Jesus was the Messiah. Menoud depends on these texts in his presentation of the conversion of Paul as a commitment to the teaching concerning Jesus' messiahship. There are also other texts in which the cross of Christ appears as a scandal for the Jews in its antithesis to circumcision, that is to say, insofar as the cross rendered useless both circumcision and the observance of the law as a way of salvation. In these texts the cross is seen in its saving significance. We shall examine these texts and inquire which have most to teach us on the conviction of Paul before his conversion.

- i. The first group is represented by two very important passages: Galatians 3:10-14 and 1 Corinthians 1:17-24.

I cannot do better than quote Menoud who explains the Galatians passage thus:

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Paul. Wilckens has shown himself ready to follow the idea that "ancient kerygmatic formulae were already speaking, often by reference to Isa. 53, of the death of Christ 'for us' "(p. 281). But, before Paul, no one had drawn the conclusions which followed in regard to the law. The first Christians had not forged a link between their christology and the question of the law.

<sup>41</sup> *Theologie des neuen Testaments*, pp. 184 ff. (ET *Theology of the New Testament*, pp. 187 ff.).

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Saul was dominated by a zeal for God when he persecuted those who believed in Jesus. For him Christians were simply impostors, because Jesus could not be the Messiah. In Paul's view and in the eyes of every Jew, a crucified Messiah was a stumbling-block, a contradiction in terms. According to the prevailing expectation, Messiah would appear suddenly in power and glory to wind up the present age and establish the kingdom of God. But Jesus had been condemned not only by the highest authorities within Judaism but even by God himself who had allowed

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him to suffer a most shameful death and to fall under the sentence of the law: "Cursed is anyone who hangs on the tree" (Deut. 21:23, quoted in Gal. 3:13).<sup>42</sup>

My problem concerns the use of this text to arrive at an understanding of Paul's thought when he was still an adherent of Judaism. Galatians 3:10 is used as a warning. If the Galatians accept circumcision, they must then observe all the requirements of the law<sup>43</sup> — or else they will bring down on themselves the curse imposed by the law on those who do not observe it in its entirety. This way of regarding the law as an agency of curse puts it in a perspective which is not exactly the same as that which Paul has in mind when he refers to his convictions before his conversion. Verses 11 and 12 set the "law" against "faith", the life which the law brings to those who observe it and the life which is promised by faith without regard to all observance. It is clear that Paul is here referring to the Christian concept of "faith". Verse 13 goes on: "Christ has redeemed us from the law's curse by becoming himself a curse for us." The belief that Christ has taken on himself the curse of the law is not to be divorced from the way in which verse 10 presents the law as an agency of curse in contrast to verse 14 which speaks of the blessing which comes from the promise made to Abraham.<sup>44</sup>

It seems to me, therefore, that these verses in Galatians must be understood as the reflections of a Christian theologian. It would not be wise to seek in them an evidence of how Paul thought when he was once a Pharisee and zealous for the law.

The other text to consider is 1 Corinthians 1:17-24, the *locus classicus* on the scandal of the cross. At verse 17 Paul remarks that his mission is to proclaim the gospel and to do it without reliance on the σοφία λόγου — the wisdom of speech — which reduced the cross of Christ to nothing. Verses 18-21 underscore the fact that the message of the cross appears as folly, i.e. since the world was not able to know God by its wisdom, God was pleased (in his own wisdom) to save those who believe, and to save them by the folly of the message (of the

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<sup>42</sup> *Révélation et tradition* p. 4 (ET "Revelation and Tradition", p. 133).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Gal. 5:3.

<sup>44</sup> The interpretation of Gal. 3:10-14 must obviously take account of the full exposition to which these verses belong. First, verses 6-24 form a unity and set the blessing linked with Abraham's faith over against the curse linked with the law. On a broader scale, in chapter 3 as a whole, Paul wants to show that righteousness is given not by the law but by faith (vv. 1-5 argue from the absurd; vv. 6-14 argue from the Scripture; vv. 15-29 argue on legal grounds, drawing upon arrangements under a will and testament). The same attention to the full explanation is needed in Rom. 4.

Nothing stands in the way of the view, supported by G. Jeremias, *Der Lehrer der Gerechtigkeit* (Studien zur Umwelt des NT, 2) [Göttingen, 1963], pp. 133-35 on the basis of QpNah 7-8 that the exegesis of Deut. 21:23 in Gal. 3:13 is inspired by an interpretation adopted from Jewish circles. But it should not be forgotten that this feature is part of a theological argument completely foreign to Judaistic thought.

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cross). Up to verse 21, we should note, it is only a matter of the *message* of the cross, set over against the wis-

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dom of men; verses 22-24 graft on the idea of the *stumbling-block* of the cross. While the Jews ask for signs — striking manifestations of God's power — and the Greeks seek for wisdom, we proclaim a Christ who is crucified, a scandal for the Jews and folly for the Greeks, but for those who are called, Jews and Greeks, the power of God and the wisdom of God.

Paul then speaks of the stumbling-block of the Jews over against the message of a crucified Christ. To imagine that this scandal arose simply from the contrast between this message and the Jewish hope of a Messiah whose coming would be attended by an impressive show of divine power would surely lead us to think that Paul was making appeal here to his personal experience and to convictions which inspired him before his conversion; but we cannot grant that the passage has any autobiographical character or that the portrayal of the Jew scandalized by the cross of Christ gives the impression of being patterned on the description of the Greek who regarded the message of the cross as folly. It would be difficult to look to this development of detailed teaching for the state of Paul's mind before his conversion.

2. Three other texts on the interpretation of the scandal of the cross point in a different direction. The scandal arises from the saving significance of the cross as a substitute in place of the law as a way of salvation.

We begin with Galatians 5:11: "As for me, brethren, if I am still preaching circumcision why am I still being persecuted? What has then become of the scandal of the cross?" Paul is exposed to persecution because he did not preach circumcision. He accepted the scandal of the cross, which was a scandal in the eyes of his persecutors because it stood over against circumcision, because it did away with the entire need of circumcision and, most of all, the requirements of the law.<sup>45</sup> The element in Paul's preaching which offended his enemies was not specifically that a crucified man was presented as the Messiah, but the statement that righteousness and salvation depended on that death of Christ on the cross, and that for righteousness and salvation a person could not turn to the observance of the law. For this reason Christianity seemed to them to strike a blow at the basic tenet of Judaism. In the motives which Paul attributes to his persecutors, he is clearly recognizing the same motives as those which had turned him into a persecutor of the church.

The conclusion of the letter, Galatians 6:12-16, strikes the same note. Verse 12 describes the attitude of those who wanted to win over the Galatians to this practice of circumcision. They hoped thereby to avoid being persecuted for the sake of the cross of Christ. The Jews, therefore, persecuted the Christians because of the cross of Christ; specifically because the

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<sup>45</sup> "Περιομή und στυρός stehen sich für ihn als einander ausschliessende Mittel und Zeichen des Heiles entgegen, wobei die περιτομή natürlich der Inbegriff des Gesetzes und also der heilwirksamen gesetzlichen Leistung und des gesetzlich erworbenen Vorzuges ist": H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galate*,<sup>10</sup> (Meyer, VI) (Göttingen, 1949), p. 173 [12th ed., pp. 239-40, Edd.].

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cross of Christ led Christians no longer to place a value on circumcision (and legal observances as a whole). Verse 13 remarks that Paul's enemies were not really concerned about the law. They did not fulfil it themselves; they wanted simply to make a good appearance to the Jews in order to deflect their hatred. At verse 14 Paul explicitly repudiates this tactic for he wants to boast only in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He goes on (vv. 15-16): circumcision counts for nothing, uncircumcision counts for nothing: what matters is being a new creature and being a member of the Israel of God. This passage shows again that the Jewish persecutors found fault with the cross because it was at odds not with their Messianic teaching but with circumcision. The cross made circumcision useless. There was a radical opposition between the Christian faith centering in the redeeming mystery of the cross and the Jewish teaching of the necessity of circumcision and the practice of the law for salvation. It should be noted that what Paul here says of the motive which turned the Jews into persecutors of Christianity harmonizes remarkably with what he says of zeal for the law as the motive of his hostility to the church before his conversion.

I conclude by reverting to Philippians 3. At verse 3 Paul has stated that we Christians are the true circumcision and we find our confidence in Christ Jesus instead of putting our confidence in the flesh. Verses 18-19 bring a charge which is aimed at people who "behave as enemies of the cross of Christ" and "who find their confidence in their shame". We recall the contrast in the Epistle to the Galatians between the Jewish (or Judaizing) practice of boasting in circumcision and the Christian position, which establishes its pride solely upon Christ and Christ's cross. They who preach circumcision act as "enemies of the cross of Christ"; they make out that Christ's cross is not enough to save. Before his conversion, Paul belonged to these "enemies of the cross of Christ", undoubtedly because he had already concluded that the value placed by Christians on the cross was at odds with the role which Judaism accorded to circumcision and the observance of the law for the securing of righteousness and salvation.

We can conclude by stating that these last texts relating to the Jews' scandal when faced with the cross agree well enough with other verses in which Paul speaks of his own "zeal" in persecuting the church. Judaism rested entirely on the conviction that the observance of the law by itself could secure salvation. The Christian faith destroyed this foundation by the saving interpretation it gave to the mystery of Christ's cross. To judge from the epistles, it is exactly in this interpretation that the motive of Paul's hostility to early Christianity is to be sought.

We may note yet again that Paul's foresight is perhaps surprising. At the time when he persecuted the Christians, most of them did not appear to have understood the fatal blow which their theology of the cross would strike at Judaism. It must at least be conceded that the Christian church

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was already in possession of this teaching. It is sufficient to recall here the studies of Jeremias and Lohse<sup>46</sup> on the ancient confession of faith in 1 Corinthians 15 which affirmed that Christ

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. J. Jeremias, *Die Abendmahlsworte Jesu*<sup>3</sup> (Göttingen, 1960), pp. 95-97, 160 ff., 188, 218-23 (ET *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, second ed. [London, 1966], pp. 101-03, 166 ff., 195, 225-31); *TWNT* V (1959) pp. 703 f. and 707 (ET *TDNT* V, 1967, pp. 703 f., 706); E. Lohse, *Märtyrer und Gottesknecht. Untersuchungen zur*

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"died for our sins according to the scriptures" (v. 3) and to recall also the traditional liturgical form of 1 Corinthians 11:24 which related how, at the Last Supper, Jesus had apprised his disciples that he would be delivered up for them: ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, "for you".

In attaching a redemptive meaning to the sacrifice of the cross, Christianity was unable to avoid entering into conflict with the Jewish soteriology, based on the law. We can by this explain the fury with which Paul at the start reacted against the Christian faith in the name of his devotion to the law.

#### ***D. The Appearance at Damascus***

After having investigated at length the question of the reason why Paul persecuted the church before his conversion, I can now deal quickly with the information which he rather summarily gives us about the event which transformed his life and made him an apostle of Jesus Christ. It seems to me that four observations should be made.

1. The first remark is that Paul confesses to *having seen* Jesus, our Lord (1 Cor. 9:1). Christ appeared to him (1 Cor. 15:8).<sup>47</sup> He ranks this appearance after those which Jesus made after his resurrection to those persons who had been his disciples during his earthly ministry. He thus regards himself as belonging to the group of witnesses to the resurrection of Christ.<sup>48</sup>

The Acts of the Apostles tells what happened when he came near Damascus. Paul was surrounded by a light from heaven (9:3; 22:6); he saw this light brighter than the sun, shining around him and his travel companions (26:13). Falling to the ground, he then heard a voice (9:4; 22:7; 26: 14). But the three accounts apparently suggest that Paul did not see who it was who spoke to him. This Lukan picture cannot silence the witness, both clear and unmistakable, which Paul himself gives that he had really seen Jesus.

2. We must next observe that the Christ who showed himself to Paul did so in an *irresistible* way. This fact is already clear in the figure of speech in

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Philippians 3:12: Christ laid hold on Paul just like the runner who gains the prize of his victory. 1 Corinthians 9:16-17 is more explicit. The apostles have the right to make a living from the gospel but Paul holds that, in his case, the right is not so evident since, though he does proclaim the gospel, he does not do it from choice. The appearance of Christ has charged him with a mission which is for him a necessity. Paul has not given himself to Christ; he has the consciousness that it is Christ who laid hands upon him all at once without giving him the

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*urchristlichen Verkündigung von Sühntod Jesu Christi* (FRLANT 64) (Göttingen, 1955), pp. 113-16, 131-35, 547 ff.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. U. Wilckens, *Die Bekehrung*, p. 274. It is unnecessary to discuss here the psychologizing interpretations which have recently been offered by W. Prentice, "St. Paul's Journey to Damascus," *ZNTW* 46 (1955), pp. 250-55, and W. Prokulski, "The Conversion of St. Paul", *CBQ* 19 (1957), 453-73. See on this subject the pertinent comments of B. Rigaux, *Saint Paul et ses lettres*, pp. 68 ff. and 78 ff.

<sup>48</sup> He belonged to this group, albeit as the last member and in spite of his unworthiness because he had persecuted the church of God (vv. 8-9). See too Eph. 3:8.



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chance to break free. From this point of view, the occurrence on the Damascus road hardly resembles what we normally call a "conversion".

3. In the third place, Paul saw *Christ in his glory*. In this respect the Damascus appearance is plainly different from the Easter appearances which are recorded in the gospels.

In Galatians 1:12, 16 Paul speaks of this appearance as an "apocalypse",<sup>49</sup> a glorious manifestation in which Christ revealed himself to Paul in his state as Son of God, such as will be his appearance at the end-time.

2 Corinthians 4:4, 6 alludes to Paul's conversion. God had caused light to shine in his heart in order that he might see and then shed abroad the knowledge of God's glory which shone in the face of Christ, the perfect image of God.<sup>50</sup> The inner illumination is connected with a manifestation of the glory of God beaming from the person of Christ.

Here again, so it seems, Philippians 3 is most significant. At the moment of his meeting with Christ, Paul reckons with the only thing which hence-forth will count with him: "to know Christ and the power of his resurrection" (v. 10). He has begun then a course at the end of which is a "prize", he knows, the divine call and the resurrection of the dead (cf. vv. 11, 14).<sup>51</sup> Verses 20, 21 make this clear: "We are citizens of heaven, from where we await as Saviour the Lord Jesus Christ who will change our lowly bodies and make them like his body of glory, by the power which gives him the ability to subdue all things to himself." The glory in which Paul saw Christ is at the same time powerful. Thanks to that, Christ makes the elect share in the glory which he has since his resurrection. Put otherwise, the glorious Christ, who appeared to Paul, stands for — in Paul's mind — salvation already achieved. He could now think of salvation only as a sharing in the glory of the risen Christ. Salvation which meant becoming like him was effected by the power that he possessed; and therefore, salvation depended on him and on him alone.

4. A final datum must be taken into consideration to explain Paul's experience on the Damascus road. Paul links the appearance of Christ with his *mission as apostle to the Gentiles*.<sup>52</sup> Paul often alludes to the mission with

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which he knows himself to be charged and which defines his particular place in the apostolic church. It devolved upon him to proclaim the gospel to the Gentiles. He traces back this calling to the Damascus event. God "revealed his Son to me so that I should proclaim him among the Gentiles" (Gal. 1:16).<sup>53</sup> He did not claim that Christ had given him the command to evangelize the Gentiles and there is nothing to allow us to imagine that this injunction was

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<sup>49</sup> See A.-M. Denis, *RB* (1957) (cited on p. 178).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. J. Dupont, *Gnosis. La connaissance religieuse dans les épîtres de saint Paul* (Univ. Cath. Lov., Diss. ad gradum magistri in Fac. Theol., II, 40) (Louvain-Paris, 1949=1960), pp. 37 ff.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. G. Bouwman, *De brief van Paulus aan de Filippiërs*, p. 87.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Rom. 1:5, 3; 11:13; 15:16, i8; Gal. 2:2, 8-9.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. U. Wilckens, *Die Bekehrung*, pp. 274-7.

Jacques Dupont, O.S.B., "The Conversion of Paul, and Its Influence on His Understanding of Salvation by Faith," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.176-194.

given him explicitly at this time.<sup>54</sup> But he was none the less convinced that his call to the apostleship of the Gentiles was bound up with the experience of Damascus. Implicit in such a call is that this experience could not consist only in the discovery of Jesus' messiahship. The attitude of the first Christians at Jerusalem shows sufficiently that it was one thing to recognize in Jesus the promised Messiah and another to have an immediate understanding of the necessity of proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul's conviction is far better explained as a recognition of the glorious Christ as the Lord on whom depended exclusively the salvation of all men, whether Jews or Gentiles.

The apostleship of the Gentiles has, therefore, been entrusted precisely to this Pharisee who was filled with destructive zeal for the law, to this Pharisee who saw religion, righteousness and salvation only in the observance of the law. Christ's appearance has made him the herald of salvation exactly for those who are ignorant of the law and who are not troubled about it. For Christ is sufficient. Salvation comes only by him and by faith in him, without the works of the law.

The mission with which Paul knew himself charged for the sake of the Gentiles since the Damascus appearance implied a soteriology wholly suspended on Christ. It could not be adequately explained as arising from belief in the messiahship of Jesus. Its basis could only be located in the faith of the saving, universal and exclusive role of the risen Christ. As Saviour of all men, he must play a beneficent role for Gentiles as well as Jews. As a unique Saviour, he takes away all significance from the law as a principle of righteousness and salvation. Paul writes in Romans 10:4: τέλος γὰρ νόμου Χριστός, which seems to state that Christ has brought an end to the law.<sup>55</sup> Now there is both righteousness and salvation for anyone who believes in Christ. But the Jews do not understand this, since verse 2 attributes to them a true but ill-informed zeal. Paul himself had opposed, from

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the very first and with all his strength, this Christ who had put an end to~ the role of the law. The vision at Damascus persuaded him that the role of the law was truly finished and the time had come to proclaim to the Gentiles salvation by faith in Christ.

### III

The study of Paul's conversion from the point of view of the repercussions which it had on his theological thought has inevitably led us to problems of soteriology. We have found ourselves faced by the resultant conflict between the Pharisaic soteriology of Paul before his conversion,

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<sup>54</sup> According to Acts, it is Ananias who received a revelation concerning the mission awaiting Paul (9:55) and who gave him news of it as the party concerned (22:14-15). One can understand why Paul did not wish to mention this indirect call.

<sup>55</sup> The *Traduction oecuménique de la Bible* (Paris, 1967), p. 78, notes: "The term in Greek which we translate as 'end' (*fin*) (*telos*) expresses at the same time the idea of purpose, conclusion and fulfilment." The meaning "end" (*fin*) is adopted notably by U. Wilckens, *Die Bekehrung*, p. 276; G. Delling, *TWNT* VIII, 57; J. A. Fitzmyer, "Saint Paul and the Law" in *The Jurist*, 27 (1967), pp. 18-36 (22 and 27).

It is rejected in favour of the idea of "goal" (*but*) by R. Bring, "Das Gesetz und die Gerechtigkeit Gottes. Eine Studie zur Frage nach der Bedeutung des Ausdruckes τέλος νόμου in Rom. 10,4" in *StTh* 20 (1966), pp. 5-36.

Jacques Dupont, O.S.B., "The Conversion of Paul, and Its Influence on His Understanding of Salvation by Faith," W. Ward Gasque & Ralph P. Martin, eds., *Apostolic History and the Gospel. Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F.F. Bruce*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1970. Hbk. ISBN: 085364098X. pp.176-194.

a soteriology based on the observance of the law, and the Christian soteriology wholly centered in Christ, in Christ's cross, in faith in Christ and in the redemptive worth of his death on the cross. We have seen how decisively and suddenly Paul passed from one soteriology to the other at the time when the glorious Christ appeared to him, effecting in his person the salvation which was Paul's object of hope in the world to come.

We have encountered what might be called the three fundamental presuppositions of Pauline soteriology:

1. First of all, there is *the personal experience* which came to Paul at Damascus. He then received the revelation, not of a doctrine of salvation but of the practical realization of salvation in the person of the risen Christ.<sup>56</sup> More than that, he recognized in the Christ who appeared to him the author of salvation and one who possessed by his resurrection the power to grant to believers in him a share in his glory.

2. This revelation led Paul to take over *the interpretation which the primitive church gave to the death of Jesus on the cross*. Christ died for us, for our sins, for human salvation. His death has, therefore, a redemptive worth. The Hellenists were not slow to seize the practical consequence of this teaching in welcoming Gentiles to the Antiochene community. It was not necessary to be a Jew and to submit to the prescriptions of the law to have a share in the salvation granted to men by Christ.

3. It is needful likewise to take account of the *Pharisaic soteriology* which at the first Paul set against the Christian faith and against which he later reacted with the utmost vigour.<sup>57</sup> In rejecting entirely and without reserve the notion of a righteousness and a salvation which may be secured by observance of the law, he came to grasp with greater penetration and to express with greater clarity what it was that constituted the novelty and originality of the Christian soteriology, viz, that salvation is given only by and in Christ to those who are joined to him by faith.

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<sup>56</sup> We are glad to avail ourselves, in this way, of the expression used by H. G. Wood "Paul was converted to Christ rather than to Christianity" (*NTS* [1954-55], p. 279).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. H. G. Wood, *NTS* (1954-55), p. 280.