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**Paul's Letter to the Romans in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament* and in Contemporary Reformed Thought**

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Almost forty years have elapsed since the publication of the first volume of John Murray's two-volume commentary on Romans in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*. (The second part appeared in 1965, the first in 1959.) Douglas Moo's 1996 contribution to this commentary series marks a significant development in twentieth-century evangelical theology. According to Gordon Fee, current general editor of the *NICNT*, Moo was chosen to replace the older work for the reason that his theological sympathies lay in the direction of Murray's interpretation of the great apostle Paul. Thus, in the estimation of the editor Moo's theology falls squarely within the Reformed camp. Moo, however, identifies himself as a 'modified Lutheran.'<sup>1</sup> Does this in any way indicate on the part of Fee a misreading or misunderstanding of these two highly influential and respected authors? Not at all. In my judgment, the modified Lutheranism of Moo is very close to (traditional) Reformed teaching. More strikingly, with respect to the doctrine of the covenants—notably, interpretation of the relationship between the Mosaic and new covenants—Moo's position is closer to that of mainstream historic Reformed doctrine than is Murray's.

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<sup>1</sup> See the important discussion in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views* (ed. W. G. Strickland; Grand Rapids, 1993), reviewed by the present writer in *JETS* 37, 1994, 447-50.

This important development in the history of the William B. Eerdmans's commentary series provides a fitting occasion to compare and analyze the work of Murray and Moo in the context of contemporary Reformed thought. The literature on Romans (and the theology of Paul generally) is voluminous. The purpose of this article is to focus more narrowly on *Reformed* theological interpretation. Needless to say, Reformed exegesis and theology has profited from dialogue within the larger evangelical community of scholars. Hopefully, our present discussion will provoke thoughtful interaction from this wider arena. Just possibly greater doctrinal consensus among *evangelicals* may yet be achieved as the Christian church moves into the twenty-first century.

The strength of both commentaries lies in *theological exegesis*. In the preface to the second volume of Murray on Romans the then current general editor, F. F. Bruce, praised Murray's work as that 'of a fellow-Scot who worthily maintains the noble tradition of theological exegesis which has for long been one of the glories of our native land.'<sup>2</sup> Indeed, readers of Murray's commentary are treated to some of the best of the Scottish Reformed heritage. And Moo enriches that particular expression of Christian theology by engaging extensively not only with Murray but other theologians across the wide spectrum of current evangelical thought. Too often emphasis on language and semantics has inhibited *doctrinal* exposition. Some of the recent commentaries simply sell theology short; others advocate theological eclecticism to one degree or another. Thankfully, neither Murray nor Moo shows any sympathy for such a methodology.<sup>3</sup>

### 1. Orientation to Paul's letter to the Romans

The commentaries of Murray and Moo on Romans are representative of the contemporary school of salvation-historical (or redemptive-historical) interpretation of the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments. This approach is by no means original with developments in twentieth-century biblical studies. Actually, this methodology is rooted in the Reformed theological tradition. It is implicit, if not always explicit, in the rise and development of *covenant theology*. Curiously, Moo has shown reluctance over the years to speak of himself as a covenant theologian, yet clearly the doctrine of the covenants plays a formative role in his understanding of the Bible. (For Moo the problem may simply be one of nomenclature.) Both take into consideration the distinction between the 'already' and the 'not yet,' as well as the distinction

<sup>2</sup> Murray 2:vii.

<sup>3</sup> Consult D. A. Carson's helpful essay, 'Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology,' in *Scripture and Truth* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids, 1983), 65-95; also Robert L. Thomas, 'Current Hermeneutical Trends: Toward Explanation or Obfuscation?' *JETS* 39, 1996, 241-256.

between the old and new aeons. There are those benefits of Christ's saving work *already* experienced and those *not yet* experienced by the believer in this present (semi-eschatological) age of the Spirit; the old age/new age contrast arises from the epochal event of Christ's death and resurrection in the fullness of time. So significant is Christ's reconciling work that an entirely *new* age has been inaugurated. The Christian life is lived out in the tension between that which is passing away and that which has dawned with the arrival of the kingdom of God. The contrast between the ages is essentially in the nature of things old and new, not mere chronological sequence. (Abraham, Moo reminds us, existentially participated in the realities of the life to come, i.e. the new age, wherein righteousness and peace reign.) Simply stated, Moo argues, the old age/new age contrast is a 'conceptual tool';<sup>4</sup> it is the 'most basic theological conception in Paul.'<sup>5</sup>

Murray develops his exposition of Romans in terms of the underlying redemptive-historical contrast between OT promise and NT fulfilment.<sup>6</sup> As we shall see, one of the central issues confronting the reader of this letter of the apostle Paul is the relation between Israel and the NT church. The transition from old to new covenants coincides with the arrival of the kingdom of Christ and the overlap of the old and new aeons. The first advent marks the great divide in cosmic history. In the words of N. T. Wright, Christ is the 'climax of the covenant.'<sup>7</sup> The fulfilment of the ages arrives with the appearance of Jesus Christ. He is Immanuel, God with us. The future regeneration and renewal of heaven and earth is inextricably tied to Christ's personal glorification. By virtue of his resurrection from the dead Christ is declared to be Son of God *in power*; he has been elevated to the state of exaltation in glory. Both Murray and Moo follow the interpretation of Geerhardus Vos on this crucial Pauline text, Rom. 1:3,4. Murray speaks of this transition in the life of Jesus as that which results in Christ's 'pneumatic endowment,' and thus stands in contrast to his pre-resurrection state (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). The assumption of human *flesh* marks Christ's entrance into the initial state of humiliation. The term 'flesh' itself covers a spectrum of meaning in Pauline theology, its basic meaning denoting *preconsummate* human weakness (see 1 Cor. 15:44-49).<sup>8</sup> Herein the first and second Adams shared an identical

4 Moo 27.

5 Ibid. 221.

6 Murray 1:4. Murray contrasts Israel under age in the period of the old covenant with her 'mature, full-fledged sonship' under the new covenant. 'The adoption of the Old,' says Murray, 'was propaedeutic' (2:5).

7 N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh, 1991; Minneapolis, 1993). See Moo's review in *JETS* 39, 1996, 663-664.

8 Moo correctly observes: "'Flesh" (*sarx*) is a key Pauline theological term. It refers essentially to human existence, with emphasis on the transitory, weak, frail nature of that existence' (Moo 47).

humanity, free from sin and its consequences. (Of course, the first Adam fell from that original state of moral rectitude.) The 'natural body' possessed by Adam in creation was not yet the consummate, eschatologico-pneumatic body of future Sabbath bliss promised to Adam upon successful conclusion of his probation. Humankind would have entered God's Sabbath-rest after its historical development and fulfilment of the cultural mandate (spanning the period between Creation and Consummation). As second Adam, Christ earns universal dominion and lordship after his historical fulfilment of that covenant established between the Father and Son in eternity. Murray rightly notes that this lordship of Christ 'did not belong to Christ by native right as the Son of God; it had to be secured. It is the lordship of redemptive relationship and such did not inhere in the sovereignty that belongs to him in virtue of his creatorhood. It is achieved by mediatorial accomplishment and is the reward of his humiliation.'<sup>9</sup>

Though crucial to Paul's explication of the gospel now made known in these last days, the doctrine of justification by faith alone is nevertheless subordinate to Paul's teaching on the great eschatological event of God's sending of his Son in fulfilment of the ancient promise to Abraham (and prior to him, to Adam in the Garden subsequent to the Fall).<sup>10</sup> The prominence that Paul gives to the doctrine of justification by faith is but one aspect, however foundational, of his elucidation of the gospel. In the judgment of Moo, 'If, then, justification by faith is not the center of Romans or of Paul's thought in the logical sense, in another sense it expresses a central, driving force in Paul's thought.' Moo concludes: 'In this respect, the Reformers were not far wrong in giving to justification by faith the attention they did.'<sup>11</sup> Both the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions acknowledge the vital role this doctrine plays in Pauline theology and in the NT generally. Modern-day revisionists erroneously contend, however, that the reformers

9 Murray 2:182. Murray is reticent to employ the covenant concept to the pact made between the Father and the Son in eternity. The reason is threefold: (1) the term 'covenant' in the Bible first appears in Genesis 6 (the postlapsarian era); (2) the incongruity drawn by Murray between covenant (as a *gracious* disposition) and the principle of 'merit' (what Murray explains as the principle of 'perfect legal reciprocity'); and (3) Murray's peculiar distinction between man-righteousness and God-righteousness (only the latter, argues Murray, can be the basis of man's reception of eternal life). Compare further my doctoral study, 'The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics' (Th.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980), 242-249. See also footnote 16 below.

10 F. F. Bruce maintains that Paul 'writes this greatest polemic in the exposition and defense of the gospel of grace' (Murray I:xiii).

11 Moo 90. The question of the 'center' of Paul's theology (or the Bible more generally) oftentimes carries more weight than is warranted. There is a richness and diversity in the canonical writings that makes difficult any attempt to reduce the message of Scripture to one central thought or idea.

introduced a speculative, rationalistic element into Protestant theology by placing the 'Law' against the 'Gospel.' Yet, apart from this theological law/gospel contrast the *sola fide* doctrine crumbles to the ground. Historic Protestant interpretation placed great emphasis upon the *sola fide* character of the biblical teaching on salvation. A subtle, but nonetheless radical, shift has gradually been surfacing in (quasi-) evangelical and Reformed thinking over the course of the last several decades, notably during the period between the time of the publication of Murray's commentary on Romans and that of Moo's. Attention is now drawn to Paul's expression 'the obedience of faith' in Rom. 1:5 as the key to the apostle's understanding of the Christian life. The new perspective calls into question the traditional Protestant doctrine of justification by faith (*sola fide*).<sup>12</sup>

The determining factor in resolving the contemporary riddle—the answer having been given by the Protestant reformers almost five centuries ago—is the Pauline understanding of the righteousness of God. Contemporary evangelical and Reformed theology is in dire need of reclaiming the teaching of its Protestant forebears. The righteousness of God which is unto salvation (i.e. justification) is an *alien* righteousness, the righteousness of Christ *imputed* to all who believe. (As the reformers correctly maintained, faith is the alone instrument that receives the righteousness of Christ.) The foundation of the Christian life is God's justifying act in raising Christ from the dead. By union with Christ in his death and resurrection (through the sole instrumentality of justifying faith) all of the saving benefits of salvation are bestowed upon the elect. And union with Christ is attained by means of the effectual working of the Spirit of Christ. This is the central thrust of Paul's teaching in Romans 1–8.

## 2. The Pauline *Ordo Salutis*

From the above discussion it should be clear that the theological categories of *historia salutis* (the accomplishment of salvation, the fulfilment of the ancient promise in the fulness of time) and *ordo salutis* (the application of salvation to the elect before and after Christ) are mutually interpretive of God's redemption. These two aspects of God's saving work are not two perspectives on a single event complex, the Christ event. They are two distinct, though inseparable, components of Christ's salvation. The Spirit efficaciously applies only that which Christ has actually earned on the basis of his meritorious obedience. With respect to the accomplishment and application of salvation, the

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Don B. Garlington, *Faith, Obedience and Perseverance (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 79; Tübingen, 1994)* and my review of this study in *TrinJ* (Fall 1997).

work of Christ and the Spirit are considered as one in the economy of redemption (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 15:45 and 2 Cor. 3:17). Effectual union with Christ in his death and resurrection ties together the individual believer's experiential appropriation of the benefits of salvation to the historic actualization of God's promise in the reconciling and atoning work of Christ (Romans 6). The various benefits accruing to the elect of God are the complete possession of every believer. Those effectually called are justified and adopted, sanctified and preserved, regenerated and glorified. Each of the benefits of union with Christ belongs to all the saints. Whatever the logical and temporal relation between them, they are inseparably bound together as a manifold package (cf. Rom. 8:29,30). Believers do not enjoy one benefit to the exclusion of any of the others, though some are received only in anticipation of the Eschaton. Thus, bodily resurrection, judgment according to works (i.e. final approbation, wherein good works are evidential of true, saving faith [cf. Rom. 2:5-11 and 2 Cor. 5:10]), and glorification await the end times.<sup>13</sup> Needless to say, we cannot contemplate the benefits of union with Christ without reference to Christ's submission to and fulfilment of the covenant of works previously established with his Father in eternity, oftentimes called the Covenant of Redemption (see footnote 9 above). The proper purpose of the Covenant of Grace is the salvation of the elect, those for whom Christ died. *Ordo salutis* and *historia salutis* are aspectually related.

Returning to Rom. 1:16,17, we consider again the foundational act of God in declaring sinners righteous in his sight on grounds of the (active and passive) obedience of Christ. The way of salvation is that of faith, not works. 'The power of God unto salvation of which the gospel is the embodiment,' writes Murray, 'is not unconditionally and universally operative unto salvation. It is of this we are advised in the words "to every one that believeth." This informs us that salvation is not accomplished irrespective of faith.'<sup>14</sup> It is the peculiar nature of saving faith to receive and rest upon Christ for salvation. Though there is 'the priority of effectual calling and of regeneration in the *ordo salutis*,' Murray adds, it is faith which is the alone instrumental cause of justification. 'It is preeminently in connection with justification that the accent falls upon faith.'<sup>15</sup> What is required for our salvation is the righteousness of God, a righteousness that 'meets all the demands of [God's] justice and therefore avails before God.'<sup>16</sup> The Protestant

13 On the subject of justification and (future) judgment according to works, see my 'Justification in Redemptive History,' *WTJ* 43, 1981, 213-246.

14 *Ibid.* 1:27.

15 *Ibid.* 1:27, n.21.

16 *Ibid.* 1:31. Murray adds: 'Man-righteousness, even though perfect and measuring up to all the demands of God's perfection, would never be adequate to the situation

reformers were unanimous in their belief that works of any kind find no place in the article of justification (i.e. the justification of sinners).<sup>17</sup> 'Grace through faith' stands in contrast to 'reward according to merit.'<sup>18</sup> What Murray calls the 'all-important aspect' of Rom. 9:15 is the distinction between God's mercy and justice. 'Justice presupposes rightful claims, and mercy can be operative only where no claim of justice exists. . . . Back of this thesis is the polemic of the apostle in the earlier part of the epistle for the principle of grace.'<sup>19</sup> The point here is this: the principle of works-inheritance (law) and the principle of faith-inheritance (grace) are radically antithetical. There can be no mixture of the two with respect to the means to salvation.

### 3. The Contrasting Covenants: Mosaic and New

This section brings us to the focal issue in this comparative critique of Murray and Moo on Romans. We begin by taking note that the apostle Paul's argument in the letter to the Romans is advanced specifically in terms of Gentile-Jewish relations. Although the Roman church was comprised primarily of Gentile Christians, Paul addresses both Gentiles and Jews. And with respect to Jewry itself Paul has in view not only converts to Christianity but also those outside the faith, notably those

16 (*Continued*) created by our sins. . . . Nothing serves to point up the effectiveness, completeness, and irrevocableness of the justification which it is the apostle's purpose to establish and vindicate than this datum set forth at the outset—the righteousness which is unto justification is one characterized by the perfection belonging to all that God is and does. It is a "God-righteousness." The justification of sinners is, as Murray notes, 'complete and irreversible' (1:274).

His identification of the righteousness given to sinners justified by grace as a God-level righteousness is tantamount to blurring the Creator/creature distinction. (According to Murray, even the reward of eternal life that would have been granted to Adam after successful completion of probation would have been based upon God's own faithfulness to his word of promise, eternal life being grounded upon a God-righteousness). Murray's formulation confounds the ontologic and the juridical categories; it also fails to do justice to the biblical teaching that Christ as the Second Adam accomplished our *full* salvation, having obtained for the elect both the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting on grounds of his perfect obedience.

17 'When Paul says "without the law" the absoluteness of this negation must not be toned down. He means this without any reservation or equivocation in reference to the justifying righteousness which is the theme of this part of the epistle. . . . To equivocate here is to distort what could not be more plainly and consistently stated' (ibid. 1:109). Murray later explains: 'In the sustained argument of the preceding verses [Rom. 3:27ff.] the negation of works of law as having any instrumentality or efficiency in justification has in view works performed in obedience to divine commandment and therefore the law contemplated is the law of commandment from whatever aspect it may be regarded. What is in view is law as commanding to compliance and performance. And the insistence of the apostle is that *any* works in performance of any such commandment are of no avail in justification' (1:126).

18 Ibid. 1:135.

19 Ibid. 2:26.

of the party of the Pharisees. Paul speaks to those who know the law, those to whom belong the adoption as sons, the divine glory, the covenants, the law, the temple worship, and the promises (Rom. 9:4). Many of those numbered among Israel have the form of godliness, but not the reality. The problem of Israelite unbelief is the focus of chapters 9–11. But before reviewing that section of the letter, we turn our attention to Paul's understanding of the purpose of the Mosaic law.

Murray's interpretation of Paul on the law is in several respects unrepresentative of Reformed federal theology. Over the course of Murray's teaching career, he was intent on 'recasting' the covenant concept. In particular, the Reformed scholastic doctrine of the covenant of works came under close scrutiny, only to be cast aside as unhelpful and misleading. *According to Murray's definition of the term, covenant is a sovereign administration of (redemptive) grace and promise.* By definition, the original Adamic administration (including the elements of probation and representative headship) could not be viewed by Murray as a *covenantal* disposition of God's original plan and purpose for humankind made in his own image. The natural state of Adam, the creational order of moral government, was one of law; the principle of government was that of 'perfect legal reciprocity.'<sup>20</sup> So long as Adam rendered obedience to natural law, the law of creation (i.e. the moral law of God), God was obliged, according to the dictates of his own justice to reward Adam with life and blessing. In the words of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* life with God was contingent upon 'perfect and personal obedience.'<sup>21</sup> Eternal life proffered to Adam would have been bestowed upon Adam and the entire human race at the

20 Compare Murray's discussion in 'Appendix B' (2:249–251) with his essay 'The Adamic Administration,' *Collected Writing of John Murray* (4 volumes; Edinburgh, 1977–1982) 2:47–59. Geerhardus Vos articulates clearly the classic Protestant understanding, stating that 'the right of God to curse in case of transgression of the law is, from Paul's point of view, after all but the reverse side of His prerogative to bless and reward with the gift of eternal life where the law is obeyed' ('The Alleged Legalism in Paul's Doctrine of Justification,' *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writing of Geerhardus Vos* [ed. R. B. Gaffin, Jr.; Phillipsburg, 1980], 389). Vos speaks of the 'twofold function of rewarding obedience and punishing disobedience, as a supreme and inalienable attribute of the divine nature, something which God cannot deny without denying Himself' (392).

As an exponent of the revisionist school, Robert Letham undermines the parallel drawn by the apostle Paul in Romans 5 between the obedience of the two Adams. He asserts: 'In divine justice, the link between sin and punishment is vital' (*The Work of Christ* [Contours of Christian Theology; Downers Grove, 1993], 126). Missing here is the vital link between obedience and reward. The same view is argued by David McWilliams in 'The Covenant Theology of the "Westminster Confession of Faith" and Recent Criticism,' *WTJ* 53, 1991, 109–24.

21 *The Confession of Faith* (Inverness, 1976), 42. Herman Bavinck notes that power was granted to Adam in the beginning 'to keep the law and earn eternal life' (*The Last Things: Hope for this World and the Next* [ed. J. Bolt and trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids, 1996], 66).



conclusion of his successful probation (the immediate reward would have been *confirmation in righteousness*). Eternal life was not something Adam as a creature could merit by his own obedience (works). Here Murray employs the Thomistic distinction between nature and grace, what was later carried over into Reformed scholastic theology as the dichotomy between the natural bond and the covenantal bond. According to scholastic federalism, the covenant arrangement was *superimposed* upon the natural order of law. Unlike Murray, however, the federalists maintained that this covenant was one of works. Because it was still necessary for Adam to render full and perfect obedience (even though the gift of eternal life was more than Adam could have properly earned for himself and his posterity), the federal theologians called the covenant at creation the 'Covenant of Works.' (All subsequent covenants between God and man in the course of biblical history fall under the rubric of the 'Covenant of Grace.')

From Murray's point of view, the concept of the covenant was antithetical to the notion of law as a system of merit. Accordingly, covenant and law were *by Murray's definition* contrary means of justification. Murray's doctrine of the covenants marks a significant (but not radical) departure from the teachings of historic Reformed theology. It would be wrong to view Murray's position as a return to the teaching of John Calvin. It is true, the earliest exponents of Reformed theology, Calvin included, restricted the term covenant to the era of redemption. Yet at the same time these first-generation reformers acknowledged the operation of a works-principle in the Mosaic economy. It would only be a matter of time before the (logical) demands of dogmatic formulation—including, notably, exegesis of Romans 5 (the parallel between the First and Second Adams)—would yield the twofold doctrine of the covenants, the 'Covenant of Works' and the 'Covenant of Grace,' highlighting the covenantal structure of history before and after the Fall. This doctrine became—and remained—a vital element in the newly emerging *Reformed system of doctrine*. (Of course, there never has been a straight line of development in the history of Christian doctrine. There are instances of doctrinal deformation—even in the Reformed tradition! Such is evident, for example, in the federalists' adoption of the Thomistic nature/grace dichotomy.) Among today's revisionists, the notion of a covenant of works itself is deemed speculative in origin. *But Murray's objections to the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works are based on altogether different considerations from those offered by present-day revisionists. Simply put, Murray's theology falls within the pale of Protestant, Reformed orthodoxy because of his adherence to the classic law/gospel antithesis.*<sup>22</sup>

22 For a concise summary of the biblical teaching on justification see J. I. Packer, 'Justification,' *New Bible Dictionary* (third edition; Downers Grove, 1996), 636-640; consult further, P. T. O'Brien, 'Justification in Paul and Some Crucial Issues of the

A second instance where Murray parted company with (mainstream) historic Reformed theology was in his articulation of what is now popularly known as the misinterpretation view of the Mosaic law. Such a view reflects a faulty and contradictory interpretation of the covenants. Fortunately, Moo's replacement volume in the *NICNT* series guides the reader back on track. Here is sound exegesis on the controverted issues respecting Paul and the law. Before summarizing Moo's position, however, we consider the problems inherent in the misinterpretation view.

The difficulty for Murray, as representative of this dominant view in contemporary biblical studies, is apparent in his tortuous handling of Lev. 18:5. From the standpoint of his definition of covenant the Mosaic administration of the single Covenant of Grace stretching over the course of redemptive history is exclusively one of grace and promise, with no element of works. Contrary to the consensus of traditional Protestant theology, both Lutheran and Reformed, Murray maintains that there are no contrasting principles operating in the administration of the Mosaic covenant. It is a covenant of pure grace. According to Murray, the principle of law enunciated in Lev. 18:5 is the principle of *law in grace*, or *grace in law* (equivalent to that which is known in Reformed theology as the 'third use of the law'). The principle 'do this and live' is the principle of faith. This is how the OT citation is to be read in its original context, says Murray. How Paul can cite the Leviticus passage in support of antithetic principles of inheritance (law *versus* grace) is admittedly problematic. Murray resorts to speaking of 'law as law' or 'law in general' (the bare principle of the law, i.e. the law of nature underlying the original order of creation), not the law of Moses. From the standpoint of what law can and cannot do, the claims of justice require payment of what is justly earned on the basis of merit or demerit. Where there is (perfect) obedience there is life and blessing. Where there is transgression, death and condemnation ensue. That is the inextricable operation of divine law. When Paul asserts that those who are united to Christ as members of the New Man are no longer under law, but under grace (Rom. 6:14), Murray construes Paul to be speaking of law as law, law as commandment. Murray insists that Paul is not contrasting an earlier *legal* dispensation under Moses to a *gracious* dispensation in the present age. The letter/Spirit contrast cannot, in Murray's thinking, be descriptive of two sequential administrations of the 'Covenant of Grace,' the Mosaic and the new. Commenting on

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22 (*Continued*) Last Two Decades,' *Right with God: Justification in the Bible and the World* (ed. D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids, 1992), 69–95. For analysis of the diversity of Reformed thought, see Mark W. Karlberg, 'Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant,' *WTJ* 43, 1980, 1–57, and Karlberg, 'The Original State of Adam: Tensions in Reformed Theology,' *EvQ* 59, 1987, 291–309.

Rom. 7:6, Murray explains: ' "The oldness of the letter" refers to the law, and the law is called the letter because it was written. . . . It is law simply as written that is characterized as oldness and the oldness consists in the law.'<sup>23</sup> He adds: 'believers no longer serve in the servitude which law [law as law—not the Mosaic covenant] ministers but in the newness of the liberty of which the Holy Spirit is the author.'<sup>24</sup> Thus the contrast is between an *external writing of the law* (which is spiritual deadness) and an *internal writing of the law* (which is spiritual life).

This interpretation led Murray to conclude that Christ is the end of the law (Rom. 10:4) in the sense that *in Christ* one no longer has need of seeking justification by means of the works of the law. Christ is the end of the law *to every one who believes*. Murray noted: 'The foregoing observation regarding the force of the apostle's statement bears also upon an erroneous interpretation of this verse, enunciated by several commentators to the effect that the Mosaic law had propounded law as the means of procuring righteousness.'<sup>25</sup> Murray clarified his objection when he denied that 'in the [Israelite] theocracy works of law had been represented as the basis of salvation and that now by virtue of Christ's death this method had been displaced by the righteousness of faith.'<sup>26</sup> On this latter point we have no quarrel with Murray. However, there were two insurmountable obstacles which stood in the way of Murray's reading of Scripture on these controverted points. First, there was his underlying antipathy for the notion of merit in connection with the Mosaic administration of the Covenant of Grace. (Covenant and merit were incongruous in his thinking.) This, in the second place, prevented him from seeing that the works-merit principle was operative *in the typological level of the Mosaic dispensation of grace*. (Although covenant theologians from the earliest days of the Reformation recognized a works-principle operative in the Mosaic covenant, they generally failed to restrict its applicability to the temporal, typical sphere of the Israelite

23 Murray 1:246. Murray's exegesis and interpretation are anticipated in Patrick Fairbairn, *The Revelation of Law in Scripture* (Phillipsburg, 1996 [original 1869]), see esp. 445–446.

24 Ibid. 1:247.

25 Ibid. 2:50. Murray is unclear as to when and under what conditions justification by works prevailed. Is he thinking of the pre- or postlapsarian epochs? If the latter, it would be of necessity only *hypothetical*. (We contest the notion of a hypothetical principle of works-salvation as much as we contest the early dispensational teaching that God tested Israel in the time of the old covenant by offering salvation on the basis of Israel's own obedience. After Adam's fall into sin, the way to [eternal] life is impossible for humankind on grounds of works-righteousness. The original covenant of works has forever been broken, thus necessitating the God-man to do for sinners what they can not do for themselves. Jesus' conversation with the rich young ruler only serves to highlight the folly and frustration of contemplating or attempting the impossible.)

26 Ibid. 2:51.

theocracy, in distinction from the eternal, antitypical sphere of heavenly salvation. There have been, nevertheless, notable exceptions here and there in the history of Reformed theology.) Present-day revisionists, unlike Murray, have gone one step further; they deny that the merit concept has any applicability to the (natural) relationship between God and Adam at creation. In their interpretation of the original 'covenant of life' it is the grace of God, not law (i.e. merit), which is the basis of the promised reward. The inheritance held out to Adam, they contend, is obtained by sovereign (nonredemptive) grace, not works (law).

A former exponent of Murray's position on Paul and the law, Moisés Silva, has now joined the ranks of the revisionists by jettisoning the traditional law/gospel contrast altogether. This translates into a radically new understanding of the biblical covenants and of justification by faith (and good works). Silva acknowledges: 'Of all the themes touched on by Paul—indeed, of all the topics covered in NT theology—none has created more controversy than the apostle's view of the Mosaic law.'<sup>27</sup> He observes that 'Paul's specific statements about the law cannot be appreciated if they are treated in isolation from his more comprehensive views.'<sup>28</sup> In the context of Galatians 3—and here the exegetical problem is the same as in Romans 10—Silva begins by asking the question: does Paul's polemic with the Jews have a direct bearing on the apostle's citation of Lev. 18:5? Might the apostle Paul possibly be employing the Judaistic (mis)interpretation of the Mosaic law for rhetorical effect? Silva says of Herman Ridderbos' solution that it is 'too simple and appears contrived.'<sup>29</sup> But, he urges, we are not to conclude that Paul had in mind the Mosaic law 'pure and simple.' That would lead to the error 'common in the Lutheran tradition and in other circles (such as dispensationalism) that stress the discontinuity between law and gospel.'<sup>30</sup> Silva's criticism also extends to exponents of Reformed theology (he names Meredith Kline as one example). It is 'a middle way' that Silva champions in his most recent theological work, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case*. The contrast between law and promise, he theorizes, has respect

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27 Moisés Silva, *Explorations in Exegetical Method: Galatians as a Test Case* (Grand Rapids, 1996), 159. Silva considers Thomas R. Schreiner and Frank Thielman to be defenders of 'a well-nuanced traditional view' (159, n.2). Compare my critique of these works in 'The Search for an Evangelical Consensus on Paul and the Law,' paper read at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (Philadelphia, November 1995); to be published in *JETS*.

28 *Ibid.* 169. Silva adds: 'The *place* of the Mosaic law in that history [i.e. the history of redemption] therefore becomes the fundamental problem before us. Or to put it more provocatively, we cannot possibly grasp Paul's teaching about the law unless we understand his eschatology.'

29 *Ibid.* 193.

30 *Ibid.* 190.

to 'instruments or sources of inheritance, life, and righteousness.'<sup>31</sup> Where, if any place, does this principle of law actually pertain? If not in the Mosaic, does it function in the pre-fall Adamic arrangement? Silva, the revisionist, presupposes that all covenants in Scripture are *gracious* dispositions on God's part (there is no place for human merit in the Creator/creature relationship). The key to Paul's theology of the law is his eschatology. From this vantage point, argues Silva, 'the mode of existence based on the works of the law is eschatologically obsolete,' thus implying that there was a time 'before faith came' (Gal. 3:23) when the principle of inheritance by law was in effect.<sup>32</sup> It eludes me how the criticism Silva levels against the traditional interpretation of Galatians does not also apply to his. In my judgment, Silva's proposed 'middle way' leads to a dead end.

The dilemma Silva has created for himself causes him to reformulate the traditional interpretation of Hab. 2:4. Here 'we are faced with a major exegetical and theological problem.'<sup>33</sup> The solution, Silva proposes, is found in the recognition that 'for Habakkuk there was no such dichotomy between faith and faithfulness [=obedience] as we often assume.'<sup>34</sup> Protestant orthodoxy, in Silva's judgment, misconstrued Paul's teaching on the law. (Lutheranism is thought to be the chief culprit.) The traditional Protestant distinction between faith and works, he suggests, is too sharp.

We turn to Moo, whom we regard to be a reliable and faithful interpreter of Paul on the law. Moo finds Paul's remarks in Rom. 9:30–33 to be particularly relevant. (To be sure, one's theology of the law will have a direct bearing on the exegesis of this Pauline text.<sup>35</sup>) Moo contends that 'this paragraph bears an importance out of proportion to its length.'<sup>36</sup> He correctly relates the 'law of righteousness' in Rom. 9:31 to the 'righteousness based on the law' in Rom. 10:5. 'Israel,' explains Moo, 'has failed to achieve a law that could confer righteousness because she could not produce those works that would be necessary to meet the law's demands and so secure the righteousness it promises.'<sup>37</sup> This reading is not far removed from that of T. David

31 Ibid. 193.

32 Ibid. 176, original italicized.

33 Ibid. 166.

34 Ibid. 167.

35 No responsible exegete can avoid the need for theological coherence (the systematic or dogmatic impulse). Presuppositionalism is operative at every level of the exegetico-theological enterprise. The real question is: which presuppositions are consistent and true to the teaching of Scripture. Ultimately, Scripture is its own interpreter; there is a circular relationship between theology (including biblical presuppositionalism) and exegesis.

36 Moo 620.

37 Ibid. 627, italics his.

Gordon, a reading which Moo finds 'intriguing.'<sup>38</sup> Both maintain that Israel was not to be faulted for identifying a works-principle in the Mosaic covenant. No, her fatal error was in regarding that principle as the means of salvation. The difference between Gordon and Moo is that the latter concludes that the principle of law in the postlapsarian epoch is merely hypothetical, whereas the former rightly sees this principle as regulative of Israel's *temporal life* in Canaan.

Precisely how does Moo view the Mosaic covenant, in contrast to the new? Or to pose the question in Moo's own words: 'to what degree and in what sense does Paul regard the law as a means of justification?'<sup>39</sup> Moo answers:

The view that God gave the law to Israel as a means of justification [=salvation] is now generally discredited, and rightly so. The OT presents the law as a means of regulating the covenant relationship that had already been established through God's grace. But, granted that the law was not given for the purpose of securing one's relationship before God [i.e. salvation], it may still be questioned whether it sets forth in theory a means of justification. We would argue that it does.<sup>40</sup>

If, following the interpretation of Moo, we were to construe the principle of law in the Mosaic covenant as theoretical or hypothetical, how can we at the same time deny that 'God gave the law to Israel as a means of justification'? This view, commonly held by Reformed covenant theologians, is inherently contradictory.<sup>41</sup> Earlier in his commentary on Rom. 3:27–31 Moo recognized that in contrasting *torah*, the Mosaic covenant, to the Abrahamic promise the apostle Paul is setting the principle of works over against the principle of faith. That is to say, Paul's negative assessment of the law is not directed merely to 'law as law,' or 'law in general,' as Murray posited, but to the *Mosaic law* in particular. 'Rather than being entirely metaphorical, then, Paul's use of *nomos* embodies a "play on words," in which the characteristic demand of the Mosaic covenant—works—is contrasted with the basic demand of the New Covenant (and of the OT, broadly understood; cf. chap. 4)—faith.'<sup>42</sup> The reference of the term *nomos* is twofold: the law of nature established in the creation order and subsequently

38 Ibid. 626, n.41. See T. David Gordon, 'Why Israel did not Obtain Torah-Righteousness: A Translation Note on Rom. 9:32,' *WTJ* 54, 1992, 163–166.

39 Moo 155.

40 Ibid.

41 Moo maintains that Rom. 2:7–13 and 7:10 suggest such a view. 'This issue,' he notes, 'is related in traditional Reformed theology to the debate over the existence and nature of the "covenant of works" and the place of the Mosaic law within that covenant' (156). Moo refers here to R. T. Beckwith's 'hypothetical covenant of works' (155, n.74).

42 Ibid. 249–250.

republished in the law of Moses. Moo rightly objects to Murray's exclusion of the latter from Paul's radical critique of the law.

Difficulties in Moo's position appear, however, in his exegesis of passages like Rom. 5:13 ('where there is no law, there is no transgression,' cf. Rom 4:15) What the apostle is saying here is that the declaration of the forgiveness of sins respecting those who are the recipients of God's love and mercy results in release from the legal demand of the *covenant of works*, the termination of *probation under law* (what was applicable to Adam at creation and to Israel under Moses—see especially Rom 7:7–13.)<sup>43</sup> The period from Moses to Christ is a parenthesis in the history of redemption.<sup>44</sup> The law was added to the promise; it served a tutelary function. The Mosaic administration of the Covenant of Grace was characterized by the peculiar works-principle regulative of Israel's *temporal* inheritance. (Salvation is always and only by grace through faith.)

The letter/Spirit contrast is the contrast between two administrations of the Covenant of Grace, one characterized by the external writing of the law on tablets of stone (the Mosaic covenant) and another by the internal writing of the law on the fleshly tablets of the heart (the new covenant). The former works condemnation and death (the letter kills); the latter righteousness and life (the Spirit makes alive).<sup>45</sup> The purpose of the Mosaic covenant was to slay Israel, and in so doing convict her of sin and point her to Christ, the only one who could satisfy the righteous demands of God's law. It was not a misinterpretation of the law of Moses that slew Israel; it was Israel's failure to keep the covenant God made with her at Sinai. It was on the basis of Israel's own law-keeping, not that of another, that Israel was judged. Her covenant transgression was the grounds for condemnation. From the standpoint of biblical typology Israel's captivity in Babylon—what was just payment for her disobedience (according to the terms of the covenant established with Israel at Sinai)—symbolized the Hell-punishment which the

43 Compare Meredith G. Kline, 'Gospel until the Law: Rom 5:13–14 and the Old Covenant,' *JETS* 34, 1991, 433–446.

44 Bavinck speaks of the Mosaic epoch as an 'intermezzo' (*The Last Things* 97). Willem VanGemerén objects to this interpretation; see his *The Progress of Redemption: The Story of Salvation from Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids, 1988), 489, n.14. VanGemerén's biblical-theological exposition, however, falters on a lack of understanding of the history of Reformed doctrine. That which VanGemerén criticizes, namely, the idea of the works-principle operative in the Mosaic covenant, is standard fare in mainstream Reformed thought, not the anomaly he imagines.

45 Moo 421. Moo's theology of the Mosaic covenant fares better than that of Murray or Silva, both in terms of Moo's straightforward exegesis of Lev. 18:5 cited in Paul's letters and in Moo's identification of the Mosaic covenant as (formally) one of works (law), not faith (gospel). As noted, in his most recent writing Silva rejects the classic ('Lutheran') law/gospel antithesis.

Servant would suffer for his people. In so doing, the Son of God tasted the cup of God's wrath.

#### 4. Romans 7: A Case Study

Doubtless the most notoriously difficult chapter in the New Testament is Romans 7. Satisfactory exegesis of this section in Paul's argument will necessarily have to accord with Paul's theology as a whole. Specifically, what is the nature of the regenerative work of God in the life of the believer? What is his/her relation to the law of God? How are we to understand the Christian's ongoing struggle with sin? And with respect to the elenctic function of the law of God what does it mean to be delivered from sin's dominion, such that we are no longer under law, but under grace?

Here Paul probes more fully into the subject of sanctification previously introduced in chapter 6 and concluded in chapter 8. He begins his discussion of the role of the law with an illustration from marriage (vss. 1-6). As long as the law is in effect—as long as one's spouse is living—the marriage partner is bound to fulfill his/her covenantal obligations. Death of the one party results in the severance of the covenantal (marriage) bond. The previous state of 'bondage' gives way to liberty. The marriage analogy serves to illustrate Israel's place in the history of redemption. Paul's perspective here belongs to *historia salutis*. As long as the law of Moses is in effect (in the period from Sinai to Calvary), God's people are governed by the principle of temporal inheritance by works (law functioning here as a covenant of works). The dual sanctions of the covenant, blessing or curse (prosperity or hardship) in the land of promise, are associated with the Mosaic administration of redemptive covenant. Now that Christ has come the law as a covenant of works (operative in the restricted sphere of temporal life in Canaan) has been abrogated (Rom. 10:4). Such was the tutelary purpose of the law for Israel under age (cf. Gal. 3:6-4:7).

The subject of vss. 7-13 is particularly enigmatic. Murray entitles this section 'Transitional Experience.' In his opinion these verses are descriptive of the apostle's 'pre-regenerate experience,' wherein the unconverted Paul has been 'aroused from his spiritual torpor and awakened to a sense of sin.'<sup>46</sup> Saul has not yet been delivered from sin's dominion; he is still under the law. In this preparatory state he has not experienced the regenerating and quickening power of the Spirit of God. According to Murray's reading, vss. 14-25 describe Paul's battle with sin as a Christian. (This is indicated by the change in tense, from aorist to present.) How well does Murray's conception of a 'transitional' state of preparation accord with the NT teaching

<sup>46</sup> Murray 1:255.



on union with Christ, especially justification and sanctification? It is quite apparent that Murray's exegesis of these difficult verses of Paul introduces an erroneous conception of *preparation* into the conversion process, something that is out of accord with Reformed (and Pauline) soteriology. The solution lies elsewhere.

Moo regards Romans 7 as the climax of Paul's negative critique of the Mosaic law.<sup>47</sup> (For this reason this passage deserves our close attention.) Being much more sensitive to the redemptive-historical orientation of the apostle Paul than was Murray in his commentary, Moo looks to Paul's earlier remarks in this letter concerning the place of the law in the history of salvation. From the standpoint of the history of the covenants, the law served a temporary purpose; it served to exacerbate Israel's spiritual plight. Moo suggests that the *egō* of vss. 7-13 'is not Israel, but *egō* is Paul in solidarity with Israel.'<sup>48</sup> Moo explains: 'In the years before Sinai sin was "dead" to Israel.'<sup>49</sup> During this time Israel was alive, which is to say, she was 'existing.' The law enters Israel's experience in order to convict her of sin, to place Israel, together with all people, under the curse of the law. Moo understands the principle of law enunciated in Lev. 18:5 to have reference to a purely *hypothetical* situation of salvation obtained on the basis of perfect obedience (*if that were possible*).<sup>50</sup>

What is most notable in Moo's approach to Romans 7 is the prominence given to Pauline perspective on *historia salutis*. Former preoccupation with *ordo salutis* prevented exegetes from rightly interpreting this text. Such was the case in Murray's commentary. The difficulties for the interpreter, however, do not end here. Equally problematic are the closing verses of the chapter. Is Paul in verses 14-25 describing the Christian's struggle with sin? Murray, following the Augustinian tradition, answers in the affirmative. Moo is persuaded otherwise; he believes that Paul is analysing the life of the unregenerate person. The central issue in these verses still remains the relation between the law, i.e. the commandments of God, and life in the Spirit. We will return subsequently to this matter when we consider the Christian's experience with the law of God in this present (semi-) eschatological age, the age characterized by the overlap of old and new aeons. But first, Paul's teaching on the place of Israel in the plan of God.

### 5. Israel and the New Covenant

Whether or not the apex of the apostle's theological argument is found here in Romans 9-11 (or earlier in chap. 5), this section of the letter is

47 Moo 423.

48 Ibid. 431.

49 Ibid. 437.

50 Ibid. 439.

pivotal to the whole of the argument. Setting aside the doctrine of double predestination, election and reprobation, concerning which both Murray and Moo concur in their interpretation of Paul, the chief issue in this section is twofold: (1) the nature of ancient Israel's election, and (2) the meaning of the term 'fulness' in chapter 11.

Murray's interpretation on covenant and election is in need of reformulation. Although Murray distinguishes between decretive election, i.e. individual election unto salvation, and Israel's national election, he maintains that both are based on sovereign grace. To be sure, ancient Israel's election was not based on her own righteousness or merit (see Deut. 9:1-6). It was an expression of God's own sovereign good pleasure and purpose. The national election of Israel was a sovereign act and it was an act of grace—if we are referring to the original choice of Israel in distinction from the continuing bestowal of the typological kingdom blessings. (The 'common grace' covenant established by God with all creation after the Noahic flood was a sovereign administration of *nonredemptive* grace.) In order to avoid ambiguity in our theological formulation on covenant and election, however, it is necessary that the phrase 'sovereign grace' be reserved for God's redemptive provision, Christ being the surety of salvation for the elect (consistent with Calvinistic soteriology). In light of Murray's imprecision it is not surprising to find in his theology of the covenant(s) a virtual equation between covenant and election.<sup>51</sup> Closer to the biblical conception is the distinction found in traditional covenant theology between covenant in the broader and narrower senses. And better still is Kline's formulation in *By Oath Consigned*, wherein he speaks of the 'proper purpose' of redemptive covenant as the salvation of the elect.<sup>52</sup> Kline rightly resists the temptation to reduce redemptive covenant to election.

The point of all this is that God's 'proper purpose' in covenanting with Israel at Mount Sinai was her salvation. But God's saving purpose pertained only to the true Israel of God. Not all the sons and daughters of Israel are true Israel. There is a distinction between the natural seed and the elect seed, between Abraham's children, Ishmael and Isaac,

51 Moo properly distinguishes between 'a general election of Israel as a nation' and 'a specific election to salvation of individual Israelites, and others' (675, n.20). Murray adds a further note of clarification regarding his understanding: 'It is worthy of note that although Paul distinguishes between Israel and Israel, seed and seed, children and children (cf. 9:6-13) he does not make this discrimination in terms of "covenant" so as to distinguish between those who are in the covenant in a broader sense and those who are actual partakers of its grace' (2:100, n.47).

52 Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids, 1968), 34. For a summary analysis of the teaching of early covenant theology, see Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids, 1996), esp. 48-49.

and his grandchildren, Jacob and Esau. There was and remains a remnant according to grace throughout the ages. As Murray observes, the promises of God, properly speaking, pertain to the remnant, not the mass of Israel. (We further add: the Pauline conception of the 'fulness of Israel' is decidedly eschatological, not strictly numerical or quantitative.<sup>53</sup>)

The question remains: how are we to understand the relationship between ancient, theocratic Israel and the new covenant people of God? Does ethnic Israel retain a special place in the history of redemption? What does Paul mean when he says that 'all Israel' will be saved in the latter days (Rom. 11:26)? Both Murray's and Moo's answer to these questions could be strengthened by fuller and clearer discussion of the nature of the Mosaic theocracy.<sup>54</sup> Firstly, the theocratic kingdom of Israel has been supplanted by the new covenant community, ordered according to principles laid down in the NT canon. Ethnic Israel is no longer the holy nation. The symbolico-typological dimension of the Mosaic economy has given way to the realities of the Spirit-born people of God, the pentecostal church of Christ. Now we worship in Spirit and truth, rather than in shadow and type (Jn. 4:23,24). Spiritual worship is *eschatological* at its core.<sup>55</sup> Secondly, the concept of the remnant according to grace has relevance to the entire period of the church down to the close of the age. Then the church will attain to the fulness of Christ, its head. The apostle speaks both of the 'fulness' of the Gentiles and the 'fulness' of Israel. This Pauline conception, what is part of the mystery revealed in the present time, applies equally to (converted) Jews and Gentiles; it brings into view the total number of the elect of God, not, as Moo conjectures, 'the corporate entity of the nation of Israel as it exists at a particular point in time.'<sup>56</sup> The fulness of 'Israel' comprises the salvation of elect Jews and Gentiles, the true Israel of God (Gal. 6:16). That Paul is entertaining the idea of a massive conversion

53 Compare Herman Ribberbos' discussion of 'fulness' in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (trans. J. R. de Witt; Grand Rapids, 1975), 354-361.

54 Justifiably, Moo finds no evidence in Romans 11 for 'a restoration of the land as integral to the eschatological rejuvenation of Israel,' contrary to the opinion of W. C. Kaiser and others (724, n.59). On the broader issues relating to Israel and the church see the following studies: *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspective on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments* (ed. J. S. Feinberg; Westchester, 1988); *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (ed. C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock; Grand Rapids, 1992); David E. Holwerda, *Jesus and Israel: One Covenant or Two?* (Grand Rapids, 1995); and my 'Israel and the Eschaton,' *WTJ* 52, 1990, 117-130.

55 See especially Geerhardus Vos, 'The Eschatological Aspect of the Pauline Conception of the Spirit,' *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* 91-125; and his *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, 1979).

56 Moo 723. Paul's argument turns full circle. Earlier in chapter 9 the apostle distinguished between Israel according to the flesh and true Israel (the elect seed comprising faithful Jews and Gentiles).

of Jews and Gentiles at the end of the age is unlikely. What is certain, ethnic Israel retains no special status in the period between the two advents of Christ (nor in the eternal kingdom). In Christ there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile. Moo is mistaken in thinking that in Romans 11 Paul 'needed to remind Gentile Christians of the continuing significance of Israel's [national] election.'<sup>57</sup> The revelation of the 'mystery' is made known in Christ, the fulfilment of the ancient covenant promises (Rom. 11:25; 16:25-27), the one who has torn down once for all the dividing wall (Eph. 2:14).

### 6. Eschatological Life: The Tension and the Resolution

In the case study presented by the apostle in Romans 7 we observed that the author weaved together two distinct aspects, that of *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis*. Moo understands the 'I' of vss. 7-13 as a personification of Israel's experience under the gospel (the promise given to Abraham) and under the law (the covenant mediated through Moses).<sup>58</sup> The remaining verses of the chapter rehearse Paul's own experience with the law. At this point Murray's interpretation of Rom. 7:14-25 is to be preferred over Moo's. The closing portion of the seventh chapter is best understood as a description of the regenerate's experience of the law of God, one which comports well with what Paul stated earlier in Romans 6 in connection with the believer's experiential union with Christ. One of the practical benefits of that union is deliverance from the dominion of sin. The sin that yet remains in the believer's members is still the source of spiritual conflict. This remaining sin is identified as the 'law of sin,' and its effect is altogether different from the dominion of sin which formerly held sway over the unregenerate life. The warfare is real and intense, yet the believer's union with Christ has broken the sinner's bondage to sin and death. The deliverance is 'already' experienced, but 'not yet' perfected in sanctification. Although the believer has been *definitively* sanctified by virtue of union with Christ—and continues to be made more and more holy through the renewing and cleansing work of the Spirit of God (the progressive aspect of sanctification)—that perfection in holiness awaits our translation into heaven (the intermediate state) or, more appropriately, future glorification.<sup>59</sup> For the present time the Christian is weighed down by this 'body of death,' and in the intermediate state,

57 Moo 739.

58 Compare Mark W. Karlberg, 'Law in Pauline Eschatology: The Historical Qualification of Justification by Faith' (Th.M. thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1977), and my revision of that thesis in 'Israel's History Personified: Romans 7:7-13 in Relation to Paul's Teaching on the "Old Man,"' *TrinJ* 7ns, 1986, 65-74.

59 See esp. John Murray, 'The Agency in Definitive Sanctification,' *Collected Writings* (2:285-293).

being 'naked,' he/she longs to be clothed with the heavenly dwelling (2 Cor. 5:1–5). Despite differences in the interpretation of this passage in Romans, both Murray and Moo fundamentally share a Reformed soteriological understanding of Pauline theology.

Gleaning from both Murray and Moo, we propose the following summary of Paul's teaching on sanctification: the Christian possesses a new, regenerate nature, not two warring natures (the old and the new). Christians, whose spiritual experience is characterized by the tension between the two ages, notably, the tension between what has already been realized by the Spirit of Christ and what awaits future consummation, presently wrestle with the lingering effects of the old age, the 'law of sin.' The definitive breach with sin means that believers are no longer identified with the Old Man (Adam), but rather with the New Man (Christ Jesus). The fulfilment of the covenant made with Abraham, Moses, and David is, according to Paul's teaching, threefold in signification: (1) cosmic, the antithesis between old and new aeons; (2) corporate, the antithesis between the Old Man and the New Man; and (3) individual, the antithesis between flesh and Spirit. (There is some degree of overlap between these contrasting pairs. For example, the flesh/Spirit antithesis has cosmic and corporate implications as well.) There is, likewise, the interplay between the 'indicative' and the 'imperative.' The Pauline parenthesis is based on the reality of that which belongs to every believer by virtue of his/her union with Christ. Christians are exhorted to obey the commandments of God because they have been empowered by the Spirit to fulfil the righteous demands of the law (see, e.g. Rom. 8:1–11 and chaps. 12–16).

Much remains to be discussed in Paul's grandest letter of all, the letter to the Romans. The present focus on Paul's theology of the law has enabled us to compare (in limited space) these worthy commentaries of Murray and Moo. Clearly, we are indebted to both of them for their meticulous work and studied opinions. The selection of Moo to replace Murray in the *NICNT* series provides the reader exposure to some of the best thinking in contemporary Reformed scholarship. Evangelical theology in its most consistent expression is Reformed theology. And it is the nature of this theology to be reformed and ever reforming according to the teaching of Scripture. The *solas* of the Protestant Reformation—notably the formal principle, Scripture alone, and the material principle, (justification by) faith alone—remain as vital to the formulation of biblical theology today as in the past. God's salvation is the manifestation of his sovereign grace and mercy in Christ Jesus (Rom. 3:21–26). Paul's letter to the Roman Christians sets forth for us the apostle's fullest theological explication of this saving action of God. The Reformed tradition's slogan *sola Deo gloria* might well serve as a succinct summary of Paul's words of

doxology in Rom. 11:33–36 and 16:25–27, a spontaneous response of faith which looks to Christ, the hope of glory.

### Abstract

This comparative review of the commentaries of John Murray and Douglas Moo on Paul's Letter to the Romans gives focal attention to the controversial topic in contemporary biblical and theological study addressing the apostle's understanding of the relationship between the Mosaic and new covenants. Summary analysis of the similarities and differences in the interpretations of Murray, an advocate of Reformed theology, and Moo, a 'modified Lutheran,' highlights current directions in evangelical and Reformed thought at the close of the twentieth century. Lively debate on Paul and the law can be expected to continue for many years to come. The question of an emerging consensus of opinion remains largely unanswered.

### Correction

In the last issue of the *Evangelical Quarterly* 70:4 (October, 1998), we unfortunately failed to include the usual information about the author and the key words for the article on 'Adoption and the Spirit in Romans 8'.

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**Key words for the article:** Theology; New Testament; Paul; Romans; adoption; law; Holy Spirit.

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