

CHAPTER VI

THE REVELATION OF CHRIST TO PAUL ON
THE DAMASCUS ROAD AND PAUL'S DOCTRINE
OF JUSTIFICATION AND RECONCILIATION
A STUDY IN GALATIANS I*

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I

THE INCLUSION OF THE ONLY AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REPORT OF ITS KIND left us by Paul in a reflection on his doctrine of justification and reconciliation seems to break an elementary rule of hermeneutics.¹ This rule obliges the exegete and historian not to impose on any given text a theme which is alien to it, and to note carefully not only what it says but what it does not mention. What can we expect a passage from which the concepts of justification and reconciliation are entirely absent to contribute to our understanding of them? The passage has its own theme: attacked and challenged by the false teachers in Galatia, the apostle, in a broad, comprehensive review of his own life-story, defends the legitimacy of an office which was entrusted to him not by men but directly by God, and thus also the truth of his controversial gospel for the Gentiles.

It is from this that the passage derives its incomparable value, which secures it the historian's keen attention. For this compressed, authentic account of Paul's, which virtually has the accuracy of minutes of proceedings, provides us with detailed information about a long and otherwise largely obscure period not only in Paul's own career immediately after his conversion but, at the same time, in the history of earliest Christianity. From the recollection of his Jewish past (I:13 f.) and his turning to Christ on the Damascus road (I:15 f.) to the apostolic conference in Jerusalem (2:1-10) and farther on to the conflict with Peter in Antioch (2:11-21), this autobiographical report spans about two decades. That is in any event far longer than the later period of his mission in the

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¹ I gratefully avail myself of the opportunity provided by this *Festschrift*, celebrating our esteemed colleague's sixtieth birthday, of developing further some thoughts already put forward in my *Paulus* (E. T. *Paul*, 1971). In order not to broaden unnecessarily the compass of this paper (and being in any case cut off from libraries at the time of writing), I have cited relatively little special literature and have also refrained from mentioning many passages which will immediately come to the reader's mind.

Aegean lands. That later period lasted scarcely more than half a decade, and we can form a reasonably clear picture of it, especially from all his indisputably genuine letters, which were composed at that time, but also from individual reports in Acts, although their historical value does not match that of the letters.¹ Historically valuable, however, as the first two chapters of Galatians are, this does not entitle us to demand from them theological ideas which, in accordance with the plain structure of the letter, do not come under discussion until chapters 3-6.

Critical misgivings about the recourse to the story of Paul's life favoured by many expositors are all too well justified. This recourse has often proved to be a disastrous flight into psychologizing fantasy, which introduces its own modern impressions into the texts, where what we have to do is to think the apostle's theological thoughts after him. This modern excess of zeal for tracing Paul's inner development and spiritual history is seldom aware how much it sins against Paul's own statement: "We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord" (II Cor. 4:5) and, so to speak, disregards the proportions of his overall thought. No wonder, then, that in consequence of such treatment the Pauline theology is inevitably seen as a personally conditioned, accidental or necessary product of the course of his life, so that its claim to truth becomes a relative one.

These basic considerations draw attention to a "Scylla" of Pauline interpretation. But they contain an equally dangerous "Charybdis" into which exegesis will just as surely steer if it tears the apostle's life and his message - his career and his theology - apart. As a rule, his life-story then regularly becomes a mere succession of historical facts and dates, successes and sufferings, good fortune and ill fortune, while his theology, conversely, becomes a system of timeless insights of faith. Yet Paul, more than any other figure in primitive Christianity, is distinguished by the incomparable energy and consistency with which he has made the message of Christ committed to him into his own personal concern, right into the concrete decisions of each day and into the content of the thought of all his letters. It is in this sense that he speaks of himself as continually carrying around in his body the stigmata and death of Jesus (Gal. 6:17; II Cor. 4:10). What else does this mean than that his life is to be understood as theology transposed into concrete history and that his theology is viewed aright only when its constant relation to his life is kept in sight?

II

When we recall the current exegesis of Galatians I, it appears (as far as I can see) not yet to have escaped the two danger zones of Scylla and Charybdis; it tends either to overload Paul's autobiographical statements

¹ Cf. *Paul*, pp. xiv ff.

with psychological reflexions or to underestimate the theological motifs which they contain and not to make them sufficiently visible.

In this connexion we can confine ourselves to a brief criticism of the false idea, still widely held, that Saul, the one-time Pharisee and persecutor of Christians, had even before his conversion secretly become aware that his zeal for the law was a great fiasco and that, due to the overwhelming influence of Jesus, he finally broke down under the pangs of conscience. This stereotyped picture has been transferred to the apostle from the life-story of Luther and from the realm of experience of the pietist fathers, but it does not really fit his case. Wherever Paul mentions his Jewish past, whether in passing or in greater detail, he speaks of it not as a contrite sinner but with pride – and that applies even to his persecution of the church of Christ. What he once regarded as wealth and gain, his faultless righteousness by the standards of the law, he has sacrificed; he now regards it as loss and refuse (Phil. 3:4 ff.). The same tone is maintained in Gal. 1:13 f. to provide a foil for Paul's statements about his conversion and call in 1:15 f. The well-known passage in Rom. 7:7–25, which is often mistakenly understood as biographical, is no proof to the contrary. In it Paul uses the stylistic form of the "I" with universal sense to portray the misery of man "in the flesh", unredeemed, held prisoner under Sin, Law and Death, and he does so retrospectively, in the light of the Christ-event. Here the traditional picture of Paul has been radically corrected by more recent exegetical research.¹

On the other hand, the opinion remains virtually unshaken that in Gal. 1:15 f. Paul, in repelling his opponents' attacks on his gospel and his apostleship, bases his faith and commission exclusively on the subjective experience of the vision of the risen Christ vouchsafed him on the Damascus road, and – this continuation belongs inseparably to what has gone before! – that from then on he maintained his own preaching of salvation on the basis of the "revelation" received through this vision, with a sovereign rejection of all humanly mediated tradition about Jesus. Since Paul names himself among the resurrection witnesses (1 Cor. 15:8; 9:1) and, as no one will deny, has experienced the appearance of the Risen One on the Damascus road, a corresponding interpretation seems to be required for Gal. 1:15 f. also. The correctness of such an interpretation is virtually never doubted. To avoid its consequences, or at least to tone down the curious abruptness of Paul's thoughts, expositors have made every imaginable effort to make them psychologically comprehensible. At the very least they have tried to present the apostle's short, two weeks' visit to Cephas "after three years"² (Gal. 1:18 f.) as the sort of opportunity

¹ Cf. W. G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (1929); R. Bultmann, *Existence and Faith* (E.T., 1960), pp. 152 ff.; G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (1969), pp. 87 ff.

² Since the ancient counting of years, months or days included the first along with the rest of the series, a period of at least more than two years can be meant by *μετὰ τρία ἔτη*.

which Paul would have sought and grasped, by which after a strange delay to be sure, he rectified his omission and obtained from the first disciple whom Jesus called, the leader of the Jerusalem church, the basic information necessary for faith and proclamation. But these and similar efforts come to grief on his actual wording. They do not get rid of the puzzling fact that Paul, immediately after his conversion, did not get in touch with those at Jerusalem (as might have been expected) but, in all probability, began at once to carry out his apostolic commission in non-Jewish Arabia.¹ An interval of at least more than two years remains extremely odd, too, when one considers that Paul had not known the earthly Jesus (II Cor. 5:16) and that, in his situation, it could well be seen as the most natural and urgent thing for him to set off at once, in penitence and curiosity, to see the original apostles.² Similarly, no exegesis should overlook the contrast between the equally glib and ineffective filling in by some interpreters of that brief visit to Cephas and the reserve which characterizes Paul's account of it. Neither should sight be lost of the fact that the apostle in any case spent the next decade and a half conducting a mission in Syria and Cilicia off his own bat before finally setting off with Barnabas and Titus to the apostolic conference. Paul's description of events in Galatians 1, which he even confirmed with an oath (1:20), is, further, headed by his unambiguous and unmistakable protestation of his complete independence of the Jerusalem apostles (1:12). Galatians 2 dovetails neatly into this, for in this continuation of his story Paul says: At that conference even the original apostles confirmed the freedom and independence of my gospel to the Gentiles, and later I fought for it uncompromisingly in the conflict with Cephas at Antioch.

Is all this based on an obstinate appeal to his "Damascus-experience" – in other words, to his vision? One is astounded that the exegetes who hold this customary interpretation to be the only right one do not frankly spell out its consequences and implications in quite a different way. If this is right, if this is what the text demands, it means that here a singular and stubborn individualist, with an unyielding view of himself which is downright fanatical, has set out to do battle with the original apostles and the primitive church, has jeopardized the church's unity, has finally got his way after bitter struggles and now, years later, is attempting to fight the same battles over again in his controversy with the Galatian Judaizers.

Initially at least, this will have been the impression which Paul in fact gave his opponents and which, very probably, he had already given to those who took part in the Jerusalem conference. He did not really shun the odium of it. But the decisive question concerns the grounds on which

¹ "Arabia" surely means the territory east and south of Syria, belonging to the Nabataean kingdom. Paul, it is true, does not expressly say that he preached there, but this is most probably implied by the *ἴνα* clause. We do not know when he came back to Damascus.

² Acts, which passes over Paul's sojourn in Arabia, gives rise to the false impression that he left Damascus for Jerusalem as soon as possible (9:20 ff.).

he defended his gospel and his apostleship to the Gentiles. If it had merely been for him a matter of the appearance of the Risen One which he had experienced on the Damascus road, the question would arise how he could, then as now, claim this as something peculiar to himself and so treat his "Damascus experience" as absolute. Primitive Christianity was and remained united in its assurance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ: this includes the teachers of false doctrine with whom Paul had later to contend in his congregations. Where, as in I Cor. 15:8 and 9:1, he appeals to his being an eyewitness of the resurrection, he expressly includes himself in the great circle of all the others and especially the original apostles: "Whether then it is I or they, so we preach and so you have come to believe" (I Cor. 15:11). This consideration compels us to assume that Paul could scarcely have defended his special apostleship to the Gentiles on the bare ground of his being an eyewitness of the resurrection – a status which he shares with the other apostles and on which the faith of all is founded. Yet exegesis must not operate with mere postulates; it must submit to verification by the text. The text appears to contradict our assumption. But the appearance is deceptive. A closer examination¹ of Paul's use of the words "revelation" and "reveal", especially in the Epistle to the Galatians, shows us that here as elsewhere he does not use these terms in a uniform sense and that their meaning in each case follows from the words with which they are associated and from their immediate context. Moreover, in none of the four passages in which the noun or verb for revelation is used (1:12, 16; 2:2; 3:23) is the subjective element in the vision or experience a constituent part of the concept itself.

The first of the passages mentioned (1:12) combines the noun of action, ἀποκάλυψις, with the objective genitive Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. That we have to understand it in this sense is established beyond any doubt by the way in which the same thing is expressed immediately afterwards (1:16) with the verb: God resolved in accordance with his decree to reveal his Son to me. The Christological title "his Son" here replaces the proper name Ἰησοῦς Χριστός as an interpretative extension of it. It is not possible to determine whether the additional phrase ἐν ἐμοί is supposed to stress the special mode of experience. The prepositional construction can also replace the simple dative.² But it would not involve an essential alteration to the meaning. In either event, the sentence describes a divine action of which Paul is the recipient. However, that does not yet settle the question whether, in 1:15, Paul is setting his subjective, visionary Damascus-road experience in opposition to tradition and teaching mediated through men. Is an answer to this question to be found in the further statements about revelation in the epistle? Obviously not in the note in Gal. 2:2

¹ For what follows cf. the excellent monograph by D. Lührmann, *Das Offenbarungsverständnis bei Paulus und in paulinischen Gemeinden* (1965), especially pp. 67 ff.

² Cf. Arndt, p. 260; Blass-Debrunner, section 220 (1), p. 118.

where he says that it was on the grounds of a revelation that he went up (to Jerusalem) with his companions for the apostolic conference. The phrase κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν means here, in all probability, nothing other than divine instructions voiced by Spirit-filled charismatics in the gathered congregation at Antioch, in the same sense as Paul speaks elsewhere, in conformity with general Christian usage, of "revelation" as one charisma among others (I Cor. 12–14; cf. especially 14:6,26; Phil. 3:15) and as Acts 13:2 depicts the sending out of the representatives of the congregation.

The fourth passage in which "revelation" is once again mentioned (Gal. 3:23) is all the more important for our question. In expounding it, attention must be paid to the fact that the great theological section of the epistle, in which the statement stands, serves a purpose no different from that of the first two "autobiographical" chapters – viz. the defence of the law-free gospel for the Gentiles, which Paul's opponents in Galatia have pilloried as base opportunism and as a sordid concession to his Gentile hearers (1:10). In their opinion, Paul has suppressed the law and circumcision in order to get a better reception and has thus corrupted the message of salvation. It is against this charge that the apostle directs his apology – or rather his sharp counter-attack. It is in truth the Judaizing agitators who have distorted the gospel and become backsliders, and the Galatian congregations have let themselves be seduced by them (3:1). This is developed in the train of thought in Gal. 3–6, which is concerned with salvation-history and eschatology: God has made an end of the old aeon, in which all men were held captive under the law and the world powers (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) and has led us, by the sending of his Son, to the promised freedom of the sons of God. It is in this context that the significant statement stands: "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, all locked up together until faith should be revealed. So the law has become our taskmaster, in order that we should be justified by faith" (3:23 f.).

This is not the place to enter into a detailed exegesis of the whole passage. We confine ourselves to noting the following features and motifs which are of special importance for the understanding of Gal. 1:15 f.:

(a) The section Galatians 3–4, which prepares the way for the Epistle to the Romans, develops the apostle's doctrine of justification in broad, universal dimensions.

(b) The tools with which this is done have been borrowed from the conceptual world of apocalyptic tradition. This is obviously the source of the two-aeons model but equally, also, of the concept of "revelation". It means in Gal. 3:23, as it does already in Jewish apocalypticism, a freshly commencing, aeon-changing, eschatological act of God, in the sense of an objective event not brought about by men.¹ The word πίστις, too,

¹ In other places too Paul repeatedly speaks of revelation in this traditional apocalyptic

requires to be understood in this way in our passage – not as a human attitude or a concern of the individual, but as the “principle of salvation” (H. Schlier) opposed to the *νόμος*, made possible and set in force by God and announced to the world as a whole. Paul therefore speaks just as objectively of the “coming” of faith (i.e. of the message of faith) as he does in 4:4–7 of the sending of the Son and of his Spirit. Indeed, he has already been able in 3:2 to tackle the Galatians on the ground that the word of the Crucified One has been proclaimed to them and that they have received the Spirit, although he really has to describe them as “bewitched”.

(c) This is as much as to say that the apostle gives the apocalyptic idea a radical new twist, by relating it no longer to a saving event which is yet to come but to that which has already been realized.

(d) This saving event is established and inaugurated by the sending of the Son of God to earth as a man, who has borne the curse of the law on the cross and “redeemed” us by his death from servitude to the world powers (3:1, 13; 4:4 f.).

Certainly none of these thoughts is expressed before Galatians 3–4, but they have already given Paul’s statements in Gal. 1:12–16 about his conversion and call their peculiar character.

(1) The ideas of his doctrine of justification underlie these statements too, and are illustrated in the person of the apostle. God, by the revelation of Jesus Christ, has put an end to the former Pharisee’s proud zeal for the law, has brought him to surrender his own righteousness from the works of the law, and at the same time has given his life and activity a new beginning and a new goal. Gal. 1:12 ff. and Phil. 3:5 ff. are very closely connected. But so are Galatians 1 and Galatians 3–4, yet with the difference that the change of the aeons which is to be spoken of later is dealt with here as the turning-point in the apostle’s life.

(2) Paul, however, does not merely understand himself as a model and paradigm of justification by faith alone; he knows himself also to be chosen and called as the bearer of this gospel to the Gentiles. As is shown by the tightly-packed statement in Gal. 1:15 f., with its echoes of the calling of Old Testament prophets (Jer. 1:5; Isa. 49:1), its emphasis lies not, as in Philipians 3, on his conversion, but on his call – in other words, on the commission given him to proclaim among the Gentiles this gospel which is summarized in his message of justification. This is what is really peculiar to *his* apostleship.

How closely the salvation-event and the preaching of salvation belong together for Paul has already been made clear in our discussion of Galatians 3–4. There, the sending of the Son in the fulness of time and the “coming”

sense – in connexion with the last judgement (Rom. 2:5; I Cor. 4:5; II Cor. 5:10), with the glory which is to follow the sufferings of this present time (Rom. 8:18 f.) or with Christ’s parousia (I Cor. 1:7).

of the message of faith are spoken of in parallel sets of statements – the two are not distinguished as a “saving fact” and subsequent information about it, but together signify an aeon-changing, saving act originating from God and effected by him. Similarly, in II Cor. 5:17 ff., Paul brings together God’s act of reconciliation in Christ and the “ministry of reconciliation”, i.e. the preaching of it, and therefore he qualifies the word of Christ’s ambassadors with the same “Now” of salvation-history (II Cor. 6:1 f.). The passion with which, in the autobiographical account in Galatians 1, Paul defends himself against the “personal” attacks of his opponents obviously requires to be understood against this background of ideas, for what is at stake is really not his personal integrity but the cause of the gospel committed to him. It is when it is seen in this connexion that the concept of “revelation” in Gal. 1:12, 16 also receives its full weight. Even though Paul here designates himself as its recipient, there exists not the slightest occasion for reducing it in this place to the sense of “vision”, against Paul’s dominant usage, and denying that its meaning, far from being restricted to the person of Paul, relates to the change of the aeons in Christ. It requires rather (as in the statement of 3:23 and its context) to be understood in the light of its content, i.e., with regard to the divine authorization of the apostle to proclaim the gospel which applies equally to the Gentiles – the gospel in which “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith” (Rom. 1:17). There can be no talk, then, of Paul’s claiming in Galatians 1 to be autonomous *vis-à-vis* the entire early church on the ground of his individual ecstatic experiences or of his being – in common with the original apostles and other witnesses of the resurrection (I Cor. 15:5 ff.) – a witness of the resurrection himself. But in Gal. 1:15 f. he must indeed insist on the commission given to *him*, because the content of the gospel demands it.

(3) This content is indicated in a single expression: “But when it pleased (God) to reveal *his Son* to me”, and it is explicitly repeated in the attached final clause: *ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι ἀπὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν*. The christological title “Son of God” is not encountered in the indisputably genuine Pauline epistles nearly so frequently as the two other titles *ὁ Κύριος* and *Χριστός*, the latter of which has largely, although by no means invariably, become a proper name.¹ Of the fourteen occurrences of *ὁ υἱὸς (θεοῦ)*, no fewer than eleven are to be found in Romans and Galatians alone, which are very closely related in theme; and it is significant, at that, that they occur above all in the context of the Pauline doctrine of law and grace, works and faith (Gal. 1:15 f.; 2:20; 4:4, 6; Rom. 5:10; 8:3, 29, 32). In all these passages the use of the title is connected with the thought of Christ’s pre-existence. But this latter term, borrowed from dogmatics, expresses only imperfectly what Paul has characteristicly in mind. At no point does Paul’s use of the title “Son of God” contain

¹ Cf. Lührmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 76 f.

any reflection on Christ's divine nature *per se* before all time, or imply the thought of his supernatural birth. (The same is true of the Gospel of John and the Epistle to the Hebrews.) On the contrary, it refers to the Incarnation; and, for Paul, that means at once that it refers to Jesus' death, through which he was to "redeem those under the law, so that they might receive sonship" (Gal. 4:4 f.).

In contrast to the Gospel tradition, Paul has actually little interest in Jesus' human existence, but all the more in his *incarnation* and *redeeming death* on the cross (Gal. 2:20; 3:1, 13; 6:14, 17). It is in the latter that God's act of love is concentrated: he "did not spare his Son, but gave him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). If Gal. 1:15 f. is set in the context of these thoughts, as is required by the line of argument and terminology of the whole epistle, the important consequence emerges that here, too, the christological title "Son of God" denotes not, as usually interpreted, the Risen and Exalted One, but the Son of God "sent" as *man*, who was made subject to the law and died on the cross to redeem all men. His resurrection has validated and manifested him as such, and has set his death for all in force. As such, correspondingly, he is to be proclaimed like a divine decree before all the world by the preaching of the Crucified One (Gal. 3:1).

III

If this interpretation is correct, it throws a significant light on the apostle's initially surprising behaviour, after his call, *vis-à-vis* the Jerusalem church and its leaders, and similarly on his attitude to the congregations of Hellenistic-Jewish and Gentile Christians in Syria. From the Epistle to the Galatians in particular, but also from certainly reliable accounts of which Luke has made use – admittedly strongly harmonizing use – as well as from other New Testament witnesses¹, it can safely be concluded that the Palestinian and Hellenistic-Syrian congregations represented very different types of early Christianity, even if it did not come to a final break between them, despite the persecution of Stephen's supporters and their mission in non-Jewish territory. At the risk of being perhaps a little too crudely schematic, one might assume that each of these types of Christianity was marked not only by the loss of a sense of Jesus' earthly story, but also by the loss of a sense of the historical and temporal character of one's own personal existence. The faith of those who remained in

¹ The differences between the Palestinian Jewish churches and the Hellenistic churches are presupposed also, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew. Cf. my studies, "Der Auferstandene und der Irdische. Mt. 28, 16–20" in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe für R. Bultmann* (1964), pp. 171–92, and "Die Binde- und Lösegewalt in der Kirche des Matthäus", in G. Bornkamm, *Geschichte und Glaube, zweiter Teil (Gesammelte Aufsätze iv, 1971, pp. 37–50 = Festschrift für Heinrich Schlier, 1970, pp. 93–107)*.

Jerusalem obviously derived its vitality from the memory of Jesus' ministry and death, which was mediated and kept awake by his first disciples, and from the ardent expectation of the Risen and Redeemed One as the coming "Messiah" and "Son of Man". The faith of those separated from Jerusalem, on the other hand, was kept most intensively alive by their certainty that Jesus was already installed as Kyrios-Kosmokrator and as victor over the world powers – the One who manifested his presence and power through the experience of the Spirit and the spiritual gifts enjoyed by the charismatics in the congregation. Jesus' shameful death thus largely became a merely transitional stage – "through the cross to the crown", "through night to light!"¹ As regards the believers' self-understanding, it meant that the primitive Jerusalem church was experiencing something like a *vacuum*, which had to be obediently endured in loyal adherence to the temple worship and Jewish traditions, and at the same time in constant expectation of the parousia; while among the "Hellenists" faith was characterized by an *enthusiastic fulness*, by a pleromatic assurance which often enough burst its banks tempestuously.

Paul is not to be classified without further qualification under one or the other of these types of early Christian faith. From those in Jerusalem he could not expect to secure full agreement immediately on the subject of his law-free gospel for the Gentiles. That is why he kept well away from them for so many years. On the other hand he did not acknowledge one of the Hellenistic congregations as his new mother-church. His activity in Arabia (which was most probably of a missionary character) preceded his return to Damascus, and his independent mission in Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21) preceded his journey to Antioch (Acts 11:26). His stay in this metropolis of Hellenistic Christianity was similarly of short duration and soon came to an end with his departure for his subsequent missionary journeys. Paul's "Damascus", we might say pointedly, lies between Jerusalem and Antioch not only in a geographical but also in a deeply symbolical sense.

So far as it is possible in the framework of this study, I should like to elucidate this at least by means of a few comparative observations and point to certain basic thoughts in Paul's Christology and soteriology which, in

¹ The statement that in the whole of the N.T. Jesus' crucifixion is understood as the vicarious death of the Sinless One for sinners and that it has to count as a "steady constant" of early Christianity (cf. J. Jeremias, *Der Opfertod Jesu Christi*, 1963, p. 11) is an inadmissible over-simplification. It should rather be observed that the thinking of the first disciples and of certain later groups in the early church was unable immediately, without more ado, to bring out saving significance from the cross of Christ itself. They were satisfied, for a start, to confess that Jesus' shameful death did not conflict with God's holy will but rather took place in accordance with it. In Luke's historical work, therefore, God's action in raising Jesus is simply set in sharp contrast to the action of men: "You delivered him up and had him nailed to the cross, but God raised him up and exalted him to be the Christ" (Acts 2:23 f., 36; 3:14 f.; 4:10; 5:30). Cf. W. Schrage, "Das Verständnis des Todes Jesu Christi im N.T." in *Das Kreuz Jesu Christi als Grund des Heils* (1967), pp. 60 ff.

contrast to other theological conceptions of the primitive church, characterize his understanding of the saving event and had their effect on his world-wide mission.

(a) As we have said already, the christological title "Son of God" acquires special significance in the Epistles to the Galatians and Romans. It was not Paul who introduced it into early Christian thought. Apart from numerous other New Testament writings, a number of passages in Paul's own letters, which show no specific features of Pauline Christology, make this plain. The short summary of the gospel in the introduction to the Epistle to the Romans is specially instructive. As recent research has shown,¹ arguments based on its language and content indicate that in Rom. 1:3 f. Paul reproduced a kind of credo of the early Jewish-Christian church. Taken by itself, the compressed formula says that the earthly Jesus, legitimated as Messiah by his Davidic-descent, is since his resurrection – or because of his resurrection? – exalted to be the Son of God. The idea of pre-existence is absent, as also is any mention, or soteriological interpretation, of his death, so that we have (in the admittedly misleading language of the later history of dogma) a decidedly "adoptionist" Christology. In a similar way, I Thess. 1:10 speaks, in the characteristic idiom and expectation of primitive Christian missionary preaching in general, of the Risen One as the Son of God who will save us from the wrath to come. The piece of eschatological teaching in I Cor. 15:20–28 belongs here, too: Christ, raised from the dead as "the Son", must reign until the end of the world; finally he will hand over his dominion to the Father and, after victory over his enemies, subordinate himself to God. None of these statements is specifically Pauline in language or ideas; they simply reproduce the expectation of the End common to primitive Christianity.

But the idea of pre-existence, with its focus on the incarnation and saving death of Christ, is also broadly attested apart from Paul.² From this we should not too hastily draw the conclusion that in early Christian theology it was common property right from the start. Yet it is indisputable that, at a relatively early time and independently of Paul, it was especially the saving significance of Christ's death that increasingly and variously became the object of theological reflection and the subject-matter of preaching. As examples from the Synoptic Gospels, we might adduce above all Mark 10:45 and the passages about the Lord's Supper. It is rightly assumed that the common expressions about the "blood" of Christ and his atoning death "for us", which are not specifically Pauline,

¹ Cf. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the N.T.* (E.T. 1952), i, pp. 49 f.; E. Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (E.T. 1960), p. 37; W. Kramer, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (E.T. 1966), pp. 108 ff.; G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, p. 248.

² It plays a familiar and important role in the Gospel of John (cf., among other passages, 1:34, where Lamb of God = Son of God; 3:16–18); in I John 4:9 and in the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:6 ff.; 4:14 ff.; 5:8; 10:29).

had their origin in these primitive Christian themes.¹ What begins to be unmistakably Pauline is the apostle's interpretation of these ideas in the framework of his message of justification and reconciliation.

(b) This indicates the soteriological aspect from which Pauline Christology requires to be considered. In a general sense, of course, soteriology is part of every christological conception in primitive Christianity. But the understanding of the saving event as God's justifying and reconciling act is distinctively and genuinely Pauline. Here it must be noted that the apostle's thoughts turn in particular on the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ χωρὶς νόμου* (Rom. 3:21)² which is grounded and revealed in Christ, in much larger measure than on reconciliation. Reconciliation is not under discussion in Galatians or Philippians 3, nor yet in Romans until chapter 5 (verse 10) – and then as nearly synonymous with *δικαιοῦσθαι*. The doctrine of justification itself is not in every aspect a new creation of Paul's; in support of it he himself appeals expressly to the witness borne to it by the law and the prophets. That its central motifs *solo deo* and *sola gratia* could already find expression in Judaism, in more extreme statements, is shown by such a passage as IV Ezra 8:36: "For your righteousness and goodness, Lord, become manifest therein, that you take pity on those who have no store of good works." The Qumran texts have supplied plenty of further examples of this.³ Yet statements of this kind must not be interpreted in a Pauline sense without further examination. For in Paul's letters it is only through the *solo Christo* and *sola fide* that these motifs gain their full meaning and significance. Once again, a passage within the context of the first great development of the doctrine of justification (Rom. 3:21–31) is specially instructive. As recent investigations have shown,⁴ the apostle has here, in two parallel, compressed and overloaded sentences, taken up a piece of Jewish-Christian tradition and then offered his own commentary on it and developed it further. This is clearly recognizable in the similar beginnings to verse 25 (*εἰς ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ*) and verse 26 (*πρὸς τὴν ἔνδειξιν τῆς δικαιοσύνης αὐτοῦ*). In the first, the righteousness of God means the covenant faithfulness shown by God in Christ's atoning sacrifice, through which, by the forgiveness of Israel's sins, he has renewed the covenant which Israel had broken. In the second, on the other hand, this limited sense of *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ* is transcended as it is extended to all who accept salvation through faith in Jesus. Similarly new and highly significant is the way in which

¹ Cf. H. Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the N.T.* (E.T. 1969), pp. 69 ff.

² Cf. E. Käsemann, "Erwägungen zum Stichwort 'Versöhnungslehre in N.T.'" in *Zeit und Geschichte: Dankesgabe an R. Bultmann* (1964), pp. 47–59; D. Lührmann, "Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung", *ZThK* 67 (1970), pp. 437–52.

³ A critical report of the extensive literature on the doctrine of justification in the Qumran texts and in Paul is to be found in H. Braun, *Qumran und das N.T.*, ii (1966), pp. 166 ff.

⁴ Cf. especially E. Käsemann, *ZNW*, 43 (1950–51), pp. 150–54 (= *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, i (1960), pp. 96–100); further discussion in D. Lührmann, *op. cit.* (see p. 101, n. 2) pp. 437 ff.

God is seen to be righteous in his justifying act. This act has *now* taken place; it does not only apply retrospectively, in God's not reckoning the sins committed by his people in the past, but has opened up a fundamentally new possibility of life – by faith alone, not by the works of the law (3:27 ff.). In this way, God has shown himself to be the God of all men, Jews and Gentiles, and has shown both groups on an equal footing the only way of salvation. As Paul says with special emphasis in Romans and Galatians (but also in other contexts and varying terminology in Philipians and the letters to Corinth), to deliver this message is the task which has been especially assigned to him; this has become the theological foundation of his entire missionary activity.

It should be noted in this connexion that the apostle (paradoxical as it may seem) has also allotted to the law an abiding and essential significance, broadening its scope to apply to the Gentiles as well. He therefore firmly opposes every kind of antinomianism. It is for the same reason that he closes the section Rom. 3:21 ff. with the words: "Are we then annulling the law? No, we are rather establishing it" (v. 31). But Paul no longer understands the function and effect of the law in the genuinely Jewish and traditionally Jewish-Christian sense. From now on, the significance of the law no longer lies in its showing the way to salvation and life, but rather in its pronouncing all men guilty before God – and that not only because they fell short of its demands, but because even for those with a zeal for the law it has become the basis of their self-assertion before God and the object of their "boasting". Through Christ and the revelation of his righteousness "without law", God has met this need of the unredeemed and has thus put an end to the law as a *way of salvation* (Rom. 10:4). All that the law is capable of – all that it is meant to do – is to bring about recognition of sin (Rom. 3:20). But precisely in this way it points beyond itself and bears witness to the righteousness of God.

In Paul's letters this doctrine of justification is developed in all directions and in the language appropriate to the hearers of the moment; the idea of reconciliation also is integrated with it and subordinated to it. As is evident from the rest of the New Testament,¹ the idea of reconciliation too was known to primitive Christianity before Paul and apart from him. That is demonstrated not least by the *ἰλαστήριον*-motif,² which is found in Paul only in Rom. 3:25. The idea of *καταλλαγή*, which stems from the Old Testament and Jewish tradition, does not really add anything new to his doctrine of justification, and in his thought it is not allowed to develop into an independent dogmatic topic. But it stresses in a special – one might say, objective – way the new "state" of peace (Rom. 5:1) into which those justified by God are brought, and thus, at the same

¹ Cf. (apart from Rom. 3:25) Heb. 2:17; I John 2:2; 4:10.

² Paul introduces the term *ἰλαστήριον* as a familiar concept, probably in the general sense of an atoning sacrifice or means of atonement.

time, it stresses the world-embracing effect of God's saving act in Christ (II Cor. 5:18 ff.). As a result, two things can be said about the relation of justification and sanctification in Paul. On the one hand, the motif of *καταλλαγή* belongs to the tradition to which the apostle, in his doctrine of the *δικαιοσύνη* of God, gives a new interpretation, oriented towards faith. On the other hand, the idea of reconciliation, which Paul has freed from all Jewish particularism, interprets his doctrine of reconciliation and makes its world-embracing significance recognizable. This is done in Romans 9–11 in very concrete relation to the enigmatic fate of Israel, which had been chosen by God and yet, for the time of the Gentile mission, rejected on account of its enmity to the gospel. Even if God's chosen people has missed its destiny of living by grace alone, yet, according to Paul, it is not eternally lost. Its rejection for the time being has rather served to bring about the *καταλλαγή τοῦ κόσμου* (Rom. 11:15), in which those who now are still hardened will finally participate.¹

* * * * *

Let us look back once more at the passage of scripture from which this study set out. It need scarcely be said that our intention was not to portray the apostle as the "Great Solitary One", but rather to put his autobiographical account in Galatians 1 into the context of his doctrine of justification and reconciliation. When one reads the passage in this light, it appears that Paul's reason for insisting so tenaciously on the independence of his apostleship was not that he held his own vision of Christ on the Damascus road to be more important than all other traditions, even if that meant the shattering of the church's unity. It was much more that the message of salvation, intended for all men, counted in his eyes as the true foundation of the one church made up of Jews and Gentiles. Charged with this gospel he accepted, from the time of his call onwards, the responsibility of endangering the existing unity of the church, and for this reason he remained suspect in the eyes of the Jerusalem congregation to the end of his days. In truth, however, he fought his whole life long, as no other ever did, for the unity of the church. His words in I Cor. 15:10 hold good for this agitated struggle too: "I have laboured harder than any of them; yet not I, but the grace of God which is with me."

¹ D. Lüthmann shows in the article cited on p. 101, n. 2 (pp. 440 ff.) that, in the deutero-Pauline Epistle to the Ephesians, the doctrine of justification has already become traditional, while the idea of reconciliation as the establishment of cosmic peace serves to interpret it (so the situation is quite the reverse of what we find in Paul). The Pauline dialectic of law and gospel has therefore been given up in Colossians and Ephesians. Cf. G. Bornkamm, "Wandlungen im alt- und neutestamentlichen Gesetzesverständnis", in *Geschichte und Glaube*, zweiter Teil = *Gesammelte Aufsätze*, iv, 1971, pp. 73–119, pp. 114 ff.