

THE PRIESTHOOD OF PAUL  
IN THE GOSPEL OF HOPE

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## I

THE ONLY EXPLICIT STATEMENT OF PAUL'S PURPOSE IN WRITING THE Epistle to the Romans is in 15:15, 16, which the RSV renders as follows:

On some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

In other words, the matters Paul writes about spring from the nature of his special apostleship to the Gentiles. He describes this in the metaphor of a priestly cult. In this cult the god is Jesus Christ, and Paul is his *λειτουργός* i.e., the priest. The worshippers are the Gentiles, and the priest's responsibility is to ensure that their *προσφορά* or offering is presentable (*εὐπρόσδεκτος, ἡγιασμένη*) according to the requirements of the cult. This image is probably drawn from cultic religion in general, rather than from the levitical system in particular. It is not meant as a picture of the Christian religion as a whole; it merely illustrates the dependence of the Gentiles on Paul in making a right response to the gospel. Thus, in his metaphor Paul calls the cult itself "the gospel of God". It is in preaching and expounding it that Paul acts as a priest (*ἱερουργοῦντα τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ*).<sup>1</sup> It is unnecessary to suppose that the Gentiles are themselves the *προσφορά*<sup>2</sup> and that Paul offers them up. The better sense is that the *προσφορά* is what the Gentiles offer to Christ, namely their own glorifying of God (15:9), or their obedience (15:18). Paul has the same operation in view when he speaks of "what Christ has wrought through me

<sup>1</sup> This remarkable metaphor is perhaps foreshadowed in the expressions which Paul employs at the beginning of the epistle: "servant (*δοῦλος*) of Jesus Christ, set apart for the gospel of God . . . whom I serve (*λατρεύω*) with my spirit in the gospel of his Son" (1:1, 9).

<sup>2</sup> The idea is not in itself inappropriate, but seems unnecessary here. Some who support it quote Is. 66:20; but there the people offered are diaspora Jews being brought back to Jerusalem by their Gentile lords as a gift to the God of Israel. For an interesting discussion see J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (E.T. London, 1959), pp. 49-51, and Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection* (London, 1966), p. 129 ff.

to win obedience from the Gentiles" by "fully preaching the gospel" (15:19).

This statement of Paul's purpose should be taken with full seriousness as explaining the intention of Romans.<sup>1</sup> It occurs in the epilogue of the epistle, where Paul resumes the intimate and personal tone of the prologue. More importantly, it follows hard on the climax of the body of the epistle where Paul summarized his thesis in these words:

Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy (15:8, 9).

This summary was followed by a catena of scriptures supporting the thesis, and then by the benediction:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope (15:13).

The operative word is "hope". The last of the scriptures quoted is "The root of Jesse shall come, he who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles hope". We may say that the aim of Romans is to show the Gentiles how their hope rests on Israel's Messiah: how that through the prior fulfilment of the promises to Israel a stepping stone is made for the Gentiles. The gospel is the gospel of hope – not of judgement only – and the Gentiles are to embrace this hope. But it is the hope of Israel in the first instance, and if the Gentiles are to respond adequately to the gospel – if they are to glorify God acceptably and make their offering in true holiness – they must comprehend what their relation is to the Jew, to Israel, and in particular to the Israelite Paul, by whom in God's design the benefits of salvation have been ministered to them.

Paul cannot separate his own role from the operation of the gospel which he thus expounds to his Gentile readers in Rome. Romans is both an exposition of the gospel of hope and at the same time Paul's *apologia* for his "priesthood" in that gospel.

## II

To understand Romans one must first come to terms with its eschatology. The subject of "justification" looms large in this epistle, not merely because Paul may be "replying to a legalistic type of religion",<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Paul S. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith* (London, 1971), rightly sees that the purpose of Romans is related to the actual situation there, and that relations between Jewish and Gentile believers are integral to that situation, though his suggestion that Paul addresses five separate groups in turn is doubtful. For the situation in Rome see E. A. Judge and G. R. S. Thomas, "The Origin of the Church at Rome: a New Solution", in *RTR*, 25 (1966), pp. 1–14.

<sup>2</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *What Theologians Do*, ed. F. G. Healey (Grand Rapids, 1971) p. 40.

but because as Paul understands "the gospel" it is, in the first place, a proclamation from God that his judgement is imminent.<sup>1</sup> It declares the coming of "the day when . . . God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (2:16); not, however, as merely giving prior notice of the event, but as fixing the eschatological reference point for God's present and immediate overture to mankind. Paul will have much to draw out from his initial statement that by the gospel God's justice or righteousness is revealed (1:17), but it takes its immediate relevance from the basic and common Christian conviction that "the Judge is standing at the doors" (James 5:9) and that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15).

The vital question for the serious hearer of this message was whether the revelation of the divine justice meant doom only – the entail of the divine wrath – or whether there was a hiding place from the storm, some hope of glory in the light of the graciousness of God. How does Paul approach this question?

In his greeting (1:1–7), "the gospel of God" is the announcement that the kingdom is at hand, as promised through the prophets. Already the "Son of God" i.e., the Messiah, has been revealed and enthroned, and awaits only the "obedience" of the nations. To the promulgation of this gospel Paul has been assigned. He is thus himself an eschatological figure. A hint of the impending consummation may be seen in the first verse of the prologue (1:8–17), when Paul says that "your faith is proclaimed in all the world". The terms here used are those which belong to the gospel itself, and suggest that Paul may see in the success of the gospel at Rome a sign that the end is near.<sup>2</sup>

The first major stage of Paul's argument (1:18–3:20) depends on the theme of the impending day of judgement. The wrath of God already hangs over mankind. The judgement itself is asserted in terms derived from the Old Testament picture of God's just assize based on the deeds of men (2:1–16), and, as we have seen, the gospel is, in part, the proclamation of its certainty (2:16). As Paul turns to address the Jew (2:17–3:20) the theme of judgement-day continues. It is the universal judgement of all nations (3:4–6, 19, 20), but especially now of Israel "under the law".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The context of coming judgement is evident in Mark 1:14, 15; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17; Rev. 14:6, to take representative examples from the few writers who seem to employ *εὐαγγέλιον* in an independent way. The concept of an authoritative proclamation (e.g., of coming judgement) is the predominant element in the use of this word in the NT, rather than the alleged etymological sense of "good news". Although *εὐαγγέλιον* has a long history in Greek literature, it should be noted that there is no instance in the singular known to us before the NT of its meaning "good news" simply, or an announcement of any kind; that it does not occur in the LXX except in its classical sense of "reward"; that its current first century use outside the NT is generally in connection with the political imperial cult (announcements regarding the emperor's activities or intentions); and that within the NT it is a specialized term designating a specific message from God. In no case in the NT is there any linguistic justification for translating *εὐαγγέλιον* simply as "good news". A term with connotations of authority, like "proclamation", is generally to be preferred.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 1 Thess. 3:6; Col. 1:6, 23.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the judgement theme in Matt. 25:31–46.

Thus, Paul's exposition of justification is set against the background of standard scriptural eschatology regarding the *dies irae*. The gospel first endorses this judgement of God, but reveals also, in the very heart of it, an output of divine power by which justification of both Jew and Gentile is provided. This positive prospect is described as "the glory of God", and is the other side of the picture from "the wrath of God". Forfeited through sin (3:23), this glory is now the "hope" which follows justification (5:2). The precise connotations of this ("we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God", RVM) are not at first clear, but it means in some sense to be admitted to the sphere of God's favour and blessing. It is to attain and enjoy eternal life (6:8, 22, 23), and the term "reign" is used in 5:17, 21. This divine beneficence has its ground, of course, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (6:1-11; 8:11, 17).

This "hope of glory" is amplified in 8:17-30, where it is seen as the glory of God transmitted to, or shining upon, his sons. They are "glorified". This glorification is profoundly based on the election and predestination of the children of God, and is related to the ultimate purposes of creation.

It is important to notice that "the glory of God" and "the glory of the children of God" is as much part of the general scriptural eschatology accepted by Paul as is the day of judgement itself. In the day when "the Lord God comes with might, and his arm rules for him", his glory is revealed (Isa. 40:1-11) and shines on his ransomed Israel (Isa. 55:5). In particular, for Paul, this glory is the inheritance of those who belong to Messiah and is the fruition of their "sonship" (8:15-17). This "sonship" is the chief prerogative of Israel among the nations (9:4), and indeed Paul's whole understanding is based on the "type" of Israel's experience of God's covenant, as it passed from the bondage of Egypt, through the redemption of the exodus, to the possession of the land of inheritance as God's son under the kingship of David. Paul further relates the final redemption of God's sons to the fulfilment of the purpose of creation and the removal of the curse (8:19-21), which is also part of the prophetic expectation. Paradise would be restored in a new heaven and new earth when God fulfilled his covenant to redeem and glorify Israel and establish it for ever in his holy mountain (e.g., Isa. 60:1-3; 65:17-25).

All this compels an observation of major significance for this study. No Jew, least of all St Paul, could have written or read Romans 8 without being aware that what was being rehearsed, and embraced in hope, was the glory which God had promised would finally shine on his people Israel. The language in this chapter - of election, of calling, of justification, of glorification, of the saints, of God's foreknowledge, of his purpose, of redemption, of sonship, of inheritance - all belonged to the theology, and specifically to the eschatology, of Israel.

This is the explanation of the pathos with which Paul goes on at once to speak of "my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, forasmuch

as they are Israelites" (9:1-5). No one recognizes more keenly than Paul that the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the promises, the patriarchs and Messiah himself, belong inalienably to Israel (9:4, 5). In proclaiming the hope of glory (the fruit of righteousness) and the anticipated liberty of the sons of God, how could Paul fail to relate them to his "kinsmen according to the flesh"? A little earlier, in discussing the grounds of justification, he was under similar constraint to explain what "Abraham our forefather according to the flesh" had found in this regard (4:1).

For all the mystery of its unbelieving members, there is, for Paul, only one Israel.<sup>1</sup> What, then, is the connection between the destiny of Israel as adumbrated in Romans 8 on the one hand, and in Romans 9-11 on the other? What Paul says explicitly in Romans 9-11 is clear enough. There has been, and could be, no change of intention on God's part, for God does not change his mind about his gifts and calling (11:29). All Israel will be redeemed and saved, according to promise (11:26, 27). Of this outcome, the present believing remnant (including Paul himself) is a guarantee any earnest (9:27; 11:1-5, 16). The salvation of the Gentiles is mysteriously intertwined with the temporary and partial hardening of Israel, but the very pattern of salvation remains part of the heritage of Israel, and can only be learned by the Gentiles from Israel. The olive tree, which has as its root God's promise of blessing to Abraham, is Israel, and Gentiles can partake of that rich root only as wild branches grafted on to the stem, in among natural Israelite branches (11:17-24).

How does this relate to Romans 8? Many commentators assume that there is little or no connexion between the salvation of chapter 8 and the salvation of 9-11, or that Paul only begins to relate salvation to Israel when he commences chapter 9.<sup>2</sup> This is a serious misunderstanding. In chapters 9-11 Paul grieves, not for all Israelites, nor, strictly speaking, for Israel, but for those of his kinsmen who do not believe. His grief is precisely because they are Israelites (*οἱ τινές εἰσιν Ἰσραηλεῖται*) and as such possess all the prerogatives of God's salvation (9:3-5). But the poignancy of this resides in the fact that Paul has just been exulting in the hope of glory which awaits those Jews whose patriarchal heritage has been confirmed to them (4:12), whose law has been therein established (3:31), and who lack nothing of all that God had promised them. The justification and glorification which Paul has been expounding in chapters 3-8 are the justification and glorification primarily of the *Israel that will be saved*, and it is from his own experience of salvation as a member of the remnant of Israel according to the election of grace that Paul is able to speak with such assurance and joy, and is able to hold out the hope of glory to the

<sup>1</sup> See D. W. B. Robinson, "The Salvation of Israel in Romans 9-11", in *RTR*, 26 (1967), pp. 81-96.

<sup>2</sup> But R. M. Grant rightly observes that Paul "has in mind the specific problem of the relations between Jews and Gentiles (not only in Rom. 9-11 but throughout the letter)", *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (London, 1963), p. 189.

Gentiles. The rest of this essay will examine more closely the proposition that, throughout Romans 1-8, Paul is conscious of the distinction between Jew and Gentile in the economy of salvation, and is describing justification and its results as he, an Israelite, had experienced it, this being his qualification to be the teacher of the Gentiles, bringing them to trust and hope in the Saviour of Israel.

### III

No one has any difficulty in seeing a personal and apologetic element on Paul's part in both the prologue and epilogue of Romans. He claims to occupy a vital and unique role in the bringing of God's gospel to the Gentiles, and he is required to justify himself in this role even to the Romans whom he has not seen. It is our belief that this apologetic element pervades the intervening chapters as well, and that Paul expounds his gospel throughout from the point of view of one who was both a Jew - born under the law but justified freely through faith in the promise - and also Messiah's designated servant for the extension of God's salvation to the Gentiles. Our suggestion is that Paul's use of "we", "us" and "our" is generally in accord with this apologetic standpoint, and that although he frequently engages in direct address to his readers ("you"), only rarely does he identify himself with them on the ground of a common position. When Paul says "I", he naturally is referring to himself, either personally, or, when he adopts the diatribe style, as a representative figure for the purposes of his argument. But he also can employ "we" in the same way to refer to himself. In the prologue and epilogue he often speaks of his apostolic role in the first person singular e.g., "I am not ashamed of the gospel" (1:16); but the first person plural also occurs with no apparent difference in standpoint e.g., "through whom we have received grace and apostleship" (1:5). We wish to argue that this apostolic standpoint, rather than one inclusive of his readers, is also regularly implied in the use of "we" etc. in the body of the letter.<sup>1</sup> This apostolic viewpoint reflects Paul's Jewishness (and therefore the representative or "standard" character of his Christian experience) and also his defensive attitude (since he has the task of commending this experience to Gentiles).

The proposition on which Paul bases his whole exposition is that the gospel to which he is committed as an apostle is "the power of God for

<sup>1</sup> For Paul's inclusion of others, such as Barnabas, Apollos, Silvanus and Timothy, within the scope and nomenclature of apostleship, see D. W. B. Robinson, "Apostleship and Apostolic Succession" in *RTR*, 13 (1954). See also A. T. Hanson, *The Pioneer Ministry* (London, 1961), especially chapter 4, "Paul and His Fellow Workers". Dr Hanson examines Paul's use of "we", though not in Romans except for the opinion that Rom. 1:5 is the "only clear instance of the epistolary 'we'" outside the Thessalonian and Corinthian epistles. Dr Hanson's general thesis is at many points relevant to the subject of this essay.

salvation . . . to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (1:16). This is a priority for the Jew not merely in hearing the gospel, but in believing and in being saved by believing. Paul relates the questions of sin, condemnation, and justification to the same formula: "the Jew first and also the Greek" (2:9, 10). So Paul is not a disinterested party: he is a Jew! He discusses the depravity of the Gentile world in an objective and conventional manner, but when the condition of the Jew comes into view, in chapter 2, he quickly loses his detachment and starts constructing a vivid, personalized case, a form of interrogation. Now prosecutor, now defendant, he exposes the mystery of being a Jew from a wide range of experience. Under cover of the diatribe, Paul is himself the Jew who is first condemned for his failure, and then first justified by faith. His Roman audience have little part in this debate. But they could hardly fail to see that the Jew, notwithstanding his falling short of the glory of God like the rest of mankind, still stands at the centre of God's work of salvation for the world.

A second apologetic and personal motif appears quite early in Paul's approach. This emerges as a reply to a charge against the apostle that he supports the policy "Let us do evil that good may come". It is not clear who is making this charge, but Paul uses it as a yardstick to examine the kind of behaviour produced in himself and his kind by the power of the gospel. The influence of this charge may be more extensive in Romans 1-8 than is commonly noticed, producing a distinct apologetic note. Paul cites the accusation explicitly in 3:8, and it determines the form of his argument as he begins the discussion of sanctification in chapters 6-8.

Thus, not only in the prologue of Romans but in the body of the letter have we reason to expect Paul to speak from his own position. The gospel is for the Jew first, and Paul is among those Jews who "first hoped in Christ" (Eph. 1:12); also a serious charge has been made against the principles of his conduct, which is most relevant to the subject of righteousness which he has under review. While Paul is not easily confined to strict consistency, we think that the majority of his "we"s etc. refer to himself in one or other of these situations. If he wishes to include his readers, or Christians generally, with himself, he makes this clear by the argument, often with the addition of "all".

### IV

#### A. Argument on Justification: 1:18-5:21

This long section begins in a formal and objective manner. A strictly personal element appears in 2:16, "my gospel", and 3:8, "as some charge us with saying". But other references to the first person are either the generalizing "I" of 3:7 ("if through my falsehood God's truthfulness

abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?"), or are otherwise part of the rhetorical idiom, e.g., 2:2; 3:5; 3:19; 3:28; 3:31; 4:1; 4:9. Some, if not all, of these instances are appropriate in argument only from a Jewish point of view e.g., the "we know" verses. A comparison of the whole section with Gal. 2:15-18 confirms the inference of a Jewish standpoint, for this closely parallel passage on the nature of justification explicitly identifies the "we" who are justified by faith as "ourselves who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners". Other "we" passages even more clearly demand a Jewish point of view, e.g., 3:5 ("our wickedness"), 3:9; 4:1 ("our forefather"); 4:12. When Paul wishes to include Gentiles as well as Jews in the seed of Abraham, he does so by means of a careful argument (4:11 f.), and then designates Abraham as "the father of *all* who believe". With this "all", reinforced by Gen. 17:5, "the father of many nations", Paul, for the first time in his argument, can include his readers with himself in the "us" of 4:16, "Abraham . . . the father of *us all*".

The crucial statement on justification, 3:21-26, is in general terms, with no personal pronouns at all. It establishes the one basis of salvation for all, following the condemnation of the "whole world" in 3:19. But then at once the viewpoint narrows in 3:27: "Then what becomes of *ἡ καύχησις*?" which the RSV rightly interprets as "our boasting" i.e., the vaunted Jewish confidence. Although this Jewish boast is excluded as a ground of justification, Paul affirms that God is still the God of the Jews (though not exclusively), that he justifies the circumcision by faith (though not the circumcision alone), that the law is upheld through faith (though it does not justify), and that Abraham is the father of circumcision to those of the circumcision who believe (though not their father alone). The distinction in identity between Jews and Gentiles is kept in view throughout this section.

The short passage which concludes the chapter on the faith of Abraham, 4:22-25, is ambiguous in its pronouns:

But the words, "it was reckoned to him", were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Does "us" and "our" here mean all believers, or is Paul narrowing his platform again to that of the justified Jew, as he prepares for another aspect of his *apologia* in chapter 5? A general, inclusive "us" would be appropriate here, following the discussion about "all who believe" in 4:11. On the other hand, "all" is not repeated in 4:24, and the passage can be regarded as consistent with a limited Jewish point of view. The reference to the scripture "written . . . for our sake . . . who believe" may indicate Jews to whom the oracles of God had been committed and who,

unlike the "some" of 3:1-3, had *not* been unfaithful. The credal formula of 4:25, "who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification", is also patient of a Jewish interpretation. If Acts 13:26-39 can be relied on - and Paul's kerygma there is strikingly parallel to that contained in 1 Cor. 15:1-5 - Paul was quite capable of expressing the doctrine of justification through the death and resurrection of Christ according to the scriptures in terms peculiarly applicable to Jews; and if Isaiah 53 is the basis for the formula in 4:25, this would be a further ground for limiting the application to Israelites, for theirs was the solidarity with the Servant in that passage.

What is the place of chapter 5 of Romans in the progress of Paul's argument, and what evidence does it yield to support the view that Paul is defending his experience as a Jew who believes?

Clearly Paul is rounding off the discussion of justification by describing its fruition in the hope of glory. There are two parts to the chapter. The first part, 5:1-11, follows logically the end of chapter 4 ("Therefore, since we are justified by faith . . ."), and supports its assertion of the hope of glory with the argument: "for if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life". The second part, 5:12-21, is an exposition of the principle on which this "much more" argument is based. Throughout the chapter stress is laid on the ultimate "life" in which justification issues, and thus Paul concludes his discussion of justification which began in 1:17 with the text, "He who through faith is righteous *shall live*".

There is a marked difference of tone and style, however, between the two parts of this chapter. The second part, dealing with the Adam/Christ analogy, is couched in entirely impersonal terms; no personal pronoun is used. The distinctive position of the Jew is alluded to, however, by reason of the attention paid to the role of the law. Death, it is claimed, is due, not to the law, but to sin which is much older in man's experience. The reign of death was established long before Moses. Within the total area affected by Adam's sin, the law merely caused an "abounding" of sin in the experience of a limited group. This, however, had its counterpart in the work of Christ, in the "abounding" of grace. Again, then, there is an implied distinction between the Jew and the Gentile, though only one of degree. The Jew under the law is actually worse off than the Gentile, because he has an "abundance" of sin. On the other hand, he finds in Christ an "abundance" of grace to offset his former disability.

In contrast to the objective style of this second part of chapter 5, the first part, 5:1-11, is highly personal in style. Practically every verse is in the first person plural. What is the force of this "we"?

The answer is bound up with the question of whether *ἔχωμεν* or *ἔχομεν* is the correct reading in 5:1. The manuscript evidence is such that

intrinsic probability must decide the matter. But which reading is intrinsically more probable? If the subjunctive ("let us have peace with God") is original there can be no doubt that "us" is the inclusive pronoun, the same "we all" of 4:16. It would follow that 4:24, 25 – the passage discussed above – must be taken in the same way, for an exhortation at this point could only be intended by Paul for his readers as well as himself. On the other hand, most commentators have preferred the indicative reading here ("we have peace with God"), and, if this be original, the possibility is open that Paul is using the narrower Jewish "we" with which he began the discussion of justification, which certainly prevailed from 3:1 to 4:12, and which he possibly resumed in the credal formula of 4:25. Such an interpretation would mean that in 5:1–11 Paul is summarizing the benefits of justification from his own experience as a believing Jew.

In support of the narrower reference here is the subjective character of the experience Paul describes: "we have peace", "we rejoice", "we rejoice in our sufferings", "God's love has been poured into our hearts". This is different from describing the *status* of believers as children of Abraham, which Paul is able to predicate of his Gentile readers in 4:16, even though he has never met them, for at least he knew they were believers. But is Paul here asserting that all believers, including his readers, *do* experience this peace, joy and love? If the point is what *ought* to follow justification, it would be better to accept the (better attested) subjunctive reading, and interpret the passage as an exhortation. If, however, Paul is asserting the *actual* fruit of justification, the better sense is yielded by taking the whole of 5:1–11 as autobiographical. For consider how concrete the description is. "Peace" is not merely a status, but the experience of harmony which follows from acceptance. "This grace in which we stand", could, it is true, describe the status of all justified persons (3:24; 4:16), but it could equally well refer to Paul's position as a Jew who believed (11:5) or as an apostle (1:5; 12:3; 15:15; 1 Cor. 15:10). "Joy" is an emotion kindled by the hope of glory. "Our sufferings", in which Paul says "we rejoice", are most likely those which he constantly endured as an apostle. Paul might easily assume that all believers would encounter suffering, but it is less likely he would assert that all were rejoicing in it. Finally, the pouring of God's love into one's heart through the Spirit seems to describe a subjective experience of a palpable kind.

In all, it is reasonable to see here a description of the actual experience which, for Paul and his circle, had followed justification. Of course he wants this to be understood as the model for his Gentile friends. But he also has a serious apologetic purpose: he is preparing the way for the next stage of his argument in which he finally refutes the charge that he, of all people, advocates continuance in sin, and in which he sets out at length the character of the new life in Christ.

## V

B. *Argument on the New Life: 6:1–8:39*

Three features of Paul's approach in chapter 6 indicate that he is basing his argument on his own behaviour and experience. First, he reverts to the rhetorical style ("What shall we say then?") which he used earlier as a guise in which to present the speaker's own case. Secondly, he at once brings forward for consideration a proposition which, in 3:8, was explicitly (though falsely) alleged to have been his own point of view. There it was "Why not (. . . as some affirm that we say) 'Let us do evil that good may come'?" Now Paul says "What shall we say then? 'Let us continue in sin that grace may abound'?"<sup>1</sup> Thirdly, there is such a marked change of address at the conclusion of the first section in verse 11 ("So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin"), that the preceding verses, all in the first person plural, must be taken as not including the readers. Indeed, the argument requires this. The "we" of verses 1 to 9 have already reckoned themselves dead to sin and alive to God: it remains only to challenge those who hear the case ("you also") to do likewise.<sup>2</sup>

All the rest of chapter 6, from verse 11, is a continuation of Paul's direct exhortation to his readers: "Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies . . .". Only once, in verse 15, is there a reversion to "we": "What then, are we to sin, because we are not under law but under grace?". The explanation is simple.<sup>3</sup> The question being in the style of diatribe, and being completely surrounded by Paul's direct exhortations to his readers ("you"), it is put into the mouth of those readers. This is further required by the connexion with the preceding verse where Paul has just described his readers as "not under law but under grace".

Paul's apology for the law occupies chapter 7, although it is not entirely clear why he launches on such a discussion at such length at this point. Gentiles as Gentiles were never under the law. Had the Romans been

<sup>1</sup> I take *ἐπιμένωμεν* not as a deliberative question, but as a hortative subjunctive, as in the form of the earlier expression. This is suggested by Pallis, *To the Romans* (Liverpool, 1920), The point is not unimportant. Paul is citing an alleged or proposed attitude in both places.

<sup>2</sup> There is actually a double contrast implied by the *καὶ ὑμεῖς* of verse 11: with Christ who died and now lives (verse 10), and with Paul and co. who have already been baptized into Christ's death and now live in newness of life.

<sup>3</sup> If the similarity of this verse to 6:1 be taken to indicate a return to Paul's position – again taking the verb (*ἁμαρτήσωμεν*) as a deliberative subjunctive rather than as a question – the train of thought, somewhat elliptical, would be thus: "We teach *you* that sin should not rule you since you are not under law but under grace: do you suppose that *we* advocate 'Let us sin because we are not under law but under grace'? Absurd!". A similar argument, though not identical, would emerge if the Western reading of *G er vg<sup>w</sup>* Ambrosiaster, *ἡμαρτήσαμεν*, were adopted: "Did *we* sin because we are not under law . . .?" Could this indicative be original? It is not easy to explain as an alteration. Pallis, in his curious commentary, adopts it, but interprets the verb in the classical sense: "did we commit an error when we withdrew from the Law. . .?"

troubled as were the Galatians we could understand Paul explaining the role of the law to them. But there is no explicit warning to his readers to steer clear of the law. In fact, his readers rate no mention in the whole chapter, except in the rhetorical opening words "Do you not know. . .?" and in verse 4, "Likewise, my brethren, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another", which is a simple statement of fact. It is even possible, as Paul Minear has proposed,<sup>1</sup> that Paul is here turning to address his fellow Jews among his audience at Rome. There is no obvious Gentile interest in the whole passage.

In reality, Paul is doing two things in this chapter. First, he is clinching the argument that the law had been utterly superseded as a means of justification before God. Seldom has the state of the case been more succinctly put than in 7:6: "We are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we serve not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit". But secondly, having demoted the law, Paul offers a vigorous defence of it as "holy and just and good". Whatever inferences he may wish his Gentile readers to draw from all this, his point of view, *vis-à-vis* the law, is peculiar to the justified Jew.

The chapter is in two unequal sections. 7:1-6 discusses the life of obedience to Christ (already described in its Gentile context in 6:16-23) in terms of freedom from the Mosaic law. The illustration is used - clear to any who "know the law" - that the marriage law binds a woman to her husband only while he is alive. If he dies, the law is no longer binding, and the woman can freely marry someone else. Under this figure, Paul describes the position of the Jewish believer. He was bound to sin, and this bondage was reinforced, and given legal status, by the Mosaic law. But, through the death of Christ, sin itself, the "husband", died. The law, therefore, had done its work, and had no more power to make sin abound (cf. 5:20). The justified Jew was free to "marry" and obey the risen Christ.

For whose benefit is Paul saying this? In Galatians he uses similar teaching about the Jew being redeemed by Christ from the law as the basis for his powerful admonition to the Gentiles not on any account to allow themselves to fall into the slavery from which the Jews had been saved.<sup>2</sup> But there is no such admonition or exhortation here in chapter 7. A straightforward explanation of the allegory is given in verse 4, and, despite the "you" of the first half of the verse, Paul must be talking about, if not to, believing Jews. In any case, he reverts to "we" before the verse is finished, and goes on in verses 5 to 7 to describe a situation only applicable to a Jew, for he speaks of those passions of the flesh which were "aroused by the law" (cf. 7:9 ff.), and of the contrast between the old

<sup>1</sup> See p. 232, n 1.

<sup>2</sup> See D. W. B. Robinson, "The Distinction Between Jewish and Gentile Believers in Galatians" in *ABR*, 13 (1965), pp. 29-48; also "The Circumcision of Titus, and Paul's 'Liberty'", *ABR*, 12 (1964), pp. 24-42, and "'We are the Circumcision'", *ABR* 15 (1967), pp. 28-35.

service of the written code and the new service of the Spirit. The truth seems to be that Paul is more concerned with analysing the role of the law than with particular implications. This concern is heightened as the chapter proceeds.

Speaking about Romans 7:7-25, Krister Stendahl comments: "While much attention has been given to the question whether Paul speaks about a pre-Christian or Christian experience of his, or about man in general, little attention has been drawn to the fact that Paul here is involved in an argument about the Law; he is not primarily concerned about man's or his own cloven ego or predicament".<sup>1</sup> This is substantially correct. Paul, having greatly restricted the function of the law in 7:1-6, now addresses himself, in the manner of the diatribe, to two questions which any serious-minded Jew might ask following Paul's assessment. The first question is "Is the law sin?",<sup>2</sup> to which the answer is "Far from it; the law is holy, just and good". The second question is "Did something which is good (the law), then, become death to me?", and again the answer is "Far from it". But the explanation is more complicated and calls for an analysis of the three-cornered relationship between sin, the law, and the individual under the law. Paul says in effect: "The real villain is sin, which the law shows up for what it is, and which is at work in my members. Even when I am 'under the law' I recognize it as God's law, and as good, though with my flesh I serve the law of sin".

Throughout this section the law and its character are defined exclusively in relation to the speaker; "I should not have known sin" etc. Yet Paul is not speaking of the relation of the law to him specifically but to him characteristically as a Jew under the law. The "I" is the generalizing "I", recalling the style of 3:7, "if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?". As Paul rebuts the suggestion that his teaching about freedom from the law makes the latter an instrument of sin and death, it becomes clear that the "I" whose relation to the law he defines for this purpose can only be the man who is still under the law and still under the dominion of the sin which works through his members. The experience no doubt had been Paul's, yet not his alone. The "I" is a conventional device by means of which Paul becomes "the type of the moral relation in which the as yet unregenerate Israelite stands to the divine law".<sup>3</sup> One of the pillars of Paul's position in Romans is that "Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified" (10:4). But "the end of the law" has not yet come for the "wretched man" of 7:7-25.

<sup>1</sup> "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West", *HTR*, 56 (1963), p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> In view of the introductory question *τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν* this may be a proposition which Paul is questioning, rather than a question he is asking i.e.: "What shall we say then? 'That the law is sin'?"

<sup>3</sup> H. A. W. Meyer on Romans (E.T. Edinburgh, 1876) II, p. 2.

Once more, then, though this time in retrospect, Paul has in consideration his own position, not that of his readers. In this apology for the law he is chiefly concerned lest they should misjudge the law and its dignity. At the same time, he paves the way for the last stage of his *apologia* for his conduct. There was indeed a time when he was under sin's dominion, but there can be no continuance in that. Even the law condemns no more. "We are discharged from the law" (7:6), and "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (8:1). Further, the dominion of sin and death – *its* law – is broken, and what the law of God required now finds a true fulfilment in Paul's life (8:4). To continue in sin would be to have the mind of the flesh, and this Paul repudiates. He sums up his position in 8:12: "So then, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh". This conclusion, relating as it does to the profounder realities of flesh and Spirit, is in a form readily transferable to the Gentiles who are Paul's special concern, but the conclusion has been reached along the path of a Jewish experience.

Paul directly addresses his readers only briefly in chapter 8, in verses 9 to 15. It is significant that the confident note which characterizes the transcript of his own experience is lacking here, and is replaced by a series of conditional sentences:<sup>1</sup> "if the Spirit of God really dwells in you"; "if Christ dwells in you"; "if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you"; "if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body . . .". Paul is certainly anxious for his readers to know that the Spirit they have received is the same "spirit of sonship" which he and his colleagues have received and which enables them to enjoy a true relationship with God as Father (8:15, 16), but in general, the theme of chapter 8 is, as we remarked at the beginning of this essay, the liberty of the Jew who has entered his inheritance in Christ, and his hope of glory according to promise and election.<sup>2</sup>

"We are fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him", says Paul in 8:17, and this proviso is the text for the exalted and deeply moving final testament of hope. There is no address to readers here, only personal confession and testimony. Earlier, in 5:1–5, there was a foreshadowing of the theme that "we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that . . . hope does not disappoint

<sup>1</sup> Only the first of these is actually indefinite (*εἴη*), but the string of conditionals following this first usage is impressive nevertheless.

<sup>2</sup> A curious problem, in view of the thesis of this essay, lies in the textual variants of 8:2. The best mss. and widest support is for "thee", but there is strong support for "me", and the other alternatives, "us" and no pronoun, are not negligible. "Thee" is hard to explain in terms of Paul's style here, for though he uses this style in e.g., 2:1 and 2:27, here the pronoun slips in without warning. The situation is that *σέ* is both the best attested reading and the *lectio difficilior*! Pallis (*op. cit.*) suggests that the statement is addressed to the questioner of *τίς με ρύσεται*. This would mean either that the Spirit-led Paul addresses the unredeemed Paul, or that God addresses Paul. For the latter, 2 Cor. 12:9 might be a parallel. There is no "but he said to me" in Romans, but there is the initial question "Who will deliver me?"

us", and we suggested there that Paul's sufferings as an apostle of Christ were probably in view. The same may well be true in chapter 8. The closest parallel to this passage is 2 Cor. 3–6, which relates the sufferings of the apostle to the glory of God. In Romans 8, suffering is not a token of sin or of God's displeasure, but the opposite. It is a sign of hope and a pledge of glory. More than that, it is the suffering of the "servant" of the Lord, "Israel in whom I will be glorified" (Isa. 49:3). Paul elsewhere identifies himself with the servant of Isaiah 49, in Gal. 1:15 (cf. Acts 13:47), and his confident appeal to the servant song of Isa. 50:4–9 in vv. 31–34, together with his citation of the words of the righteous sufferer of Psalm 44, to interpret his experience, is a remarkable seal on his *apologia*.

Thus, both the positive Christian experience related in this chapter, and the expectation of final glory, are set forth deliberately as the experience of the justified Jew, indeed of Israel itself in the person of the servant and apostle of the Lord. The exposition of salvation in these terms, based on God's covenant with Israel, is part of the exercise of Paul's priesthood – which is his apostleship – in regard to the Gentiles, providing the way by which they, too, embrace the free gift of forgiveness, exchange the flesh for the Spirit, and find their hope in the root of Jesse.