

# An Introduction to the Pauline Letters

## Foreword

This booklet was written for the fourth of the annual courses on Scripture sponsored by the Union of Monastic Superiors. I am grateful to Sister Zoe for suggesting this work, and to the monks and nuns who have constituted such a stimulating, faithful and appreciative group of students over the last three courses.

I last wrote at any length on Paul in a booklet *Theology in Saint Paul* (Mercier Press, Dublin, 1969) which has long been out of print. Particularly in the last three years it has been stimulating to tutor the subject in Oxford, which has forced me at last to make some real efforts to come to grips with the muscular theology of Romans. In this too I have learnt - and continue to learn - a great deal from and with the students. Their questions and insights have contributed considerably to this booklet.

I would like to thank also the sisters of Turvey Abbey for the care and devotion lavished on illustration and production of the booklets for the course. It makes them a pleasure to use.

Henry Wansbrough

Feast of the Conversion of Saint Paul, 1996

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# Chapter 1. Luke's Portrait of Paul

Before approaching the letters of Paul it will be useful to establish an outline of the story of Paul's missions which form their background and context. This can be done only after an investigation into the Acts of the Apostles and Luke's way of writing history. The data of Paul's letters and of the Acts are not identical. The letters, however, are the primary sources for the author's life and the Luke's story in the Acts is only a secondary source, so that in cases of factual dispute preference should be given to the letters.

In his article on Paul in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* J. Fitzmyer<sup>1</sup> gives the appearance of maintaining the traditional position, using the data of Acts, while in fact carefully leaving the two unreconciled by relating the data of Acts in the present tense (dramatic!) and the data of Paul's writings in the past (historic!) tense.

In fact Luke is a good historian, but that this does not necessarily imply that he writes according to the modern canons of historical writing. He is a historian of his own times, and uses the conventions then current. It will therefore first be important to understand how Luke writes history.

## 1. Basics - the Traditional Data

Before we go any further, it will be useful to have firmly in mind two traditional sets of data:

### A. Paul's life according to the Acts

- c. 36 Conversion
- 46-49 First Missionary Journey (southern Turkey)
- 49 Council of Jerusalem
- c. 52 Second Missionary Journey (Asia Minor & Greece)
- Third Missionary Journey (Greece & Asia Minor)
- 58 Arrest in Jerusalem
- 60 Journey to Rome
- 62 Release at Rome - [further missionary journeys to East and Spain]
- 64 Martyrdom in Rome during Nero's persecution]

The evidence for the two 'firm' dates given here (36 and 52 A.D.) is as follows:

36 The date of Pilate's withdrawal from Palestine on the orders of the governor of Syria. Since a capital sentence was reserved to the Roman governor, it is assumed that the martyrdom of Stephen took place in the interregnum between governors, because only then could the local government get away with passing such a sentence. Luke states that the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of Saul, who fully approved of the killing (Ac 7.59-8.1). If this is not a mere literary artifice - a decision which depends on one's view of Luke's way of writing history - it shows that Stephen's martyrdom preceded Paul's conversion. The alternative explanation is that

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<sup>1</sup>(London, Geoffrey Chapman, 1990) Article 79, 'Paul'

Stephen's martyrdom is a mere lynching. This, however, seems to me to square perfectly with the account, even if it is merely taken at its face-value, quite apart from any consideration of Lk's methods of history-writing. In all this investigation it is essential to remember the popular historian's *horror vacui*. The historian - or at least the popular historian - abhors a void, and the slope from 'possible' through 'probable' to 'certain' is well-greased. If you insist on answers, you will be given them. So there are in fact too many imponderables for Stephen's martyrdom to give us a firm date after which Paul's conversion took place.

52 Date at which Pollio was governor of Achaia. By means of an inscription which mentions Pollio's governorship and the regnal year and number of acclamations of the emperor it is possible to date Pollio's governorship to spring/summer 52. Pollio's brother Seneca says that he was scared of fever and left Achaia early, which suggests that he left at any rate before the sailing season closed. This suggests a date for the end of Paul's 18-month stay in Corinth, during his second missionary journey, as spring/summer 52. This is probably the most reliable external dating for Paul's stay in Corinth - *if* we trust the data of Acts.

## **B. Groups of Pauline Letters**

In our New Testaments Paul's letters are printed in descending order of length, first the series of letters to communities, then the series of letters to individuals. This printed order carries no suggestion of chronological order. A convenient grouping is:

### *1. Early Letters: 1-2 Thessalonians.*

Of these the authorship of the first is undisputed. Some would dispute authorship of the second.

### *2. The Great Epistles: Galatians, 1-2 Corinthians, Romans.*

These make up the norm for Pauline letters. Their authorship is undisputed. Some have however suggested that Second Corinthians is in fact a collection of several Pauline letters.

### *3. The Captivity Epistles: Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, Philemon.*

Each of these claims to have been written by Paul in captivity. Each of them (except Philemon) has a problem: Philippians is again possibly a collection of Pauline notes. Colossians and Ephesians show a considerable development of thought and language from the Great Epistles; there is dispute whether such development within five years is psychologically plausible. In addition, Ephesians has the problem that it seems to use in a curiously deliberate way ideas and words taken over both from Colossians and from the earlier letters.

### *4. The Pastorals: 1-2 Timothy, Titus.*

These three letters suppose a mission of Paul to the East after his captivity in Rome. Their Pauline authorship involves several problems, and they are normally considered post-Pauline and pseudepigraphical. In this study they will not be discussed.

## **2. The Historiography of Acts**

Christian writers have too often considered the Book of the Acts in the void, assuming that it should be read in the same way as modern historical writing. There is, however, a perfectly good literary context in which it must be placed. Rather than among the great and sophisticated

historians such as Herodotus and Thucydides, it should be placed in the genre of popular literature, which proliferated at this period. It is convenient for us to divide these into scientific and fictional works.

### *1. Scientific Works*

Loveday Alexander<sup>2</sup> has established that Luke's prose-style is midway between the vulgar, rough, kitchen Greek of Mark and the literary Greek of *belles lettres* of the period. This 'technical prose' (*Fachprosa, Zwischenprosa, ein Schreibtischprodukt*) is the common language of the treatises of the period, characterised by Dr Alexander as 'well-used literary language, distinct from the literary Greek of the period' (p. 171). This sort of scientific treatise is very varied, and is constituted by such works as

Apollonius of Perge (262-190 BC) of whom 4 books of geometry survive in Greek and three in Arabic.

Archimedes of Syracuse (287-212), *On the Sphere and the Cylinder, On Floating Bodies, etc.*

Artemidorus 1. of Ephesus (fl. c. 100 BC) geographer  
2. of Daldis in Lydia (late 2nd AD) *On the Interpretation of Dreams.*

Dioscorides (mid 1st AD) medical treatises

Erotian (c. 60 AD) medical writer

Hero of Alexandria (late 1st AD) on mechanics

Thessalus of Tralles (mid 1st AD) on medicine

Vitruvius (fl. 30 BC) on architecture.

### *2. Fictional Works*

Perhaps even more important for our purposes are the airport- or station-bookstall novels of the period (pulp novels). One example of this type of work is *Chaereas and Callirhoe* (torn pages of which date it at latest to the 2nd AD). It has the following story: after the perfect love-match, in a fit of jealousy Chaereas of Syracuse hits his wife Callirhoe and leaves her for dead. Her body is found by tomb-robbers, revives and she is sold as a slave. After many adventures Chaereas leads the Egyptian army to victory over the Persians, finds Callirhoe among the captives, they sail home, and all live happily ever after. Chaereas' search is full of adventures such as unexpected escapes from captivity, shipwrecks, outspokenness before authorities and vindication by them. Heliodorus' novel *Charicleia* (c. 220) has the same sort of combination of adventures with pirates, storms, disguises, recognitions and final bliss.

The Acts of the Apostles, of course, avoids romance. However, it is certainly enlivened by the

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<sup>2</sup> Loveday Alexander, *The Preface to Luke's Gospel* (Cambridge University Press, 1993)

sort of stories just mentioned. No doubt it was expected that such an account should include elements of this kind, to which Luke's brilliant story-telling technique was well suited. For a discussion of the historicity of Acts it is important to differentiate between three elements: factual details, speeches and extended scenes.

### 1. *Factual details*

AN Sherwin White long ago showed<sup>3</sup> that the geographical and political details of Acts are impeccable. In this respect Luke is a model historian by modern standards. In the complex eastern mediterranean world there was a multiplicity of different constitutions, free cities, colonies, etc. Luke invariably gets the constitution and titles of magistrates right: the chief magistrate at Ephesus is the *grammateus*, with other important officials being the *Asiarchs* (Ac 19.31). The Roman colony of Philippi is governed by *strategoï* (Ac 16), but Thessalonica by *politarchoi* (Ac 17.6, 8); these details have recently been confirmed by archaeology. Similarly his knowledge of how to attempt to save a ship in a storm (Ac 27) is admirable, as is shown by other contemporary stories and depositions for insurance lawsuits.

This shows only that Luke is a careful writer who has done his research properly. In the case of the shipwreck it means no more than that he had read the many accounts of adventures at sea which were current at the time<sup>4</sup>. It is still entirely compatible with fictional narrative.

### 2. *Speeches*

For speeches in ancient histories there were conventions which stemmed from Thucydides, who wrote, 'My method has been to make the speakers say what in my opinion was called for by each situation'(I.25.2). It became standard practice for historians to put in the mouths of leading characters their own editorial comment on the significance of an event. For instance, it was the convention, particularly before a decisive battle, to represent the two opposing generals as making a great speech outlining the issues at stake. Two salient examples from historians of about this period are the opposing speeches of the two leaders at the battle of the Mons Graupius, the Scot Calgacus and Agricola himself, in Tacitus' *Agricola* (30-34), and Josephus' speech of Eleazar (*Jewish War*, 7.8.6) which inspired his followers to mass suicide at Massada (no survivors to relate the speech!).

Of this kind is clearly Stephen's speech in Acts. In many ways this speech is a turning-point in the story, a hinge in Luke's composition, concluding the Jerusalem part of the Book, and indicating the significance of the death of Stephen the prophet, after the model of the death of Jesus the prophet, both killed by the Jews. It is somewhat artificial to suppose that the murderous mob exercised such quiet restraint for 56 verses before hustling Stephen to his death. Rather it should be said that this speech draws the line under events in the first chapters of Acts, explaining why it is that the authorities at Jerusalem were bound to persecute Christians: the Jews had always refused the messengers from God. Similarly Peter's speech at Pentecost, depending as it does on the Greek form of the quotation from Psalm 16.8-11 ('You will not allow your holy one to see *corruption*' instead of Hebrew 'the pit'), represents Luke's comment on the

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<sup>3</sup>*Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1963)

<sup>4</sup>cf. Luke T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* [Sacra Pagina], (Collegeville, Liturgical Press), p.448)

significance of events. Rather than presenting a verbatim, tape-recorded version of the speeches, which a modern reader might expect, Luke is giving his contemporary readers what they would have expected, namely the author's view of the issues at stake.

This makes it all the more remarkable that Paul's speeches do bear some accommodation to the mentality and ideas apparent also in his letters - especially in view of the fact that there is no indication that Luke knew Paul's letters, or indeed knew even that he wrote any. Many of the themes of Paul's speeches in Acts are, of course, Lukan. Notably Pauline themes, however, are

1. The stress on forgiveness of sins, from which the Torah cannot justify, offered to believers (13.38), corresponding to the theme of faith rather than Torah in Rm. It should, however be remembered that forgiveness is also a central Lukan theme.
2. The possibility of knowledge of God through nature (17.27, cf. Rm 1.19-23) and God's forbearance to the ignorant (17.30, cf. Rm 3.25-28).
3. Particularly close is Paul's farewell speech, delivered to the elders of Ephesus in Ac 20:
  - a. Paul's protestations that he depended on no one for money (e.g. 2 Cor 11.7-11) are close to those of Ac 20.33.
  - b. 'I place no value on my own life' (20.23) is close to Phil 1.21-23 and other passages.
  - c. His general harping on the theme of his service of the Lord in suffering, cf 2 Cor 1.8-9; 11.23-31.

With Paul's letters in front of him, a modern forger could do a much better pastiche - as Luke did a much better job with the LXX in front of him in Lk 1-2 - but then he does not seem to have had Paul's letters before him. Quite possibly they were not available to him, being still uncollected, and lodged only in the recipients' community. Possibly it simply did not occur to him that the letters would be a useful resource. After all, they were incidental letters written to respond to difficulties in particular, which Luke was not concerned to discuss. It is notable that Plutarch, in his life of Cicero, does not make use of Cicero's *Letters*, which had been published. At most Luke can be working with a generalized memory of Paul's teaching.

### 3. *Extended scenes*

In his construction of little scene Luke does seem to have built up stories to convey his theological message by means of story. A few examples must suffice:

1. The escape of Peter from prison (12.1-17)  
Divinely-arranged escapes from prison are part of the stock-in-trade of Hellenistic novels, beginning with the escape of Bacchus from prison in Euripides' *Bacchae*. Another succinct example comes in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (3.699-700), Acoetes the Tyrrhenian is freed from Pentheus' captivity:

sponte sua patuisse fores lapsasque lacertis  
sponte sua fama est nullo solvente catenas  
(spontaneously the doors flew open,

spontaneously, 'tis said, untouched by hand,  
the chains fell from his arms).

In this story the doors open and the chains fall off *sponte sua*, exactly as in the Peter story. Luke Johnson sees the story as a mirror-image of the story of the empty tomb, 'a demonstration that the resurrection of Jesus continues to empower his apostles' (p. 219). Detailed similarities with the resurrection-story are the arrest, the leading forth, the angel, the refusal to believe, the message from Peter to tell these things to the others, the dream/ghost-like quality of the whole narrative. The same theme of angelic release from imprisonment occurs, of course, also earlier with 'the apostles' at Jerusalem (5.18-21) and later, by means of an earthquake, with Paul at Philippi (16.25-40).

### 2. The acceptance of Barnabas and Paul as gods (14.12)

The mistaking of gods for humans is frequent enough in the Hellenistic novel (examples in Johnson, p. 248). Perhaps the closest parallel to our incident is the charming Ovidian story of Baucis and Philemon in Phrygia (near the scene of this incident in Acts), who welcome Zeus and Hermes to their home in human form, and in reward are turned into a double sacred tree, *de gemino vicinos corpore truncos* (*Metamorphoses*, 8.720). Perhaps the people of Lystra were hoping for the same reward.

### 3. The storm-scene (27.10-44)

The marine details are impeccable, as we have already remarked. But again the conventions of the Hellenistic novel come into play. Paul is portrayed as the shipwrecked philosopher is often represented, calm in the midst of the storm. Perhaps more exactly, he is portrayed also as the prophet, first warning of the impending danger, and then (like Jonah) announcing that no one will be lost. The fact of Paul's shipwreck cannot be dismissed as fiction, for he himself writes (2 Cor 11.25) that he was shipwrecked three times, and spent a day and a night adrift at sea. It is chiefly the way he, a prisoner, takes command that rings a little false.

## **3. Incidents from Paul's life mentioned in both Acts and Paul's own letters.**

These three samples of Luke's historical writing are designed to show the power of God at work in various ways in the early Church. For the outline of Paul's life, however, two events play a very important part: the incident on the road to Damascus and the series of visits to Jerusalem.

### *1. On the road to Damascus - conversion or vocation-narrative?*<sup>5</sup>

Like Peter's vision at Joppa (which justified the admission of Cornelius and gentiles to the Christian community), the importance of this incident for Luke is shown by its triple repetition. It is narrated first in the historical sequence of the event, secondly by Paul in the Temple and lastly by Paul before Agrippa and Bernice (chapters 9, 22, 26). In accordance with Hellenistic conventions, elegant variations occur in the telling. For instance in 9 the bystanders hear the

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<sup>5</sup>cf. Gerhard Lohfink, *Paulus vor Damaskus* (Stuttgart, 1965)



voice and stand speechless, whereas in 22 they do not hear it but fall to the ground; both of these are theophany-motifs. In 22, where it is important to stress that Paul's new attitude is in accordance with Judaism, the conversion-account is immediately followed by a confirmatory vision in the Temple. In 26 (where some Greek elegance is particularly suitable) the voice speaking, presumably in Aramaic, includes the Greek proverb about kicking against the pricks.

In painting this scene Luke uses biblical models to convey its meaning, just as he did in the scenes of the Annunciation or of Pentecost. The basic model is the story of Heliodorus, persecuting God's faithful people in Jerusalem. As he arrives in the Treasury, he is felled to the ground by two angels and enveloped in darkness, left speechless and has to be carried away by his attendants. The high priest Onias (note the same name as Ananias, who baptizes Paul!) is prevailed upon to offer sacrifice for his recovery and he is converted (2 Mc 3.24-35).

However, the Acts-story is also, and chiefly, a vocation-narrative or commissioning. So much is clear from the parallel with other biblical narratives, for instance, the Call of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac in Gn 22, the Call of Jacob to go down to Egypt in Gn 46, the Call of Samuel in 1 Sm 3. Each has the same sequence of four elements:

1. Double address: Saul, Saul
2. Reply: Lord, who are you
3. Identification: I am Christ whom you persecute
4. Commission: Stand up and go...

But, although this account in Acts is formalised, it expresses perfectly three (perhaps four) fundamental ideas in Paul's own thought about his ministry, the importance of all of which will appear in the course of discussion of the letters:

1. The work of the apostle is primarily to preach the gospel of Christ - whereas elsewhere Luke insists on the importance for the apostolic office of continuity with the earthly ministry of Jesus.
2. 'To me life is Christ' (Phil 1.21) and the whole doctrine that Christ is in the members of the Church.
3. Witness to the risen Christ (1 Cor 15.3-8), whom he has seen.
4. Perhaps from his vocation itself also stems Paul's teaching that his is a ministry of light (2 Cor 3.7-18).

A more fundamental question still is whether the experience of the divine which Paul invokes in 2 Cor 12.1-4 is in fact the same as the experience of Christ which Acts describes on the Road to Damascus. Is Paul giving an interior account, couched in the imagery of the apocalyptic writings, of the event of which Acts gives a dramatic exterior account?

## *2. Visits to Jerusalem*

In Acts Paul visits Jerusalem six times (9.26-29; 11.29-30; 12.25; 15.1-2; 18.22; 21.15-17). This is part of Luke's theme that Jerusalem is the centre from which the gospel spreads, and the source of unity of the Church. The theme of unity is constantly stressed by him (e.g. in his doctoring of the matter of the appointment of the Seven in Acts 6.1-6, who seem in fact to be not so much 'deacons' in charge of material things, as a hierarchy for the Hellenist

community, in parallel to the Twelve, who are the hierarchy for the Hebrew-speakers. See NJB note f to Ac 6.5). Consequently Luke represents Jerusalem as Paul's spiritual focal-point, to which he returns like a homing-pigeon. The first of these may be the visit mentioned in Ga 1.18, three years after his conversion, when he saw only Cephas and James. The last may well be the visit with the Collection projected in Rm 15.25. The middle visits may all represent the visit 'after 14 years' when 'in a private session with the recognised leaders, I expounded the whole gospel that I preach to the gentiles' (Ga 2.1). This corresponds well enough to the 'Council of Jerusalem'. Such constant recourse to Jerusalem is not the impression given by Paul's letters. In Galatians Paul is more concerned to stress how seldom he visited Jerusalem. And the final visit with the Collection seems to have been a very special event, long prepared. There may have been other visits which Paul has no occasion for mentioning in his letters subsequent to Galatians. It depends how serious was the rift occasioned by the incident at Antioch (see p. 15).

#### **4. Other events in Paul's life**

This leaves to be discussed Paul's escape from Damascus under Aretas and the end of Paul's ministry.

##### *1. The escape from Damascus (2 Cor 11.32-33)*

Aretas ruled Damascus only for two years, 37-39 A.D.. In Ga 1.17 Paul says, 'later I came back to Damascus' before relating his first visit to Jerusalem as a Christian to meet Cephas and James 'after three years' (from his conversion?). The escape in a basket could be at the end either of his first visit to Damascus or of his second. This does, however, give us the important date that Paul was established as a Christian well before 39 A.D. Incidentally, Luke seems to have only a vague and inaccurate account of this event: he attributes Paul's flight to trouble from the Jews because of his preaching (Ac 9.23-25), whereas Paul himself says that the governor Damascus puts guards round the city (2 Cor 11.32).

##### *2. The end of Paul's ministry*

This is bound up with questions about the authenticity of Pastorals, which must be left till later. But at least the ending of Acts with Paul in custody in Rome cannot validly be used as evidence against their authenticity.

It has been suggested that the reason why Acts ends where it does, with the mention of Paul's two-year captivity in Rome is that everyone would know that after two years he was released and would have continued his work. There is a hoary and widespread theory that if an appeal was not heard within two years the captive was released. Sherwin White<sup>6</sup> showed that this was based on misinterpretation of one text. In any case, Luke would never leave such a matter hanging in the air and unexplained.

In fact Acts ends where it does because Luke has brought two themes to an end:

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<sup>6</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 112-113

1. In Ac 1.8 the apostles are to be 'my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judaea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth'. In contemporary Jewish literature this expression can be used as a code-name for Rome (*Psalms of Solomon*, 8.15). Thus Paul's arrival in Rome completes the geographical plan of Acts.

2. One of Luke's most important themes is that the Christian message is the completion of Judaism. Paul preached always first to Jews. Only when these refused the message did he turn to the gentiles. Therefore three times, in the three segments of his missions, there occurs a triple scene:

1. Paul is rejected by the majority of Jews (not all, for some accept the message and so make Christianity the true fulfilment),
2. he turns to the gentiles, and
3. he certifies that this fulfills the prophecies.

This occurs first in Asia Minor, at Antioch in Pisidia, where Paul quotes Isaiah at them and shakes the dust off his feet (13.46-51). Next in Greece at Corinth, on the second journey, Paul uses the biblical phrase, 'Your blood be on your own heads' (NJB Ac 18.6g) and shakes his cloak out in front of them. Thirdly and finally in Rome he quotes at them the passage of Isaiah 6.9-10, used also in Mk 4 and in Paul's own passionate lament over the Jews, Rm 9-11. This provides a satisfactory theological rationale for ending the story.

### **5. The 'We-Passages'**

Four passages in Acts (16.10-17; 20.5-8, 13-15; 21.1-18; 27.1-28.16) employ the first person plural form, which could normally be expected to show that the author of the narrative was present with Paul 'on mysteriously sporadic portions of his missionary journeys' (Richard J. Dillon, *NJBC*, p. 722). It is indeed difficult to explain why the author should have registered accompanying Paul for these small fragments of journey spread over a decade.

A number of differences between Pauline and Lukan theology exist, raising the question whether the person behind the theology of Acts could have been a long-term companion of the fiery, dominating Paul and still maintained such an independent view-point.

1. *The concept of 'apostle'* differs widely in Acts and in Paul. Acts uses the term only of the Twelve, and suggests (1.21-26) that only those who accompanied Jesus from the baptism onwards could be counted apostles. Paul, however, uses the term far more widely, including certainly himself and his helpers, and possibly even a woman, Julia/Junia (Rm 16.7).

2. In matters of legal observance it is difficult to see the advocate in Galatians of total freedom from the Law (see below) having his hair cut off in observance of a vow (Ac 18.18). It would have needed extreme pressure - not to say blackmail - to induce the Paul of Galatians and Romans to desert his principles and head in a diametrically opposite direction in the Temple in order to show 'that you too observe the Law by your way of life' (Ac 21.24, but see discussion p. 28).

Other explanations of the 'We'-passages have been put forward, e.g. that the author wished to stress that these stretches were authenticated by some eye-witness, though not necessarily himself. None of these is particularly convincing. The possibility suggested, however, by these widely-separated fragments and by the frequent visits to Jerusalem, is that Luke has schematized Paul's journeys into three great missionary tours. This question has been famously dramatized by J. Knox<sup>7</sup> 'if you stopped Paul on the streets of Ephesus and said to him, "Paul, which of your missionary journeys are you on now?" he would have looked at you blankly without the remotest idea of what was in your mind'. A less rigid pattern would certainly leave room for a number of incidents mentioned in 2 Cor 11.23-27 to which nothing in Acts corresponds.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this introductory chapter has been to establish the primacy of the evidence of Paul's letters. This is not to reject the evidence of Acts nor even to show that it should be despised as history. It is simply that Acts is not written as history in the way we would today write history. Even scripture must be understood according to the genre of its writing. It is anachronistic to read the details of the story as historically compelling; they should be understood more as the modern reader understands the details of a historical novel: they may be accurate in detail, or they may merely contribute to the general picture painted by the author. The nett result is that the second of the two schemata with which we began (p. 3-4) is far more helpful than the first. The grouping of the letters is a more helpful guide to the development and shape of Paul's thinking than the traditional historical outline, which should be used only very provisionally.

Other smaller matters for which the data of Acts are normally assumed to be correct may also be questioned, for example:

1. Was Paul really a Roman citizen? Acts makes clear on several occasions that he was. Twice Paul uses this with regard to being flogged (Ac 16.37; 22.25), since it was illegal to flog a Roman citizen, and Paul on both occasions dramatically (and rather tiresomely) announces his citizenship chiefly to embarrass the Roman authorities. It is also the grounds for his being taken to Rome for trial (Ac 25.11), itself a puzzling circumstance (Could he really appeal to Caesar before any sentence had been passed? Was there machinery at Rome for dealing with appeals from any Roman citizen anywhere? Why is there no sign of any appeal process during his time in Rome?). On the other hand, Paul himself writes that he was three times beaten with rods, a Roman penalty (2 Cor 11.25), and nowhere makes mention of his Roman citizenship (though, of course, it is more important to him that 'our citizenship is in heaven', Phil 3.20). Is the Roman citizenship an invention of Luke's as part of his apologetic that Christianity deserved the good will of the Romans?

2. Was Paul really from Tarsus and the son of a Pharisee (Ac 23.6)? There is no evidence of Pharisees based outside Judea, which would rule out the combination of a Pharisee, Paul's father, resident at Tarsus. Paul himself claims to be 'a Pharisee according to the Law' (Phil 3.5, i.e. according to his legal observance), but this says nothing about his

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<sup>7</sup>*Chapters in a Life of Paul*, 1950, p. 42

ancestry, only about his personal attitude to the Law. It would remain open that Paul/Saul joined the Pharisee party later in life, or indeed that he is here merely stressing the strictness with which he observed the Law. There is, however, as we shall see, no doubt that Paul was thoroughly familiar with and practised in the principles of scriptural exegesis used by the rabbis of his time.

### **Personal Work**

Take the Letter to Philemon and work on it. This is the shortest of all Paul's letters, and in many ways a microcosm of others.

1. Read the letter carefully once or twice. It will be helpful to use a Bible which offers sections with cross-headings (such as the *NJB*).
2. Read critically the notes and the introduction to Philemon in the *NJB* (p. 1862). Read other short introductions and commentaries, e.g. Joseph A. Fitzmyer in *NJBC*, article 52, and J.L.McKenzie's comments in his *Dictionary of the Bible* (p. 670).
3. Note how the commentaries contradict each other. Is it a personal or a public letter? What is Paul's attitude to slavery? Does he here try 'to transform or interiorize the social structure' (if you understand what this means)?
4. Re-read the letter and appreciate Paul's humanity, warmth and humour, especially his puns on 'Onesimus' (use the notes).
5. Write a reply from Philemon to Paul. Observe the formal structure of greeting, thanksgiving and final good wishes.

## Chapter 2. The Lord comes like a Thief in the Night

### 1. Thessalonica

Paul's letters were written to real communities of Christians, responding to their needs, often to their queries. They are therefore real communications with people. It is useful when reading them to have an idea of the communities to which they were sent.

The modern city of Thessalonica, the second largest city of Greece, is built over the ancient town. This has made it difficult to discover much of the ancient town or its buildings. Only the odd arch or two remains standing from the times of the Roman Empire. But the continuous history of the town is itself significant. As soon as the northern part of Greece began to open out, in the reign of Alexander the Great, this city was built because of its natural geographical advantages. It has an excellent natural harbour, and stands at the end of a natural road-route into the interior. The motorway from Belgrade and the Danube dips down to the sea there. In Roman times it was also the point at which the great Via Egnatia hit the sea-coast. This important trunk road was the land link between Rome and the East, running from the West coast of Greece to Constantinople. Such has remained the importance of this link that, from the motorway now following the same route, the ancient bridges, dating in part back to Roman times, can still be seen. Perhaps more important in an age when transport by sea was immeasurably easier than transport by land, Thessalonica provided the opening onto the Eastern sea for goods both from Rome and from the northern part of the Empire up to the Danube.

This goes to show that Thessalonica was a natural centre of trade, a bustling sea-port, at which convoys to and from the interior would be constantly loading and unloading. There would be pack-animals, carts and traders everywhere. Most of the big trading cities of the Mediterranean had an important Jewish presence. If for no other reason, the banking system was already widely developed, and (as in the modern world) the mutual trust and relationships between Jewish groups spread over the world made the exchange of money easier. Their financial contacts will have played an important underpinning and facilitating role for the traders and shippers of the port. It is even possible that Paul the sail-maker may have had personal contacts there.

It is from Acts 18.3 that we learn that Paul was a tent-maker. The letters themselves make clear only that Paul earned his living by the work of his own hands (1 Thess 2.9; 1 Cor 4.12). To be a tent-maker would be a convenient trade for an itinerant preacher or herald of the gospel. He would need to carry only minimal tools, and his products would be needed in a variety of situations. Apart from the canvas used for sails and covered wagons, awnings were used to keep off the summer sun in the courtyards of private houses, in the forum and even for such huge areas as amphitheatres (Pliny, *Natural History* 19.23-24). Tents were of course used as temporary dwellings for large gatherings, such as would assemble for the Isthmian Games at Corinth, and also for market-stalls (Juvenal, *Satires* 6.153-4).

The Jewish community was large enough to have a synagogue. According to Acts 17, when Paul reached Thessalonica, he preached there about Christ on three consecutive Sabbaths. Then the

Jews opposed to him 'enlisted the help of a gang from the market-place, stirred up a crowd, and soon had the whole city in uproar'. With this gang they set about persecuting Paul, who in fact escaped from the city. Luke does not actually tell us that Paul spent only three weeks there, and this impression may be a foreshortening of a much longer period. Luke does, after all, like to keep Paul moving! A short stay might account for the gaps in their knowledge of Christianity, but the affection with which he writes to the Thessalonians suggests that they were long-term friends.

The impression of uproar throughout the city may be something of an exaggeration, for Luke regularly stresses the virulence, and even violence, of the rejection of the Christian message by the majority of Jews. He depicts similar scenes at Ephesus and at Corinth. He stresses that in each city some of the Jewish community accepted the message, but the opposition of the majority forced Paul to turn to the gentiles. Paul's letter itself makes it clear that the gentiles formed a significant part of the Christian community, for they 'broke with the worship of false gods' (1.9), which would not have been said of Jews. But Luke does not tell us anything of how or when they were evangelised by Paul.

We do not know that Paul ever succeeded in returning to Thessalonica. In the opening of his letter - always a rather formal and flowery passage - he praises their faith and insists that 'we do not need to tell other people about it; other people tell us how we started the work among you, how you broke with the worship of false gods, etc' (1.8-9). Later on, however, he makes clear that he had been anxious to pay them another visit. This cannot have been merely out of affection, as he suggests (2.17), or it would not have been much substitute to send Timothy 'to keep you firm and encourage you about your faith and prevent any of you being unsettled by the present hardships' (3.2-3). Indeed, he makes it clear that he was worried about their faith and perseverance (3.5). So by the time the letter was written, it seems unlikely that Paul had paid them a second visit.

Read First Thessalonians carefully and make a plan of its contents which shows Paul's sequence of thought.

## **2. Paul's Letters**

### *1. Letter-writing in the Roman world*

Transport systems were so good in the Roman Empire that letter-writing was a common form of communication. Many letters have survived. Some are mere scraps, often found preserved in the dry sands of Egypt, such touching fragments as letters from schoolboys to their parents (much the same as their modern equivalents, asking for more pocket-money!). One voluminous correspondent was the lawyer and politician Cicero, about a century before Paul, whose letters to his family and friends have been collected into eight books. Another was the statesman Pliny, the tenth book of whose letters comprises 121 letters exchanged between himself as governor of the Roman province of Bithynia (northern Turkey) and the Emperor in Rome, sent by the regular imperial post, some 60 years after Paul's letters. He would write with such trivial questions as the age at which municipal firemen should be appointed, and what equipment should be provided for them. He also writes to ask how the Emperor wishes Christians to be treated. His description of their activities gives us invaluable information about Christian life and liturgy at the time. Both

of these clearly wrote with an eye on subsequent publication.

Paul did not write for literary publication, but sometimes directs, as in 1 Th 5.27, that the letter is to be 'read out to all the brothers'. Colossians 4.16 directs 'after this letter has been read among you, send it on to be read in the church of the Laodiceans, and get the letter from Laodicea for you to read yourselves'. At any rate some of Paul's letters were treasured and preserved, though of course we have no guarantee that all his letters have survived to be collected into the body of letters which we now have.

## 2. *Letter-formulae*

As with modern letters, there was a stock formula of beginning and ending, which needs to be appreciated. It would be a great mistake for future historians to deduce from twentieth century English letters that 'Dear...' implied any affection. One needs to know the customs, such as the convention that 'Yours very sincerely' is not warmer, but rather more formal and distant than 'Yours sincerely'. Letters written in French have a different set of conventions, such as the formal and courtly ending. Paul's letters have a definite set of conventions.

### - a. *Praescriptio*

Paul normally begins 'Paul to so-and-so' or 'to the church in such-and-such a place', sometimes joining to his own other names, perhaps subordinate co-authors or secretaries. It is difficult to be certain of their part in the composition of the letter. This formula is similar to the curt Roman formula '*Maximus S.D. Minimo*' ('Maximus wishes health/safety to Minimus').

But Paul follows it with a blessing, 'Grace and peace'. The latter half of this corresponds to the set Jewish formula '*Shalom*' ('Peace'). From Paul's pen, however, this may have a fuller sense, for 'peace' has become a special Christian greeting. The Christian message as a whole is called 'the good news of peace' (Acts 10.27). One of the faults of unbelievers is that they did not recognise the way of peace (Rm 3.17), for 'God has called us in peace' (1 Cor 7.15), and Jesus Christ 'is our peace' (Eph 2.14).

With this Paul has coupled the greeting usually translated 'Grace'. This too is a special Christian word. The basic idea behind this concept is favour freely bestowed without any merit. Just as a king or potentate spontaneously and unpredictably chooses a favourite on whom he lavishes his favours, so does God. The favours bestowed are only the sign of a living and vibrant relationship. So the 'grace' which Paul wishes in his letters is the relationship of God's gracious favour.

### - b. *Thanksgiving*

Paul follows the initial greeting with a thanksgiving. This occurs quite frequently in other letters of a religious character. Paul thanks God in prayer for the qualities and Christian life of his correspondents. This thanksgiving is normally rather rotund and formal, even rhetorical. It compliments the recipients of the letter on their faith and fidelity. This makes the deliberate absence of such a thanksgiving in Galatians all the more stunning: Paul has no praise to give them, but simply pitches straight in, 'I am astonished that you are turning away so promptly from the one who called you'. The thanksgiving normally also stresses the main theme of the letter. So in First Thessalonians, as we shall see, one of the main themes is the future coming of Christ. This is reflected in the conclusion of the thanksgiving: 'You are now waiting for Jesus, his Son,



to come from heaven. It is he who will save us from the Retribution which is coming' (1.10). In First Corinthians, where the gifts of the Spirit form a major theme, Paul thanks God that 'you have been richly endowed in every kind of utterance and knowledge... and so you are not lacking in any gift' (1.5-7).

- c. *Conclusion*

It was common enough to conclude a letter, even dictated, with a short passage which is especially personal; this was often in the chief author's own hand (as in Galatians 6.20). It would include good wishes. In secular letters the usual form for this is '*erroso*' ('be strong' or perhaps 'take care'). In Paul, however, this also has the form of a blessing, very often 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you'.

### 3. Paul's First Letter to the Thessalonians

Jerome Murphy O'Connor, in his *Paul, a critical life* (1997), maintains that First Thessalonians is a combination of two originally independent letters, since there are two thanksgivings (1.2-10 and 2.13-14) and two conclusions (5.23-28 and 3.11-4.2). He therefore divides into Letter A (2.13-4.2) and Letter B (1.1-2.12 + 4.3-5.28). Letter A would then be a short note, full of 'effervescent warmth' (p. 110), anxiety that they are managing to withstand the persecution which drove Paul himself out; Paul is sorely missing his friends at Thessalonika. Letter B shows less personal warmth (it was written later, and Paul is now more concerned with his new work and new friends at Corinth), and is centred on the problem of the Parousia. The chief objection to this theory is that it leaves unexplained why any editor should have so carefully inserted one letter within the other. It has also been forcefully suggested that Second Corinthians and Philippians (see p. 29) are each an assemblage of letters written to those churches and strung together when Paul's letters were collected. The situation is slightly different, in that in the latter two cases the separate letters are added at the end, one after another, rather than inserted in the middle of an existing letter.

1. *The earlier part of the letter* does not give any firm clue as to why Paul wrote when he did to the community at Thessalonica. There are plenty of expressions of admiration for their faith and their perseverance. There are plenty of expressions of affection: 'like a mother feeding and looking after her children...' (2.7), or 'we treated every one of you as a father treats his children' (2.11), or 'you are our pride and joy' (2.20). He calls them 'brothers' 17 times, more frequently than in any other letter.

One recurrent theme is that of persecution. This coincides with the atmosphere suggested by Acts 17, a considerable hostility on the part of the Jewish community. Paul confirms that this was already the case during his stay at Thessalonica: 'God gave us the courage to speak his gospel to you fearlessly, in spite of great opposition' (2.2). This state of affairs clearly continued. Paul stresses that he had warned them that they were certain to have hardships to bear, 'and that is what has happened now' (3.4).

The only concrete piece of information we have in the early part of the letter is about Timothy's visit. Paul had wanted to visit Thessalonica again but had been unable to do so. Instead, he had

sent Timothy, who had returned with a reassuring report (3.1-6). Putting together these two pieces of information, we may be justified in guessing that Paul's chief concern was whether they were managing to withstand the pressure of opposition, perhaps from the Jews, and that he is writing to express his relief and congratulation on discovering that they were holding fast.

2. *The later part of the letter* is concerned overwhelmingly with the future coming of Christ. Paul's teaching on this matter is sparked off by the problem that some of the Christians at Thessalonica had died.

#### **4. The Problem of Death**

The basis of the problem seems to be that they had not expected any Christian to die before the coming of the Lord. Now Christians had died without the Lord coming, and what were they to think? Was Paul wrong? Was Christianity a fraud? This already tells us something about what Paul had taught them. One may assume that the teaching which had been called into question by the death of some of their number was that Christians had already died with Christ in baptism, and that for them there was no more death. This, after all, is the teaching of Romans: 'We know that Christ has been raised from the dead and will never die again. Death has no power over him any more. In the same way, you must see yourselves as being dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus' (Rm 6.8-11). They understood this to mean that death would not have any grasp on the Christian, that is, that Christians would not die.

Perhaps what Paul meant (or at any rate should have meant) is better expressed in Corinthians, 'Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin' (1 Cor 15.55). What he really meant was not that death does not occur any more, but that it has lost its sting and its victory. For the Christian considers that death is a thing of the past, because of the life of the Spirit:

When Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the spirit is alive because you have been justified; and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you, then he who raised Jesus Christ from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through the Spirit living in you (Rm 8.10-11).

In Paul's view, the life given by the Spirit overrides any prospect of physical death.

The basic difficulty seems to lie in the eschatology which the Thessalonians had received from Judaism. In 4.13-18 Paul centres his explanations on a meeting with the Lord when he comes.

There is a strong stream in the eschatology of the prophets which looks forward to a happy meeting between those who are alive and the Lord when he comes: 'Blessed is he who perseveres and attains 1335 days' (Dn 12.12).

Survival till the end is regarded as a privilege, as in the Cantic of Simeon (Lk 2.30) and 'I tell you, many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see and never saw it, to hear what you hear and never heard it' (Lk 10.24).

The same is reflected in the Pharisaic Psalms of Solomon, 'Blessed are those who will be present in those days to see the good things of Israel at the gathering of the tribes which God will effect' (17.45, and in almost identical words 18.6).

Also in 4 Esdras 13.24 (which survives only in a Latin version), 'More blessed are those who are left than those who are already dead'.

In contemporary apocalyptic writings it is always the living, like Enoch himself (Gn 5.24), who are taken up into heaven. The Thessalonians were worried that if they were not actually alive when the Lord came they would be excluded from this blessing.

In reply, Paul's teaching uses this same apocalyptic imagery, 'We who remain alive will be taken up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Th 4.17). The word used is *eis upantesin*, a hellenistic word for a solemn, usually processional, meeting with the Emperor on a state visit. Elsewhere Paul uses similar technical terminology, that of the triumphal procession (2 Co 2.14; cf. Col 2.15). The imagery is that of joining Christ's triumphal procession. A Roman triumphal procession ended with the offering of the spoils of battle to God. In the Roman rite the offering was made to Jupiter on the Capitol hill, including the slaughter of captives. Paul adapts this language, making a bridge between this Roman custom and the apocalyptic scenes familiar to us from Jewish apocalyptic writings of the first century. One of the features of apocalyptic writing, seen in such writings as 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch, is journeys of heavenly figures to earth and of earthly figures to heaven. In Paul's adaptation it consists in Christ, as the triumphant general, handing the kingdom over to his Father: 'after that will come the end, when Christ will hand over the kingdom to God the Father, having abolished every principality, every ruling force and power' (1 Cor 15.24).

## 5. The Day of the Lord

This Pauline imagery looks like a modernisation of the biblical imagery of the Day of the Lord. Paul presents the Day of the Lord in Roman dress.

The idea of a Day of the Lord first occurs in Amos 5.18. A prime element in Amos is his campaign against social injustice. The rich and comfortable of Samaria are secure in their consciousness of election, which has only to be consummated at a Day of the Lord. The prophet rounds on them to say that this Day they are expecting will be one of deserved disaster:

Disaster for you who long for the Day of Yahweh.  
What will the Day of Yahweh mean for you?  
It will mean darkness not light,  
as when someone runs away from a bear  
only to meet a lion.

This conception of the Day of the Lord grows in importance and immediacy as prophetic and national awareness of the corruption of Israel increases, and the punishment of Israel and then

of Judah by the exile approaches (NJB note to Am 5.18).

With the exile of the Jews in Babylon the application of this Day of the Lord changes sharply. The Day of the Lord becomes a day when the oppressors of the now helpless Israel will be punished: 'The Day of the Lord is near for all the nations. As you have done, so will it be done to you: your deeds will recoil on your own head' (Ob 15). It will become a day of comforting for Israel (Joel 3.4; Zc 12.1; Mal 3.2). Increasingly, with the awareness of God's rule over the whole of creation (which was not yet clear in Amos' time), this Day takes on cosmic dimensions (e.g. Is 24.21-23)

When that Day comes, Yahweh will punish  
the armies of the sky above  
and on earth the kings of the earth.  
They will be herded together like prisoners in a dungeon  
and shut up in gaol  
and after long years punished.  
The moon will be confused and the sun ashamed  
for Yahweh Sabaoth is king.

This is the imagery of the *Dies Irae*, based on Joel 2:

As they come on, the earth quakes, the skies tremble,  
sun and moon grow dark, the stars lose their brilliance.  
Yahweh's voice rings out at the head of his troops,  
for mighty indeed is his army,  
strong the enforcer of his orders,  
for great is the Day of Yahweh  
and very terrible - who can face it? (vv. 10-11).

This imagery is, of course, also reflected in the scene of the crucifixion, not only by the darkness at noon - no mere casual meteorological observation, but an allusion to Am 8.9 (see NJB note h), but by the earthquake, the splitting of the rocks and the opening of the tombs described in Mt 27.51-52 (and see NJB note).

## **6. Current Eschatological Expectation**

It looks as though Paul had presented to the Thessalonians only one third of the application of this in the current eschatological picture. The three streams of expectation were:

1. Expectation that the living would go to greet the Lord, already described.
2. Expectation that the dead would rise to greet the Lord. Paul's answer to the Thessalonians' problem, that the dead would get there at the same time (Paul actually puts them first) was also traditional. This was the point of the resurrection of the dead, from Dn 12.13 onwards, 'But you, go away and rest, and you will rise for your reward at the end of time'. There was, as we have seen, a special blessing pronounced on those who lived to see the end, but in some traditions it is

stressed that the dead will be blessed at the very same time as the living (for example 4 Esr 6.20 says, 'they will all see it at the same time'). Now Paul stresses this simultaneity to the worrying Thessalonians:

those who are still alive at the Lord's coming will have no advantage over those who have fallen asleep... Those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and only after that shall we who remain alive be taken up in the clouds, together with them. (1 Thess 4.15-17).

3. Expectation of an earthly reign of the Lord lasting for a thousand years, so subsequently known as milleniarism. In the New Testament this is represented most strongly in Rv 21-22, though it can, perhaps, also be seen in 1 Cor 15: the fact that Christ is first to be king, before handing over the kingship to his Father, the fact that he is to be king until he has made all his enemies his footstool, and the last of the enemies to be done away with is death (vv. 24-26) - all these suggest a certain time-lapse between the coming of Christ for the resurrection and the final hand-over. In the Thessalonian letter, however, this aspect of eschatology plays no part.

## **7. Two Pauline Modifications**

Paul's modification of the Jewish eschatological scenario can be seen to consist in two important factors. The first is important but comparatively simple:

### *1. Christ has taken the place of God.*

Paul's view of Christ develops in the course of his letters, as he faces new challenges and comes to consider the place of Christ in relation to different new situations. At least, he presents to us different aspects of Christ. In First Thessalonians he considers Christ primarily from the point of view of the Second Coming. In Jewish thinking the Day of the Lord consisted in the great visitation by God. But now, for Paul, the Day of the Lord refers to the coming of Jesus (2.19; 3.13; 4.15; 5.2, 23). Elsewhere it has become the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 5.5), the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 1.8; 2 Cor 1.14), the Day of Christ Jesus (Phil 1.6), the Day of Christ (Phil 1.10; 2.16).

This is reinforced by quite definite allusions to the Old Testament, in which Jesus has taken the place of God:

- 3.13 echoes Zc 14.5, the coming of the Lord Jesus, *with all his holy ones*.

- The image of labour-pains, used in 5.2-3 of the coming of the Lord Jesus, is used of the coming of Yahweh in Is 13.8.

- 'Your dead will come back to life, your corpses will rise again', sings Isaiah 26.19, of the coming of Yahweh. Paul sees this fulfilled at the coming of Christ in 4.16-17

- the ram's-horn will sound for the coming of Yahweh, Is 27.13, just as the trumpet will sound in 4.16.

- Christ is *o ruomenos*, the deliverer from the wrath to come in 1.10, just as Yahweh is in Is 9.20.

In all these cases occurs what has been called rather transatlantically 'a referential shift from God to Christ'. The importance of it, of course, is as an indication that Paul now considers Christ in at least some respects to take the place of God, to perform at least one of God's functions, that of final judge and deliverer. The full implications of this have yet to be seen.

## 2. *The timing of the Day of the Lord.*

In the Old Testament and the Jewish writings there is no special urgency about the Day of the Lord. With the coming of Jesus this has changed. Christians have already been baptised into Christ's death, though full salvation is still a thing of the future.

Only once in Paul is 'saved' used in the past tense, and even then it is modified, 'we were saved in hope' (Rm 8.24). On the other hand, 'we *shall* be united with him in a resurrection like his' (Rm 6.5), 'we *shall* also live with him' (6.8), '*will* be made alive' (1 Cor 15.22). Christians already have the firstfruits of the Spirit (Rm 8.23), but still '*are being* transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory' (2 Cor 3.18). It is a process which is yet to be completed.

Obviously the whole problem arose because Paul's oral teaching to the Thessalonians, on his first visit to them, had led them to believe that the Second Coming would be fairly immediate, as it appears also in First Corinthians. He does not actually say when it will happen, and in fact refuses to do so; but his sayings on the suddenness of its coming are pointless if he does not expect it to be soon.

This in its turn raises fascinating questions about the teaching of Jesus, on which Paul must have been building. It is even possible that Paul's image of 'labour-pains' for the suddenness of the end (1 Th 5.3) goes back to an oral saying in Aramaic, the original language of Jesus. The same Aramaic word *hebel* could have been here translated 'labour-pains' which also underlies the Greek for 'trap' in Lk 21.35, 'that day will come upon you unexpectedly, like a trap'. It must be remembered that Paul is far nearer in time to the teaching of Jesus than the gospels which record his sayings. He was writing some 15 years after the resurrection, while the earliest gospel was written probably at least another 15 years after Paul. Even where the gospels have preserved for us the exact words of Jesus (which cannot be presumed), these are interpreted by the context in which the evangelists put them.

Albert Schweitzer read the gospel sayings as presenting a Jesus who was a disappointed eschatological visionary: he wrongly expected the end of the world to come first with the sending out of the disciples on their mission and then later (when it did not happen) at least at his death on the Cross. Even if this interpretation is not accepted, some value must be given to the urgency of the teaching of Jesus, the constant stress from the teaching of John the Baptist onwards that the sovereignty of God – the kingdom or kingship of God – was about to be established, 'The kingdom of God is close at hand' (Mk 1.15). In the 'crisis-parables' the ever-present image of the harvest is a pressing threat (Mk 12.1-12), paired by the image of the messianic banquet (Mk 2.19). The timing

of this event seems to be given by such sayings as 'In truth I tell you, there are some standing here who will not see death before they see the kingdom of God come in power' (Mark 9.1), or 'I shall never drink wine any more until the day I drink the new wine in the kingdom of God' (Mark 14.25), or - to the assembled chief priests - 'You will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming on the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14.62).

Such sayings certainly seem to suggest that the completion of the Kingdom will come within a single lifetime. At least one plausible interpretation of the story of the discovery of the Empty Tomb is that the women at the tomb are overcome with awe and astonishment that the last times of the world have broken in so suddenly. The general resurrection of the dead was widely expected at the end of time, and here, suddenly, it had arrived - at least partially. The frightened, astounded and awestruck women are reacting to an event which should have signalled the end of time.

In the course of the New Testament, however, there seems to be a progressive backing-off from the immediacy of these sayings of Jesus as the Parousia fails to occur. Matthew determinedly shifts the Judgement to the end of a period in which good works must be performed (the Parables of the Sheep and Goats, of the Wedding-Guest without a Wedding-Garment). Luke similarly stresses that it is not for the disciples to know 'the times and dates which the Father has decided' (Ac 1.7). Finally 2 Peter 3.8 refuses any time-scale by announcing that 'with the Lord a day is like a thousand years'.

Was Paul wrong in his interpretation of Jesus? More daunting still, was Jesus wrong in his expectation of the end? An alternative explanation is that Jesus used the symbols of his time to indicate the Day of the Lord, the decisive moment in history, without any explicit implications for the ending of the space-time framework of the universe as we know it. Paul, thinking in terms of the current apocalyptic imagery, doubtless expected the final moment to come very soon, and stresses the imminence and hope of this moment. For further discussion of New Testament eschatology, see David Aune in *ABD* volume 2 (1992), col 599-607.

## **8. The Second Letter to the Thessalonians**

Already with this second letter we come up against the problem of pseudonymity. There was a convention at the time that a writing could be ascribed to a famous author in order to give it authority. This is less dishonest than it seems, for it was considered an act of homage to the famous author. It was not only before any laws on copyright, but seemingly before there were any conventions about ownership of a piece of writing. The attitude towards copying was quite different before printing and photocopying made diffusion of a text a simple matter. In these cases it seems that the later author felt that he was carrying on the tradition of the famous figure of the past, and interpreting his mind for the present, applying it to the new situation.

Examples from the first century are numerous. The *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, the *Book of Henoah* and *3 & 4 Esdras* are clearly pseudonymous. Nor is pseudonymity a bar to inclusion in the canon of scripture. In the Book of Proverbs several of the collections of proverbs are attributed to Solomon, no doubt on the grounds that his

reputed wisdom (1 Kgs 3) was considered the basis of all wisdom in Israel. Similarly the Book of Wisdom is called 'The Wisdom of Solomon', though composed probably in the mid-first century BC. The 'Psalms of Solomon', included in the Greek Septuagint though not in the Latin Vulgate, is similarly a Pharisaic collection from about the same time. In the New Testament also it has been vigorously argued that the gospels were originally anonymous and were subsequently (in the second century) attributed to their named authors. At the end of the New Testament period there is no doubt that Second Peter is also pseudonymous.

It is undeniable that there are many purely Pauline phrases in 2 Thess. The difficulty is that there are too many exactly similar words and phrases, combined with differences of thought. It looks as though an imitator has deliberately imitated the phrases exactly, in order to suggest Pauline authorship of the letter. At the same time, subtle changes have crept in which add up to make a pattern.

### *1. Words and phrases*

1 Th 1.2 We always thank God for you all... faith...love...perseverance.

2 Th 1.3 We must always thank God for you... faith...love...perseverance.

Note the grudging 'must'; the letter is less warm, and the formula occurs nowhere else in Paul, but also in 1 Clement 38.4 and the Epistle of Barnabas 5.3. The letter has several affinities with these writings which date from a generation later.

1 Th 3.12 (just before the closing section) May God our Father himself and our Lord Jesus Christ...strengthen your hearts

2 Th 1.16 (just before the closing section) May the Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father...strengthen you

Note the unusual 'himself', and the reversal of order. Putting 'Christ' before 'God' fits a later, more developed Christology better than the Christology of 1 Thess.

1 Th 2.9 We worked with unsparing energy, night and day, so as not to be a burden on any of you (repeated verbatim in 2 Th 3.8).

1 Th 5.12-14 (in the closing section) We urge you, brothers, in the Lord (repeated verbatim in the closing section of 2 Th 3.12-15).

### *2. Differences from Pauline thought*

- in 1 Th Paul says the Day will come suddenly, in 2 Th the author details events which will warn of its coming. In 1 Th the worry is that the Day will not come, in 2 Th that it has come already - differences which might perhaps occur if there were a long gap between the letters, but not a short one.

- 1 Th is full of personal warmth and chat (his travel plans), whereas 2 Th is sharp and peremptory, without any reason given for the change.

- in 2 Th the final autograph is adduced merely as a guarantee of authenticity (he protests too much), whereas normally (Ga 6.11; 1 Cor 16.21) it is used to impart a special message.



- 2 Th 1.12 'by the grace of our God and Lord, Jesus Christ' suggests the divinity of Christ, which is nowhere else stated so clearly in Paul. Similarly *kyrios* ('Lord', used of Jesus) frequently replaces *theos*=God (2 Th 3.16 for 1 Th 5.23 in a blessing, 'the God/Lord of peace'; similarly 2 Th 3.5 for 1 Th 3.11).

- 2 Th 2.2 'any letter claiming to come from us' presupposes that a number of Pauline letters were circulating, of which there is as yet no sign or likelihood.

The most likely solution, therefore, is that 2 Thessalonians is a letter facing a different situation. It assumes a realised eschatology, such as is expressed in Ephesians and Colossians some years later. It was deliberately written in a Pauline style, with some involuntary variations and some wooden imitations. It was given the address 'to the Thessalonians' because 1 Thessalonians is the Pauline letter which deals most fully with the problem of eschatology, though in a different situation with different worries. The unknown author will have attributed the letter to Paul on the assumption that it applied the Pauline teaching to the situation of his own day.

Other solutions are possible and cannot be excluded. One good possibility is that the letter is basically from Paul, facing a situation some time later, but making use of a different secretary. Paul's flexible creativity in responding differently and aptly to different situations is a feature which will continue to astonish any student of his letters. The somewhat wooden and not wholly exact imitation in 2 Thessalonians of phrases in 1 Thessalonians could be explained by the careful harmonisation of the second letter to the first by a secretary: both letters are from 'Paul, Silvanus and Timothy' (1.1), but perhaps Silvanus and Timothy played a more prominent and different part in the composition of the Second from the First.

### **Personal Work**

1. Try to recreate for yourself the Jewish notion of the Day of the Lord (Use McKenzie's *Dictionary of the Bible*, the *New Jerusalem Bible* footnotes to Amos 5.18m and 8.9h, the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*).

2. Write the letter that Silvanus might have written to a Christian friend at Thessalonica whose Christian mother has died.

## Chapter 3. Slaves and Sons

The excitement of the Letter to the Galatians is that here the distinctive doctrines and positions of Christianity begin to be worked out for the first time. The letter to the Thessalonians remains peaceful, and stays basically within the Jewish frame of reference - with, of course, the adjustments we have mentioned. But Galatians glows with the heat of a new position being forged. The basic question is here faced for the first time, whether Christianity can remain a mere sect or orientation within Judaism. There can never be any doubt that Christianity is the fulfilment of Judaism. The only question is whether the directions which Judaism has taken mean that Judaism itself has run off into a siding. The whole character of Christianity is at stake, as Paul argues for his view of the consequences of faith in Christ and his cross and resurrection.

First read the Letter to the Galatians carefully. Preferably use a version with cross-headings. It may be helpful to use the plan given on p. 33 to guide your reading.

### 1. The Jewish view of the Law

#### *1. The traditional Christian view*

According to the traditional understanding of Jewish piety, helped by Christian anti-semitism, pious Jews believed that salvation was earned by the works of the Law, circumcision, observance of the Sabbath and especially the alimentary precepts. Life was a matter of building up 'brownie-points' with God by successive acts of obedience to the Law. This led to the widespread hypocrisy criticised in Matthew, the most Jewish of the gospels, who (especially in Mt 6 and 23) castigates the Pharisees for parading their good deeds 'to win human admiration'.

Such a view of Judaism was further confirmed by the Reformation controversies. At that time the Catholics were caricatured in the same way as the Jews: they were attempting to earn salvation by indulgences, multiplication of Masses, pilgrimages etc, while the Reformers stood at Paul's side in their demand for *sola fides*.

#### *2. A corrective*

However this view has finally been recognised as a caricature. EP Sanders in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977), carried further by James Dunn in the essays published in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (1990) and now in his short commentary on Galatians (Cambridge University Press, 1993), have shown that it is a fundamental misunderstanding.

For the basic Jewish understanding of the Law at the time Sanders has coined the phrase 'covenantal nomism'. The Law was the gift of God and the revelation of his love for his covenant people, the children of Abraham. Salvation was offered in the covenant, and only within the covenant. Obedience to the Law was a response to this love and a sign of being within the covenant people. Belonging to the covenant people was certified primarily by circumcision, but also by the appropriate behaviour. Salvation was not earned, for it was a free gift. The purpose of circumcision and the other observances (especially food laws and sabbath) was to show that a person belonged to the covenant people; they were 'boundary-markers'. God gave the Law to

show how people should live within his covenant, so that obedience to the Law was a sign of belonging. These were the customs by which Jews in the ancient world were recognised as such, both by themselves and by outsiders. Dunn calls them 'badges of covenant membership' (*Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 192).

## 2. The Christian dilemma

The Gospels and Acts leave little doubt that Jesus did not make clear any position with regard to observance of the Law by his followers. Mark is much more dismissive of observance than is Matthew. Thus Mark reads Jesus' comments on cleanliness ('Nothing that goes into someone from outside can make that person unclean; it is the things that come out of someone that make that person unclean' Mk 7.15) as sweeping away all culinary restrictions: 'Thus he pronounced all foods clean', Mark explains (7.19). Matthew, however, deliberately omits this telling explanation, which suggests that in his community the restrictions still held. He also suggests that the Sabbath continued to have some importance (e.g. 24.20). As we saw before with regard to the imminence of the Second Coming (p. 25), we cannot insist that Jesus should have worked out and promulgated all the consequences of his mission.

The Acts of the Apostles reflects the uncertainty about the matter in the earliest Christian community. It was by no means obvious that non-Jews should be admitted to Christianity at all. Jesus had made contact with them only exceptionally. The Syro-Phoenician (gentile) woman had to win the cure of her daughter by the ready wit coupled to her faith in Jesus (Mk 7.24-30). The Gerasene demoniac, whose legion of unclean tormentors drowned themselves in the Lake, may or may not have been a gentile; all we know is that he lived in the gentile area of the Decapolis (5.1-20). It is, of course, significant that the first human being to recognise that Jesus was Son of God was the gentile Roman centurion after his death.

One of the main purposes of the Acts of the Apostles is to show that the extension of Christianity to the gentiles was divinely inspired. So Peter is sent to the first gentiles to be received by means of that strongest of Lukan divine persuasions, an interlocking vision (Cornelius is told by a vision to send for Peter [10.32] and correspondingly Peter is told by a vision to go to him [10.22]). When Peter arrives, the reception of Cornelius and his family is pre-empted by the Spirit coming down before Peter has finished his introductory speech (10.44). Further stress is laid on this story by its repetition twice, in chapters 11 and 15 before the Christian assembly. Similarly the vocation by the risen Christ of Paul, the apostle to the gentiles, is thrice repeated. Again thrice, in each area of the expanding mission (Asia Minor, Greece, Rome), Paul begins his mission to the Jews, but is forced to turn to the gentiles. This he does with a biblical gesture, hinting that this was the divine will. The heavy stress on the divine guidance of this move to include the gentiles suggests that it needed justifying.

But the inclusion of gentiles did not settle the question of the relationship between Jews and non-Jews within Christianity. On the contrary, it merely raised it! Before Galatians was written we know of two (possibly three, though the third cannot be dated) stabs at the problem:

1. *The 'Letter from Jerusalem'* (Ac 15.23-29), addressed to 'the brothers of gentile birth in

Antioch, Syria and Cilicia'. This letter does not even hint that converts must obey the Law in such important matters as Sabbath, circumcision. It lays down basically three restrictions, banning food sacrificed to idols, blood in meat, and illicit marriages (presumably marriage within the family degrees forbidden by Jewish Law, but permissible in Roman Law). These conditions would avoid situations which would make association with gentile Christians highly distasteful for Jewish Christians. But the relationship of this letter to Paul remains obscure: certainly, when writing to the Corinthians, he does not forbid the use of food sacrificed to idols. Was the letter a merely local ruling? When was it made, before or after the writing of Galatians and First Corinthians?

2. *The Row between Peter and Paul at Antioch*, described in Ga 2.11-14. Two factors in this ugly scene particularly deserve note:

a. It concerns association of Jews with gentiles, not gentile observance of Jewish Law. Of course if gentile Christians had observed Jewish Law, there would have been little or no problem. But it is not suggested that the only reasonable solution would be to prescribe such observance. Another reasonable solution (one which might have been preferred) would be to have two separate eucharistic communities within Christianity.

b. The dispute remained unresolved. Paul tell us that he publicly rebuked Peter/Cephas, but he never tells us Peter's reaction. Did Peter admit that he was in the wrong? Did he even think he was? If Peter had conceded the point, Paul would surely have trumpeted the fact, since it would have been an impressively strong argument on his side. The fact that Paul says nothing, leaves his question in the air (Ga 2.14) constitutes a strong argument *e silentio* that Peter never conceded. This would also account for Paul's seeming isolation after this event. It could be at this point that Paul split off from his erstwhile colleague and leader, Barnabas. Luke attributes the split to a 'sharp disagreement' over the suitability of John Mark (Ac 15.37-39). This may be less than the whole story. Paul admits ruefully that at the Antioch incident 'even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity' (Ga 2.13). There is no sign later in the Acts that Paul is working in conjunction with any of the other Jewish apostles.

3. *Trouble also at Philippi*

[Preliminary: The Composition and Division of Philippians

As for First Thessalonians (p. 17) and Second Corinthians, a case has been made for dividing Philippians into several separate letters. For two reasons it is odd that Paul launches at the end of the letter into a thanksgiving for the gift of money which he has received from the Philippians. Firstly, a thanksgiving is normally at the beginning of the letter, and secondly, Paul always wades immediately at the opening of the letter into his primary concern (witness the abrupt condemnation at the beginning of Galatians, and the opening diatribe in First Corinthians against the divisions within the community). Why should he save up till now his thanks for the gift of money which they have sent him? The preceding paragraph, with its personal messages (4.2-3) and its advice in valedictory style as though concluding (4.4-9a) and final blessing of peace (4.9b), seems to be an interrupted conclusion. These difficulties are solved if 4.10-20 is regarded as a separate

letter, Letter A. Its tone is somewhat defensive, as though Paul needs to justify himself against the accusation of accepting money unnecessarily. Such a tone appears again when the Collection for Jerusalem is at issue (2 Cor 8.18-20).

A conclusion of a letter appears to occur also at 2.19-3.1a, again with personal news and plans, and a final blessing, 'Finally, brothers, I wish you joy in the Lord'. It may be that this first part of Philippians (1.1-3.1a) is also a separate letter, Letter B. From this fragment we learn that Paul is in prison, no doubt awaiting investigation, and envisaging the possibility of being put to death (1.19-26; 2.16-18). The backwards-and-forwards of Epaphroditus and the proposed mission of Timothy (2.19-30) suggest that Paul is not too far from Colossae, which may indicate that his imprisonment is at Ephesus.

This leaves 3.1b-4.1 as a third, separate letter, Letter C.]

This section of Philippians is perhaps the bitterest and most caustic personal attack in all Paul's letters, on those who practise and urge circumcision. To begin with, in a single verse Paul calls them 'dogs', 'evil workmen' and 'mutilators'. The injurious name used by Jews for gentiles is now turned back on Jews who hold this point of view, suggesting that they put themselves outside the true people of God. The prime good work of Judaism is characterised as an evil work. Further, the sacred operation of circumcision is degraded (by a neat play on words, *katatome*, rather than *apotome*), into a mere mutilation. Later on (v. 8), he spurns as 'filth' - 'shit' would not be an unjustified translation - all the noble titles in which Jews took their pride. Finally (v. 19), he mocks the regulations about food as making a god out of the stomach. Worse still, by 'they glory in what they should think shameful', he actually goes over to the side of the gentiles, whose contempt and disgust for circumcision made it impossible for Jews to take part in athletic contests unless they somehow disguised their circumcision. Paul would not go to these lengths of coarse abuse on an intimate and delicate matter unless he felt that strong pressure was being put upon the Philippians to embrace the practice of the Law.

It seems likely, then, that the relationship of Jews and gentiles within Judaism remained unresolved when Galatians came to be written. The resolution of the problem could be regarded as the most striking single advance in the constitution of Christianity, paving the way towards a separation of Christianity from Judaism.

### **3. The Style of the Letter to the Galatians**

The most striking feature of the letter is its lack of thanksgiving at the beginning. Standard in Paul's letter-writing is a thanksgiving immediately after the initial greeting (p. 3-4), including often fulsome praise for the recipients of the letter. No such thing in Galatians! There is neither praise nor thanksgiving. Instead Paul launches immediately into reproaches, 'I am astonished that you are so promptly turning away from the one who called you' (1.6). Such hostile and wounding remarks are repeated at intervals throughout the letter: 'I am beginning to fear that I may, after all, have wasted my efforts on you' (4.11), or 'I am quite at a loss with you' (4.20). It is almost more upsetting that at the end of the letter, when Paul has had his say, he still cannot find it in his heart to send the personal greetings with which he usually concludes. He does manage the final 'grace', but before that almost pushes them away with, 'After this, let no one trouble me' (6.17)

and a final re-affirmation of the authority he earns by sharing in Christ's sufferings (compare p. 79-80). So there is real poignancy in the agonised 'My children, I am going through the pain of giving birth to you all over again' (4.19).

Further light is thrown on the nature of the letter if Hans Dieter Betz is correct (in his commentary, *Galatians*, in the Hermeneia series<sup>8</sup>) that the letter is composed according to the formal rules of rhetoric. It can be classified according to the well-known genre of an 'apologetic letter'. This means not that Paul is apologising, but that he is arguing and explaining a situation, justifying his stance (as John Henry Newman in his *Apologia pro Vita Sua*). The more formal it is, the more chillingly impersonal, unlike some of Paul's warm, vibrant letters to other communities.

The formal, rhetorical structure, corresponding to the rules laid down for a speech by the defence in Cicero's works, is in fact easily traced:

1.1-5 *Praescriptio* (address)

1.6-11 *Exordium* (intro) - statement of the issue, the Galatian rejection of Paul's gospel

1.12-2.14 *Narratio* (narration of events) - the story, intended to establish Paul's authority.

2.15-21 *Propositio* (argument to be proved) - Salvation comes to all not by the Law but by faith in Christ.

3.1-4.31 *Probatio* (proof)

3.1-5 The evidence of experience: the Spirit

3.6-14 The evidence of scripture

3.15-18 The analogy of a will

3.19-25 Digression on the purpose of the Law

3.26-4.11 Children of God entering upon the inheritance

3.12-20 A personal appeal

3.21-31 The allegory of Hagar and Sarah

5.1-6.10 *Exhortatio* - this is not quite a normal feature. It normally consists in an appeal for sympathy to the listening jury, and invocation of the gods. Paul, however, here exhorts his correspondents to give full rein to the freedom of the Spirit.

6.11-18 *Conclusio*

#### **4. The Argument of the Letter**

Each of the four main central sections deserves some special comment.

##### *1. Narratio*

This provides us with the fullest piece of consecutive autobiography of Paul that we possess. He is concerned to establish both that his authority is of divine origin and that it is not opposed to the teaching of the human authorities in the Christian community. There is a certain tension here, though it is easy enough to distinguish between Paul's authority and the content of his teaching.

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<sup>8</sup>Fortress Press, 1984, p. 14

In fact Paul's sense of divine vocation did not exclude his learning from human tradition. In First Corinthians he gives two excerpts of credal statements (on the eucharist and on the resurrection) which must have been learnt by heart, first by Paul and then by the converts to whom he passed them on: they depart slightly from the characteristic Pauline vocabulary, and in any case Paul uses the technical rabbinic terms of passing on tradition, 'the tradition I *received* and also *handed on* to you...' (1 Co 11.23; cf. 15.3). Paul speaks of a visit of 15 days to Jerusalem (Ga 1.18). If Luke is correct in claiming that Paul was educated at the feet of Gamaliel (the greatest of this generation of rabbis), he would certainly have been trained in learning by heart. Rabbi Resh Laqish learnt the whole of the *Torat ha-Qohanim* (the Torah of the Priests) by heart in three days (b. Yeb. 72b).

The situation is, however, not quite so simple. In the last analysis Paul does not succeed in sheltering behind the human authorities of the Christian community. Although he had previously twice 'checked out' with the authorities in Jerusalem, it is precisely against these authorities, James and Cephas, that he takes up his stand in the Antioch incident. On the human level he can claim only that in Jerusalem they recognised 'that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been entrusted to me' (2.7). When it came to the point, this did not stop them taking a different point of view on the relationship of circumcised and uncircumcised Christians.

## 2. *Propositio*

This is the nub of the whole argument of the letter. The whole burden of the letter is that some outsiders had attempted to divert the Christians of Galatia from the gospel preached by Paul, persuading them to return to the practice of the Law. Paul does not bother to tell us exactly who they were, nor exactly what they taught. But their stress on the Law was enough to induce Paul to formulate and express the attitude of the Christian to the Law.

a. There are only hints in the letter which suggest that those who pressed the claims of the Law were distinguished from the Galatian Christians themselves, that they were outsiders:

1. He always refers to the trouble-makers in the third person, while he addresses the Galatians in the second person (1.7-8; 3.1).
2. To Paul it seems as though they want to cut the Galatians off from him, so that the Galatians can centre their devotion on them (4.17).
3. They want to cut a figure by human standards, and avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ (6.12).
4. They are circumcised (6.13).

b. It is also difficult to see what they taught, because Paul does not see any need to give a fair and balanced picture of their teaching. Rather he caricatures it:

1. It can be presented as a 'gospel'. Paul denies that it is a gospel (1.6), but this denial suggests that the proponents put it forward as such.

2. It is concerned with the flesh rather than the Spirit (3.2). This, however, say little, for to Paul 'the flesh' opposed to 'the Spirit' is merely unredeemed humanity. This contrast is more a value-judgement than an explanation.

3. They depend on the works of the Law (3.10).

4. It concerns 'those powerless and bankrupt elements whose slaves you now want to be all over again' (4.9). This again is difficult to evaluate. Are the 'elements' the principles behind the Law, or some sort of powers which might be thought to rule the world? In the previous verse Paul refers to being 'kept in slavery to things that are not really gods at all'. Paul may mean merely false principles of conduct, or some powers which stand behind them.

5. It involves keeping special days and months, and seasons and years (4.10).

6. It implies being fastened again to the yoke of slavery from which Christ has set us free (5.1); this could be no more than an image of return to the Law, as in 4.1-7.

7. It requires acceptance of circumcision (5.2).

These details do not add much to the central picture given by Paul's rebuttal. No 1 suggests that it is still centred on Christ, so that it can be presented as 'good news'. Nos 2 and 6 are more value-judgements than indications of content. Nos 3, 5 and 7 show that it is concerned with legal observance. The main thrust of Paul's reply, and the principal advance of the whole letter, is that faith in Christ and baptism into Christ effect such a change that legal observance becomes irrelevant. To return to such observance is therefore to fail to recognise faith and baptism for what they are. What is Paul's alternative? This is contained in the *Propositio*.

Firstly and negatively, it must be made clear that saving justice does not come through the Law. This is stressed at beginning and end, verses 16 and 21: 'No human being can be found upright by keeping the Law' and 'if saving justice comes through the Law, Christ died needlessly'.

Secondly and positively, the heart of the teaching is in the two paradoxes, 'through the Law I am dead to the Law' (v. 19) and 'I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive' (v. 20). These must be taken in turn:

1. Throughout the letter Paul makes clear that he does not reject the Law. Paul's whole position and mental framework is thoroughly Jewish. The promises to Abraham run in his blood and form the canvas on which his world-picture is painted. But Paul's insight, the startling new division he made within Judaism, is a distinction within the very accepted structure of Judaism, a distinction between the promises to Abraham and the Law 'coming four hundred and thirty years later' (3.17). The normal Jewish standpoint was to see these two as inseparably related, two sides of the same coin, forming a single unity. Now Paul gives the primacy to the promises made to Abraham; these retain their full force (3.6-9, 15-18). By contrast, the Law and its prescriptions fade away as merely temporary structures.



Paul's position is, however, at the same time not a rejection of the Law but an appreciation of it. Christ supersedes the Law but does not make it worthless; rather his action builds upon it and brings it to completion. Hence the Law can be characterised in 3.24-25 as a *paidagwgo/j* (*paidagogos*). A *paidagogos* was the slave who looked after a young child, taught him elementary manners, led him to school, a sort of nanny or child-minder. It would be nice to think that, like modern schoolteachers, such a figure was regarded with a mixture of awe, affection and patronising mockery. In the ancient world, however, there may have been less tolerance, and such a figure could well have been cast aside as a mere drudge who has served his purpose. This would fit Paul's fierce polemic against those who still championed the Law.

But why '*through the Law* I am dead to the Law'? This must be taken with the next phrase, 'I have been crucified with Christ'. Despite his claim that the fulfilment of the promises cannot be considered to have become dependent on the subsequently-given Law, Paul does not complete the sundering of the two sides of the coin to the extent that the Law can be regarded as entirely irrelevant.

Rather the two, the promises and the Law, are joined together in Christ's death. On the one side Christ is the fulfilment of the promises, for the promises were made primarily to Christ, as Paul puts it, to Abraham and to his progeny, 'not in the plural but in the singular' (3.16). On the other side, the curse of the Law was that no one could accomplish it, and 'accursed be anyone who does not make what is written in the book of the Law effective, by putting it into practice' (3.10, quoting Dt 27.26). Christ, to whom the promises were made, took this curse upon himself, and 'redeemed us from the curse of the Law by being cursed for our sake, since scripture says, "anyone hanged is accursed"' (3.13-14). By taking the curse upon himself he nullified it and brought its effectiveness to an end. [This same process of thought will recur later in Romans, when Christ's obedience is seen as undoing Adam's crippling disobedience]

2. The second paradox at the centre of Paul's thinking is 'I have been crucified with Christ and yet I am alive'. The mechanics of this statement are explained more fully in Romans than in Galatians. Through baptism into Christ the Christian has put on Christ, and has personally taken on Christ's history: 'every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ' (3.26). By this means the Christian has received the position of Son (4.6-7).

The realism of Paul's thinking is disguised by the necessary English translation '*adoption* as sons'. '*Adoption*' looks like '*substitution*'; I adopt as a son a child who is not really my son. The Greek word *ui(o)qesi/a* by contrast means '*placing as a son*', '*constituting as son*', so that the son really holds this position by nature and not by substitution.

### 3. *Probatio*

The first and principal element of the *Probatio* is the experience of the Spirit. This factor (almost the only aspect of the *Probatio* which has not yet been touched) runs throughout the letter. In the *Propositio* he had made the ringing claim, 'I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me' (2.20). He now comes in more detail to what this means. It is striking that Paul can appeal to the phenomenon of the Spirit at work in the Christian community as an

undeniable datum that must be explained. If the 'favours you have received' (3.4) were not obvious, external as well as internal, there would be no point in appealing to them.

In this letter Paul does not mention the more 'unusual' or miraculous manifestations of the Spirit, such as healings and speaking in tongues, as he will in First Corinthians. He appeals to the spirit of sonship, the awareness of being a son: 'God has sent into our hearts the Spirit of his Son, crying "*Abba, Father*"'(4.6). He appeals also to the fruit of the Spirit, 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control' (5.22). These must be considered to be unmistakable, just as 'when self-indulgence is at work the results are obvious' (5.19). They are, in their own way, just as striking.

This, too, must be seen as related to the fulfilment of the Law and its completion in Christ. It also builds upon Paul's awareness, seen already in First Thessalonians (p. 8), that the final age has now begun, when the Spirit will be poured out. The Galatian Christians, sprung from Judaism, and now being drawn back to it, would be aware of these promises of the final days and would respond to them. For anyone versed in Judaism, the presence of the Spirit was a function of the last days.

After this I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity.  
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy.  
Your old people shall dream dreams,  
and your young people see visions. (Joel 3.1, quoted also in  
Peter's speech at Pentecost, Ac 2.17))

Corresponding more exactly to the phenomena mentioned by Paul, Isaiah looks forward to the time when

the Spirit is poured out on us from above.  
Fair judgement will fix its home in the desert,  
and uprightness live in the productive ground,  
and the product of uprightness will be peace. (Is 32.15-16)

#### 4. *Exhortatio*

Slavery and freedom have been themes recurrent throughout the letter, the state of slavery being represented by the Law. In chapters 4 and 5 alone 'freedom' occurs eight times, and 'slavery' another eight; it is almost an obsession with Paul! It is thoroughly understandable that, however much he loved and respected the Law, when he was freed from it, Paul had an overwhelming sense of freedom from restriction. What then is to replace the Law as a guide of conduct? Paul's whole language is different: he speaks of 'slavery' to the Law, but of being 'led by the Spirit' (5.5, 18), and of the 'fruit' of the Spirit, where no Law is appropriate (5.22-23). The generosity associated with living by the Spirit makes any externally-imposed restrictions unnecessary.

The most vigorous use of this contrast comes in Paul's use of the allegory of Hagar and Sarah (4.21-31). The full sting, not to say offensiveness, of this figure comes from its reversal of the natural and expected meaning of the contrast. Paul's Judaising opponents would no doubt have

used the contrast between Sarah and Hagar to reinforce their own view: the Jews were the promised inheritors, descended from Abraham through Sarah, while the gentiles, excluded from the promise, were linked to Ishmael. Outrageously, Paul uses his contrast of slavery and freedom to reverse this, and relegate the Jews to descendance from Ishmael.

To deepen the insult yet further, Paul applies the same figure to the city of Jerusalem. When Moses is commanded in Exodus 25 to make the sanctuary and its furnishings, God promises to show him a design for them. Ezekiel also sees a vision of a heavenly Jerusalem and describes its design in minute detail (Ezek 40-48). In the first century apocalyptic writings this heavenly Jerusalem was considered to be about to appear. Paul appropriates this 'Jerusalem above, that is our mother' (4.26) for his law of freedom, relegating to the Jews the currently enslaved Jerusalem, a city captive to the Romans.

Paul will return to many of these questions in his later great work, the Letter to the Romans.

### **Personal Work**

Suppose yourself to be one of the new Christians of Galatia. Write a letter to a friend who has been urging you to return to the practice of the Law. Be firm, but concede what you can to the attractiveness of your friend's position.

### **Further Reading**

Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* [Sacra Pagina 9] (Michael Glazier, 1992)  
James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*  
[New Testament Theology] (Cambridge University Press, 1993)

# Guide-lines for a Turbulent Community

## 1. Corinth in the first century

It is more than usually important to understand the circumstances of the Corinthians to whom this letter is addressed. The ancient city of Corinth had been destroyed in 146 BC, in an unusually aggressive and impatient period of Roman history, following a considerable amount of unrest. It was refounded a hundred years later by Julius Caesar. In Paul's time, therefore, the city was only two centuries old. It had three chief characteristics:

1. It was a port-town, controlling the Isthmus of Corinth, over which passed the major portion of shipping between East and West of the mediterranean. So feared was the dangerous Cape Malea, the southern tip of the Peloponnese, that merchants normally preferred to transfer their goods or even their entire ships from one side to the other of the isthmus. This made for a very large population of dockers and harbour-folk, with all the attendant difficulties of such people. It also meant for a wide diversity of rich and poor. The city had developed fast in the previous century. The grand civic buildings betoken considerable wealth. This has direct connection with some of the problems of the letter, for instance Paul's criticism of eucharistic parties, at which the poor had to sit outside and eat miserable food, while the rich gorged themselves from generous hampers. In fact no room in any house has yet been found in the widely-excavated town which would hold more than 40 people. Houses were built in *insulae*, a 'block' turning inwards, round interior courtyards. According to the design of town-houses at the time, one must think of the rich assembled in the *triclinium*, while the poor skulk in an obviously underprivileged and neglected position, in the peristyle courtyard outside.

2. It was a university town, renowned for its wisdom. This is related directly to Paul's discussion of Greek wisdom and may well account for the self-confidence, not to say arrogance, of the judgement of some of the Christians, who were so sure of themselves that they held to their opinions in blissful neglect of the feelings of others. It chimes in with Paul's representation of Christ as the true wisdom of God and his rejection of Greek wisdom as the worthless wisdom of this world.

3. It was the home of the Isthmian Games, held every alternate year. These were in fact more popular than the quadriennial Olympic Games, because they had more side-shows, more fringe-benefits than the Olympic Games. This would bring in business and money at all levels. Also, at least in the old days, Corinth was known as the fun-city of Greece. Strabo tells us that there were 1,000 licensed prostitutes in Corinth. Murphy O'Connor<sup>9</sup> maintains that at least by now this reputation was undeserved, on the grounds that there were only two unimportant temples to Aphrodite. Certainly by this time the slogan *Non cuivis homini contingit adire Corinthum*, originally said with a leer ('Not every man has the good luck to get to Corinth' - wink, wink), has come to mean something like 'Not everyone gets selected for the Olympic Games'. It has this meaning in Horace (Ep. 1.17.36). In more general terms it may mean that such a bustling and competitive city was not everyone's cup-of-tea. It may be that its liveliness as well as its central

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<sup>9</sup>Corinth

position were characteristics which made it attractive to Paul. Like Ephesus in Asia Minor, the trade and bustle of Corinth made it a focal point which could have great importance in the spread of Christianity.

4. There was a large Jewish population, as would be expected at such a mercantile centre. Not many Jewish inscriptions have been found, but a certain corporate strength is implied by their courage in unsuccessfully attempting to arraign Paul before the Roman pro-consul (Ac 18.12-17). This may also have some bearing on the problem of meat-eating.

The situation was not made easier by visits from different preachers with their different approaches and emphases. Apollos from Alexandria had visited Corinth and acquired a following; we may perhaps guess that those who favoured Greek philosophy were among these, since the Jewish community of Alexandria specialized in interpreting the Jewish faith in Greek terms, and Apollos himself was an accomplished orator (Ac 18.24). Possibly Peter too, who is mentioned with unusual frequency in First Corinthians, had passed through on his way to Rome; he may have been responsible for some of the scruples about breaking away from Jewish customs. But it was to Paul, as the founder of the community, that they turned for answers to their questions.

Now read First Corinthians. This pattern (simplified from the *NJBC*) may help:

<b>1. INTRODUCTION &amp; GREETING</b>	1.1-9
<b>2. DIVISIONS IN THE COMMUNITY</b>	1.10-4.21
A. Rival groups in the community	1.10-17
B. God has different standards	1.18-31
C. The power of Paul's preaching	2.1-5
D. True wisdom and the language of love	2.6-3.4
E. The right attitude towards pastors	3.5-4.5
F. Application to the Corinthians	4.6-13
G. The visit of Timothy	4.14-21
<b>3. THE IMPORTANCE OF THE BODY</b>	5.1-6.20
A. A case of incest	5.1-8
B. Clearing up a misunderstanding	5.9-13
C. Lawsuits among Christians	6.1-11
D. Casual copulation	6.12-20
<b>4. RESPONSES TO CORINTHIAN QUESTIONS</b>	7.1-14.40
A. Problems of social status	7.1-40
B. Problems from pagan environment	8.1-11.1
C. Problems in liturgical assemblies	11.2-14.40
<b>5. THE RESURRECTION</b>	15.1-58
<b>6. CONCLUSION</b>	16.1-24

## 2. The Genesis of First Corinthians

The community at Corinth kept Paul busy. By the time of writing of First Corinthians a

complicated series of interchanges had occurred:

1. Paul's first visit to Corinth in which he founded the community. He claims to have 'laid the foundations like a master-builder' (3.10), and 'even though you have 10,000 slaves to look after you in Christ, you still have no more than one father, and it was I who fathered you in Christ Jesus by the gospel' (4.15). In spite of this he protests that he himself baptised only Crispus and Gaius and the family of Stephanas (whom he describes as 'the firstfruits of Achaia' [16.15]). Apollos had also been at work in the community, 'doing the watering' (3.6) of the seed Paul planted. Cephas may well have played some part too, since he was regarded by some as the patron of their party, though this might conceivably mean only that they appealed to him, perhaps as the authority for some mild kind of Judaising (mild enough not to merit Paul's fury). As Paul says in those two precious passages of literal tradition, he must, in his first visit of catechesis or kerygma, have given them some elementary passages to learn by heart: 'the tradition I received from the Lord and also handed on to you...' (11.23; 15.3).

2. A previous letter (5.9-11) in which he wrote to them that they should have nothing to do with people who live immoral lives. He now precises those instructions to explain that he meant they must keep away from Christians who indulge in extreme vices.

3. The letter which constitutes the present First Corinthians is provoked by two sets of information, one oral and one written. In 1.11 Paul mentions that 'Chloe's people' have told him of the factions which are dividing the community. He may have received more information from Stephanas, Fortunatus and Achaicus, about whose arrival he says he is delighted (16.17). He had also been brought a letter containing not information but questions. The way Paul deals with these two sets of information or in-put is entirely different.

a. The sections where he has received oral information about what is going on at Corinth concern:

1. Their boasting and quarrelling, their party divisions (1.11-17; 3.3-4.21), their false idea of wisdom (1.17-3.2, 18-23; 4.1-21).
2. A case of incest (5.1-8).
3. Litigation before gentile courts (6.1-11).
4. Disorder in liturgical assemblies (11.17-24).

In all these sections Paul is writing about the past,

- he is direct and censorious, even angry and sarcastic,
- he speaks with his own authority, not attempting to cajole or persuade, but simply laying down the law,
- his treatment is black-and-white, without any appeal to compassion. He seems to make little attempt to understand the Corinthians' position.

b. The sections where Paul is responding to questions put to him by a letter from Corinth. These are easily discernible because he begins each new topic *περὶ* d/e\ ('But about...')

- 7.1 Marriage
- 7.25 Celibacy

- 8.1 Meat sacrificed to idols
- [11.2 (without peri\ de\ Veils in church]
- 12.1 Gifts of the Spirit
- 16.1 The Collection
- 16.12 Apollos' visit

Paul uses peri\ de\ elsewhere only 1 Thess 4.9 and 5.1, both times about topics on which he says there is no need to write to them - a conventional rhetorical ploy called by Quintilian *praeteritio* ('passing over'). Another literary feature is the quotation of the Corinthians' slogans, which Paul then immediately qualifies or corrects:

- 6.12 'For me everything is permissible' (repeated 10.23)
- 6.13 'Foods are for the stomach and the stomach is for foods'
- 7.1 'It is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman'
- 8.1 'All of us have knowledge'
- 8.4 'None of the false gods exists in reality'

A vexed question is whether the two verses (14.33b-35) which demand the total silence of women in church are in fact also such a slogan which Paul then contradicts. The importance of this is that these are the only two verses before the pseudepigraphic Pastoral Letters which hold this position. Certainly the succeeding words could be read as expostulation at these ideas expressed by Corinthians, 'Do you really think that you are the source of the word of God, or that you are the only people to whom it has come?' Since they can be excised without trace it has also been suggested that they are a later interpolation.

These two suggestions are not desperate moves to avoid Paul seeming politically incorrect; they are attempts to secure consistency. Elsewhere in Paul there is no trace of this attitude. In his lists of greetings women feature as 'fellow-workers in Christ Jesus', Prisca, Tryphaena and Tryphosa in the Romans 16 list alone. The most important name is that of one whom Paul greets as 'an outstanding apostle' (Junia) (Rm 16.7, in the accusative). The nominative of this could be masculine (Junianus), though there is no known example of the masculine name Junias. On the other hand 'Junia' is common enough. There is also strong MS evidence (P46) for 'Julia', which would leave no doubt at all that the title of 'outstanding apostle' was being given to a woman.

- In all these sections Paul is writing about the present and the future
- often envisaging hypothetical cases. The sentences are full of 'if...!'
  - he is systematic and calm, not critical or censorious.
  - he seeks to persuade and appeals to authorities.
  - he is aware of weaknesses and the need to accommodate them.

Paul's difference in attitude in the two situations is striking, his censoriousness about the news which has filtered to him and his sympathy in the cases about which they have consulted him.

### 3. The Trouble at Corinth

It is tantalising to try to build up a picture of what the basic trouble at Corinth, underlying all the others, can have been. The two factors which stare the reader of the slogans in the face are:

1. An overflowing confidence in their liberty (the repeated 'for me everything is permissible') combined with a certain arrogance ('all of us have knowledge', 'None of the false gods exists in reality'). These result in a certainty that they can transcend the temptations of the flesh ('It is a good thing for a man not to touch a woman'), and in the unfeeling contempt for the poor criticised in Paul's complaints about the eucharistic assembly. Paul is probably mocking this over-confidence when he contrasts them with himself in 4.8-10. He says they are honoured, wise, wealthy, kings, while he is the opposite of all these. It is also significant that these are all terms used by Philo (the Jewish writer of Alexandria, and Apollos was a Jew of Alexandria) to describe the heavenly man, the model of all human beings.

2. Allied to this is their complacency in the Spirit. This manifests itself in the prominence of glossolalia, or speaking in tongues, and in the possible reason for Paul writing to them about the Resurrection.

*a. Paul's attitude to glossolalia* is distinctly cool. He insists that he himself has the gift but does not use it (14.18). He compares it to thrumming on a lyre or a flute in which the notes are indistinguishable, and to a badly-played bugle (13.7-8). He complains that it lacks decorum, fails to edify and fails to communicate - unlike prophecy. Possibly also he refers to glossolalia the childish babbling which he has now put aside (13.11). The reason why he writes at such length about the other spiritual gifts is to show what variety of other gifts of the Spirit there is, and how much more serviceable they are for building up the church. Most pointed of all is the list of qualities in the description of the highest of all gifts, love; these are precisely the qualities which the Corinthians lack, such as sympathy and tolerance.

Time and again Paul's thought on the gifts of the Spirit, as on all behaviour of the Christian, is determined by his image of the church as the body of Christ. This surfaces in First Corinthians in several ways:

1. The first occurrence is in his condemnation of sexual union with a prostitute. Such is the realism with which he views the body of Christ, that sexual union with a prostitute is forbidden because the body of the Christian is Christ's body: 'Do you think one can take parts of Christ's body and join them to the body of a prostitute? Out of the question!' (1 Cor 6.15). The bodily union with Christ is as real as the full sexual union, which, according to Genesis, makes the two partners into one living being.

2. On the level of eating, too, the Christian is given a share in Christ by sharing in the eucharistic meal. Paul uses the term 'body' indistinguishably on two levels at once: 'The blessing-cup which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? And the loaf of bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?' (10.16) Here the parallel with 'blood' shows that he means the real and physical flesh and personality of Christ. But then he goes on to conclude: 'And as there is one loaf, so we, although there are many of



us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf' (10.17). Here Paul is using 'body' in the sense of a body of people. The eucharistic body of Christ means for Paul equally the loaf and the community.

3. It is only after this that Paul applies to the concept of the body of Christ which is the community the idea of the body as a political corporation. The idea of the parts of a political corporation as interdependent and interacting was a commonplace of political thought in the ancient world. Paul develops this idea in his discussion of the various functions towards the body as a whole of the different gifts and capacities on the members. One is like an ear, one like a hand, one like a head (12.12-30). But his thinking is at the same time wholly different from any previous use of this figure. Only in Paul is this body someone, namely Christ. When he uses the figurative language of the different members, he is building on the reality of the Christian's belonging to Christ, which he has used independently of the metaphor.

*b. Paul's explicit teaching on the Resurrection* is reacting against the claim that 'there is no resurrection of the dead' (1 Cor 15.2). Since they had accepted the basic message that Christ was risen, it must be that they denied any resurrection in the future. This would fit with their excitement and confidence about life in the Spirit: their experience of the Spirit was so vivid and satisfying that they neglected any dimension of future resurrection. This has been characterized by Charles H. Talbert as 'overrealized eschatology'<sup>10</sup>. This is why Paul concentrates at such length on the future resurrection and transformation in Christ when he has submitted the kingdom to the Father.

First Corinthians 15 is, of all the Pauline writings, the passage where we come nearer than anywhere else to seeing the nature of the risen life, transformed by Christ's resurrection. Since Christ is the firstfruits of resurrection, the risen life of Christ is the exemplar and cause of all risen life. What is said of the risen Christ is true of the risen Christian too. Paul can, of course, only use images. He proceeds step by step (vv. 35-49):

1. First he wishes to establish continuity between the present life and the risen life. He uses the comparison of the seed. The continuity is the same as that of the seed to the plant germinated. This is shown by the fact that certain seeds produce certain plants. Grain produces wheat and acorns produce oak-trees.

2. Secondly Paul establishes the principle of analogy. The risen body, that is, the risen personality, is physical, but this is not an end of the matter. Paul tries to explain the principle of analogy: 'not all flesh is the same flesh; there is human flesh, animals have another kind of flesh, birds another and fish yet another' - just as there are different kinds of brightness. so the risen personality is a physical personality, but not physical in the sense to which we are accustomed. Paul is saying that 'flesh' and 'brightness' are alike analogical terms.

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<sup>10</sup>*Reading Corinthians* (London, S.P.C.K., 1987)

3. The change from one form of 'flesh' to another is summed up in four contrasts, the first three issuing in the fourth. Each of these changes indicates a transference into the divine sphere:

1. From perishable to imperishable (the divine immutability),
2. From contemptible to glorious ('glory' is *par excellence* a divine concept),
3. From weak to powerful (and strength is above all a divine property).
4. These three are summed up in the life principle: the life-principle is no longer the yuxh but the pneuma; that is, the Christian transformed in the final resurrection is informed and enlivened no longer by the ordinary human life-principle, but by the life-principle of God.

#### **4. Christology: Christ, the wisdom of the Father**

It is also in function of the ideas of the Corinthians about wisdom that Paul outlines his new and exciting development of Christology. However he is to be presented, Christ must be defined or described in terms of already known realities drawn from Judaism or other spheres. The revelation of Christ was new, and demanded new language, but based on old. So, in First Thessalonians Christ is seen primarily in terms of the Lord who, in accordance with Jewish eschatology, will come again in triumph. In Galatians he is seen as the inheritor of the promises made to Abraham, the fulfilment of the purpose of the Law. Now in First Corinthians a new and exciting development occurs, in confrontation with the views of the Corinthians on wisdom, through the measurement of Christ against the Old Testament concept of Wisdom.

The concept of Wisdom in the Old Testament attempted to describe God's action in the world. As God became more remote and revered it was felt unfitting to depict him as acting directly on the world. His action on and in the world was therefore described in terms of the Wisdom of God. In the later books of the Wisdom literature, especially Proverbs and Wisdom, attempts are made to describe a quality which reflects God but is not God. In Proverbs 8.22-31 Wisdom is represented as existing before creation, before and beside God, working with him and for him in the creation of the world:

Yahweh created me, first-fruits of his fashioning  
before the oldest of his works  
From everlasting I was firmly set,  
from the beginning, before the earth came into being.  
The deep was not when I was born...  
I was beside the master-craftsman  
delighting him day after day.

Finally in Wisdom 7.22-8.1 comes a series of images which is designed to express equality with God, a Wisdom somehow separate from God yet wholly dependent on him, a reflection of God with all the divine qualities:

She is the breath of the power of God,  
pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty...  
she is a reflection of the eternal light,  
untarnished mirror of God's active power,  
and image of his goodness.

All these images attempt to express equality, total dependence yet separateness.

When Paul says that Christ is the power and the wisdom of God (1.24) he is referring to these passages. This attributes to Christ a quite new relationship of closeness to God on a permanent level. A crucial question here is whether Paul considers the relationship to be a permanent one. Christ (1.30) 'was made for us wisdom from God', and this is clearly related to the 'folly' of the Cross. James Dunn<sup>11</sup> maintains strongly that there is no hint here of pre-existence, that Christ is the wisdom of God in the sense that he is the fulfilment of God's plan. Dunn insists that there is no link here between Christ and God's wisdom in creation (or in the governance of the world). 'We speak of God's wisdom in mystery, the wisdom that was hidden, which God predestined to be for our glory before the ages began' (1 Cor 2.7). There is all the difference in the world between God's wisdom as a permanent quality of God and a particular embodiment of it, God's wisdom in the sense of the fulfilment of God's wise plan. Perhaps one should say that in this passage Christ is not necessarily said to be the originating Wisdom of God, so much as an instance of God's Wisdom.

This is, however, not the only passage in the letter in which Paul uses Wisdom concepts, and the later passage must be used to interpret also the earlier. The situation in 1 Cor 8.1-6 leaves little room for doubt. N.T. Wright<sup>12</sup> has described this as 'one of the greatest pioneering moments in the entire history of Christology'. Still employing Wisdom language, Paul takes the *Shema* and uses it to associate Christ with God in a way wholly unprecedented. Now Christ is considered in parallel with the Father, and is set apart from created things as involved in their origin.

The *Shema* is, and at this time already was, the heart of the Jewish thrice-daily prayer. It is taken from Dt 6.5, 'Listen (*shema*), Israel! The Lord our God is the one only Lord'.

This is the central statement of Jewish monotheism. Paul adapts this Credo to associate Christ with God (8.6), in a way which is startling and even (to Jewish sensibilities) shocking in the extreme:

For us there is one only God, the Father  
from whom all things come and for whom we exist,

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<sup>11</sup>*Christology in the Making*, p. 178-9

<sup>12</sup>*The Climax of the Covenant*, 1991, p. 136

and one Lord, Jesus Christ  
through whom all things come and through whom we exist.

So now the formula has been split into two. There are now two persons confessed in this central statement of monotheism. The one God and one Lord has become the one God *the Father* and the one Lord *Jesus Christ*. The one God is still the originator and goal, but the agent of creation (and of continuing creation) is no longer divine Wisdom, but is now named as the Lord Jesus Christ. Here Jesus has indeed taken the place of Wisdom within God.

### **Personal Study**

Choose one essay:

1. Was there any single overriding factor of concern at Corinth, which led to all the various disorders?
2. 'If First Corinthians had been kept firmly in mind, *Lumen Gentium* would have been a considerably better document' Is this judgement justified?

### **Further Reading**

Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth* (Michael Glazier, 1983)  
Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (S.P.C.K. 1987)

# Chapter 5. Romans: the Problem God's Justice - God's Anger

## 1. The Christians of Rome

It would be an egregious mistake to picture the Rome of the period as being inhabited by Italians. The population of Rome has been estimated by ancient historians as being by this time only 12% of Italian origin. A constant complaint is voiced by Juvenal, that the Orontes (a river in Syria) now flows into the Tiber, indicating the immense numbers of orientals then resident there; there had been steady immigration, mostly as slaves, for 250 years. A Roman, by now and certainly later, came to be judged not by his blood but by his way of life. Just as a native of Chichester or Caesarea had as much right to expect advancement in the Roman empire as a native of Ostia, so an inhabitant of the city of Rome was as likely to be black as the descendant of local stock.

Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.6) claims, no doubt with his customary exaggeration, that at the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC there were 8,000 Jews in Rome. A host of synagogues is known from inscriptions, with an organisation of *gerousia* (Council of Elders) and *gerousiarch*, *archisynagogos* (President), etc, the sort of organisation common in the synagogues of the diaspora, though without any central organisation such as is known at Alexandria, with its Jewish ethnarch. Jews and their habits were well known and thoroughly mocked in Rome as early as Horace: *credat Iudaeus Apelles*, 'let the Jew Apelles believe *that*', he says (*Sermo* 1.5.100), as though everyone knew that Jews would believe anything. The sententious Seneca criticises them for wasting one-seventh of life by their observance of the Sabbath (*apud* Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 6.11). It is significant that Paul does not use the term *ekklesia* of the Christian community at Rome: they were not a single community. He uses it of an individual grouping round Aquila and Prisca (Rm 16.5). The list of greetings in Rm 16 suggests that Paul is greeting members of at least four independent synagogues.

The most significant factor is the expulsion of Jews (how many? certainly not all of them) from Rome under Claudius in 49, by an edict which probably lapsed at his death in 54. The presence of so many Jews back in Rome when the letter was written, many of whom Paul had no doubt met in the east, shows at least that it was no longer effective. It is not unreasonable to suppose that an important factor in the Roman congregations was this return of the Jews after the gentile Roman Christians had lived, believed and worshipped on their own for some years; a fair amount of tension would not be surprising, and could well have been significant for the composition of the letter.

## 2. The Purpose of the Letter

The Letter to the Romans is the longest, most massive and most important of all Paul's letters. Yet there is considerable question why it ever came to be written.

G. Bornkamm put forward the theory that Rm should be regarded as Paul's Last Will and

Testament<sup>13</sup>. He argues that there is no mention of information received from Rome, to which Paul might be responding. On the contrary, the letter forms a sort of summing up of previous controversies, interests and debates. He lists (pp. 23-25) sixteen themes, present in the letter, which have preoccupied Paul earlier. But whereas earlier they had occurred in polemical contexts, now they are 'carefully reconsidered, more profoundly substantiated and usually placed in a larger context' (p. 25). They are shorn of any particular circumstances, such as controversies or the stresses caused by the unbridled charismatic activity at Corinth. Paul is writing about the original questions which made him a Christian, puzzling and mulling over them again. Any impression of controversy is misleading and comes from the diatribe style of exposition. However, nowhere does Bornkamm explain why Paul should have written like this to the Romans; it seems to be simply a motiveless letter out of the blue, simply a *christianae religionis compendium*, as Melancthon put it, 'a compendium of the Christian religion'.

A more attractive position is represented by Peter Stuhlmacher<sup>14</sup>. Stuhlmacher brings the letter into relation with Paul's impending visit to Jerusalem. At about this period Paul seems to have been highly pre-occupied with a collection of money from the gentile Churches to be presented to the Church of Jerusalem. Writing to the Romans he explains this as repaying with material possessions the spiritual debt they owe to the Church from which they received the faith (15.27). By the time he writes to the Romans he has already undertaken to take the collection to Jerusalem himself. When he wrote 1 Cor 16.4 this was still a possibility in the future, depending on the amount contributed. There he shows that the collection was widespread, for he instructs the Corinthians 'to do the same as I prescribed for the churches in Galatia' (16.1). Paul's concern with this collection comes to the fore again in 2 Cor 8-9, and there he writes more openly of the effect for which he is hoping: 'when you have proved your quality by this help, they will give glory to God for the obedience which you show in professing the gospel of Christ, as well as for the generosity of your fellowship towards them' (2 Cor 9.13).

It is attractive to regard this collection as an attempt to heal the breach between Paul (and the Pauline gentile Churches) and the mother-Church of Jerusalem which had opened out as a result of the Antioch affair.

Did the attempt succeed? We hear nothing in Acts of any rapturous reception of Paul during his final visit to Jerusalem. On the contrary, after the elders have briefly acknowledged his work, they immediately reproach him for drawing Jewish converts to Christianity away from observance of the Law, and demand that he show his good faith by being purified in the Temple and paying the expenses of four others (Ac 21.21-24). The unity of the Church is one of the major themes of Acts, and there are other occasions where the author seems to be

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<sup>13</sup>Chapter 2 in *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried, revised & expanded edition, 1991.

<sup>14</sup>In *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried, revised & expanded edition, 1991.

suppressing or soft-peddling disagreements within the Christian community. Has the same occurred here? Did the Jerusalem Church tell Paul he could keep his filthy gentile money, or at best prove his good faith by 'laundering' it through using it in the Temple?

In any case, the letter to the Romans was written from Corinth (or Cenchreae, just next door, 16.1) when Paul was about to take the collection to Jerusalem. He does not know the Romans well enough to ask them to contribute, but he does ask for their prayers. In Jerusalem he knew that he would have to justify his gospel and his stance with regard to the gentiles. The differences between Jewish and gentile Christians at Rome, which one may presume he has heard about from his friends there (it is only a week's journey from Corinth and very frequently traversed), raise the same difficulties as he will have to face in Jerusalem, for in Jerusalem he would certainly have to justify his view of the relative importance of the Law and of faith in Jesus Christ. 'It is very likely that Paul intends to defend himself before the Christians in Jerusalem with arguments similar to those presented in Romans. But Jerusalem is not the letter's principal destination. The Apostle's main intention was to achieve a consensus with/between the Christians in the metropolis' (Stuhlmacher, p. 236). In other words, the letter is a sort of dress-rehearsal for his defence at Jerusalem.

With such a motif must, however, be at least integrated another, Paul's concern about his proposed journey to the West, to Spain (Rm 15.23). There he would be on totally unfamiliar ground, even linguistically. Did Paul speak Latin? Even if he did, he would find in Spain a medley of dialects with little relation to conventional Latin. There would be no maps to guide him, no Diaspora Jewish communities to welcome him. On the other hand, Rome had ruled Spain for two and a half centuries, sending there governors, troops and merchants. There would be plenty of people at Rome, no doubt even among its Christians, who knew Spain well. Their sympathy and help was essential to the success of his venture of carrying the gospel to the furthest reaches of the world (Strabo, 3.1.4). But if his reputation among the Christians of Rome was that of a dedicated opponent of the Law, of all that Jews held sacred, then he could hardly expect whole-hearted support. After the row with Peter at Antioch, after his uncompromising attack on the Judaisers in Galatia, his bitter and sarcastic mockery of Judaisers at Philippi and Corinth, it would require only slight over-simplification by his wounded opponents to secure him just that reputation. If he was to win the support of the Roman congregations, he must first set out in detail what his stance towards the Law really was.

### **3. The Style of the Letter**

Standing back from all these controversies, it would be well to consider the style of the letter as a whole. This does not encourage the views that Paul's main purpose is either to reconcile opposing groups or to engage in controversy. If he wished to reconcile opposing groups, this would be far more obvious. The difference between Jew and Greek does indeed play a part in his thinking: the whole passage 1.16-2.11 is bracketed by the phrase 'Jews first but Greeks as well'. But there is no sign of bitterness or opposition.

When Paul is engaging in controversy his style leaves no doubt about itself. It is not merely diatribe. Diatribe exists amply in Romans (e.g. 2.1-5, 17-25; 3.27-4.21; 9.19-21; 11.17-24).

Paul's staccato style can perhaps often misleadingly seem angry, with its little rushes, changes of direction, sharp questions and emphatic answers. Special features of this diatribe-style are:

- interpellation in the second person: 'You preach that there is to be no stealing, but do you steal? You say that adultery is forbidden, but do you commit adultery?' (Rm 2.22)
- imaginary dialogue with short, sharp question and emphatic answer, often a volley of these ('Is there any advantage in being circumcised? A great deal in every way.' [Rm 3.1]) or an answer suggested and then disputed.
- Paul's favourite answer is  $\text{ὄχι μὲν ἵνα μὴ γένηται}$ , literally 'let it not happen', used by him as one might say 'heaven forbid!' or 'out of the question!'; it occurs 10 times in Rm alone.

There is some evidence that it was a technique used chiefly within schools rather than between one school and another (Dunn, in *The Romans Debate*, p. 249-250). The technique of setting up an artificial opponent, and interrogating that opponent, is of its nature suitable when there is no direct opponent in view, whose opinions are known. When Paul is fighting against opponents he makes this clear: the Galatians are not spared, but called 'fools' or 'senseless' (3.1) and denied the usual complimentary thanksgiving at the beginning of their letter. To the Thessalonians he is clear enough when he is answering a concrete point of difficulty: 'We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have fallen asleep, to make sure that you do not grieve for them' (1 Th 4.13). Writing to the Corinthians he is crisp and clear about the judgement of the sexual deviant (1 Cor 5) as well as about those who cannot see that Christ is the true Wisdom. By contrast, in Romans there is no pointed opposition, and it may well be a mistake to over-focus as the same time as mirror-reading. Had there been a need for this sort of writing, Paul would surely have been fully informed of the circumstances by some of his host of friends at Rome, and would have referred to them. In 1 Corinthians he makes full use not only of the explicit questions brought by 'Chloe's people' but also of the news they brought him.



Now read the letter to the Romans, concentrating especially on Chapters 1-11. The following plan may help, simplified from that of James Dunn in his *Word Biblical Commentary* on Romans (1988)

**1.1-17 Introduction**

- 1.1-7           Introductory statement and greetings
- 1.8-15         Personal explanations
- 1.16-17       Summary statement of the letter's theme
- 1.18-11.36 GOD'S FAITHFULNESS & MAN'S FAITH**
- 1.18-5.21     *The righteousness of God - to man's faith*
- 1.18-3.20     God's wrath on man's unrighteousness
- 1.18-32                   from a Jewish perspective
- 2.1-3.8                   on Jew as well as gentile
- 2.1-11                    the impartiality of God
- 2.12-16                  possession of Law no safeguard
- 2.17-24                  favoured status no security
- 2.25-29                  circumcision no guarantee
- 3.1-8                     what then of God's fidelity?
- 3.9-20                    conclusion: God's judgement on all
- 3.21-5.21     God's saving righteousness to faith
- 3.21-31                 A. To faith in Jesus Christ
- 3.21-26                 God's righteousness in Jesus' death
- 3.27-31                 the consequence for Jews
- 4                         B. Abraham as test case
- 5                         C. New perspective of faith
- 5.1-11                    on believer's present and future
- 5.12-21                    on God's plan for humanity
- 6-11                     *Consequences for individual & for election*
- 6-8                        *for the individual*
- 6                         A. Does grace encourage sin?
- 6.1-11                    believer has died to sin
- 6.12-23                  believer should live to God
- 7                         B. What role does the Law play?
- 7.1-6                     believer released from condemnation
- 7.7-25                    Law still exploited by Sin & Death
- 8                         C. Eschatological tension & God's plan
- 8.1-11                    the Spirit of life
- 8.12-17                  the Spirit of sonship
- 8.18-30                  the Spirit as firstfruits
- 9-11                     *for Israel*
- 9.1-5                     A. Paul's concern
- 9.6-29                  B. The Call of God
- 9.6-13                    the character of God's free choice
- 9.14-23                  all are still within God's plan

9.24-29	those called include Jew & gentile
9.30-10.21	C. The Word of Faith
9.30-10.4	Israel misunderstood
10.5-13	righteousness from Law & from faith
10.14-21	Israel's failure to respond
11	D. The Mystery of God's Faithfulness
11.1-10	the remnant according to grace
11.11-24	the hope of Israel's restoration
11.25-32	the final mystery revealed
11.32-36	final hymn of adoration
12.1-15.13	<b>CONSEQUENCES FOR REDEFINED PEOPLE OF GOD</b>
12.1-2	basis of sane living: Christian worship
12.3-8	the body of Christ as context of faith
12.9-21	love as norm for social relationships
13.1-7	live as good citizens
13.8-10	love of neighbour as fulfilment of Law
13.11-14	imminence of the end as a spur
14.1-15.6	problem of food laws and holy days
14.1-12	challenge to 'the weak'
14.13-23	responsibility of 'the strong'
15.1-6	Christ as exemplar
15.7-13	summary: God's mercy and faithfulness
15.14-16.27	<b>CONCLUSION</b>

#### 4. The Justice of God

Broadly speaking, it seems obvious that the basic problem with which Paul deals in Romans is the justice of God, how God is true to his promises, and how human beings, both Jew and gentile, can enter into those promises.

Since the Reformation, on the other hand, the letter has often been viewed through the spectacles of Luther: the basic problem is the wrath of God: human beings are worthless and hideously sinful - how can they escape God's wrath? It cannot be by obeying the Law, but traditional doctrine and behaviour in the Church seemed to Luther to imply that human beings could somehow pile up merit by good works, indulgences, pilgrimages, multiplication of Masses. Those who held this doctrine were in the same state as the Jews who attempted to pile up merit by obeying the Law. Within this framework God's justice is understood as a calmer and more deliberate version of God's wrath: human beings have sinned, so God's justice must punish them. This is in fact a fundamental misunderstanding of the concept of God's justice.

The word-group based on  $\text{δικαιοσύνη}$  ( $\text{δικαιοσύνη}$ ) ('justice of God') occurs overwhelmingly in two letters only: 60 times in Romans and 13 times in Galatians. Otherwise in Paul it occurs only 8 times in the two Corinthian letters, 5 times in Philippians and twice in Thessalonians (twice in Philippians and both times in Thessalonians it is represented only by the anodyne adjective  $\text{δίκαιος}$  [ $\text{dikaios}$ ] ['just'], which means little more than the vague 'good').

The term is clearly a forensic and relational term. To the modern mind it is related to keeping a set of rules or a law. A judgement is just if it adheres to the law. Perhaps an arrangement can be called 'just' if it puts into practice the principles which stand behind the law, though this might more properly be characterised as 'fair'. To the Jewish mind, however, the concept is entirely different.

This difficulty has been recognized implicitly by the translation of the offending term  $\text{צדקתו של אלהים}$  in many versions as the 'righteousness of God'. The advantage of this term is that in modern English it means nothing, and so can have meaning infused into it. It can be used as a sort of wild-card.

In the Bible the positive relationship of  $\text{צדקתו של אלהים}$  is not to the Law but to God's promises. It is God's fidelity to his covenant promises, his reliability. It is not connected with fairness, or human deserts, or assessment of merits.

The clearest way of finding the meaning of a word in the Bible is often to see the parallel terms which are used. Hebrew poetry works primarily by parallelism, stating the same truth twice in parallel ways or expressions:

O God, come to my assistance,  
O Lord, make haste to help me.

You fixed the earth on its foundations,  
for ever it shall not be shaken

Especially in the psalms and in Deutero-Isaiah God's justice is parallel to God's saving power, or his judgement in favour of Israel, quite divorced from Israel's meritorious conduct.

So Ps 7.11: 'God is an upright judge, slow to anger'.

Is 46:13, 'I am bringing my justice nearer,  
my salvation will not delay'.

Is 51.6, 'My justice is suddenly approaching,  
my salvation appears'.

Is 51.8, 'my justice will last for ever,  
and my salvation for all generations'.

Similarly in Jewish literature of the first century, roughly contemporary with Paul, as shown in the texts of Qumran:

1 QH 11.17 I have known that righteousness is thine  
and that salvation is in thy favours.

1 QH 11.31 Cleanse me by thy righteousness,  
even as I have hoped in thy goodness

and have put my hope in thy favours.

Occasionally this justice positively violates or runs contrary to human notions of justice, which demand the punishment of offences:

Dn 9.16 In your justice turn away your anger,...  
for we have sinned.

1 QS 11.9-12 He will wipe out my transgressions through his righteousness ...  
From the source of his righteousness is my  
justification.

So close is  $\text{𐤀} \text{𐤅} \text{𐤆} \text{𐤇} \text{𐤈} \text{𐤉} \text{𐤊} \text{𐤋} \text{𐤌} \text{𐤍} \text{𐤎} \text{𐤏} \text{𐤐} \text{𐤑} \text{𐤒} \text{𐤓} \text{𐤔} \text{𐤕} \text{𐤖} \text{𐤗} \text{𐤘} \text{𐤙} \text{𐤚} \text{𐤛} \text{𐤜} \text{𐤝} \text{𐤞} \text{𐤟} \text{𐤠} \text{𐤡} \text{𐤢} \text{𐤣} \text{𐤤} \text{𐤥} \text{𐤦} \text{𐤧} \text{𐤨} \text{𐤩} \text{𐤪} \text{𐤫} \text{𐤬} \text{𐤭} \text{𐤮} \text{𐤯} \text{𐤰} \text{𐤱} \text{𐤲} \text{𐤳} \text{𐤴} \text{𐤵} \text{𐤶} \text{𐤷} \text{𐤸} \text{𐤹} \text{𐤺} \text{𐤻} \text{𐤼} \text{𐤽} \text{𐤾} \text{𐤿}$  to being God's power to save and help Israel that in the LXX it can translate the Hebrew  $\text{𐤀} \text{𐤅} \text{𐤆}$ , 'mercy' (Gn 19.19; 20.13; Ex 15.13) as well as the more obvious  $\text{𐤀} \text{𐤅} \text{𐤆}$ , 'justice'. This whole view of God as a saving God whose very nature is to pardon is rooted in the explanation of the name and nature of God given in Exodus 33-34. After the disaster of the golden calf, the first of Israel's many derelictions of the Covenant, Moses prays to see God's glory. God descended in a cloud and pronounced the sacred Name, immediately giving an exegesis or explanation of that Name, 'God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in faithful love and constancy, maintaining his faithful love to thousands, forgiving fault, crime and sin' (Ex 34.6-7). Only after this strong assertion of forgiveness does God briefly mention 'letting nothing go unchecked, punishing the parent's fault in the children'. How deeply rooted in the consciousness of Israel is this conception of God as forgiving may be seen by the number of times this passage is recalled, either by direct quotation or by allusion throughout the Old Testament<sup>15</sup>. The 'justice' of God, therefore, is God's trueness to himself and to his promises as expressed, and ever and again renewed, in the Covenant with Israel.

## 5. The Anger of God

The puzzle is not so much God's justice as his anger. It would be a legitimage corollary-question, then, whether there is any room for God's anger or punitive retribution. How can God's anger find place beside this 'justice'? The concept cannot simply be denied. After all, to revert only to statistics, the 'anger' of God is mentioned no fewer than 9 times in Romans. God's Covenant with Israel is not entirely one-sided, and does demand absolute loyalty from Israel, recognition of God for what he is, and excluding at least loyalty to other gods. Even to David's line God does not promise not to punish, only not to punish with that annihilating absoluteness which might be expected of a divinity: 'if he does wrong I shall punish him with a rod such as men use, with blows such as mankind gives. But my faithful love will never be withdrawn from him' (2 Sm 7.14-15). God's punishment will always be corrective rather than vindictive.

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<sup>15</sup>The marginal references in the *New Jerusalem Bible* list Ex 20.5-6; Nb 14.18; Dt 5.9-10; Ps 86.15; Jr 32.18; Jl 2.13; Jon 4.2; Na 1.3. To these key passages another couple of dozen could be added without difficulty.

When, after multiple infidelities and disloyalties, Israel is eventually punished by exile, the seeming end of Israel's special status, Ezekiel presents his audience with a God who was forced willy-nilly into this catastrophic position by Israel's failure to recognize him for what he is. God's inability to protect and rescue Israel according to his Covenant with them is described by Ezekiel as the profanation of the Name: he has been compelled, publicly and in the eyes of the world, to act against his nature:

They have profaned my holy name among the nations where they have gone, so that people say of them, 'These are the people of Yahweh; they have been exiled from his land.' I am acting not for your sake, House of Israel, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. And the nations will know that I am Yahweh when in you I display my holiness before their eyes. For I shall take you from among the nations and gather you back from all the countries, and bring you home to your own country.

(Ezek 36.20-24)

Once God's corrective anger begins to 'bite', then he can re-assert his basic nature by once again protecting and forgiving Israel.

The basic problem Paul faces in Romans is, then, the irreconcilability of God's anger with his justice. The burden of the first three chapters is the universal liability of humankind to God's anger. This is the opening statement: 'The anger of God from heaven is being revealed against the ungodliness and injustice of human beings who in their injustice hold back the truth' (1.18). First this is amply illustrated by the sins of the godless gentiles. Then, lest Jews begin to glory, Paul turns on the Jews. The Law will not save them, nor circumcision. If anything their situation may seem worse: 'You are bringing God into contempt. As scripture says, *It is your fault that the name of God is held in contempt among the nations* (Is 52.5, compare Ezekiel, quoted above)' (Rm 2.23-24). Finally Paul indicts both Jew and gentile with a catena of quotations from the psalms (Rm 3.9-18).

### **Personal Work**

Write a letter to a friend (2-3 pages) explaining your first impressions of the Letter to the Romans. Don't pretend to your friend that you have solved all the problems and understand everything. Has anything thrilled you and enlightened you? Has anything puzzled you? Has anything frustrated you?

## Chapter 6. Romans 2

### The Sacrifice of Christ

The problem Paul finds himself facing is how human beings can be acceptable to God. He insists that human beings cannot achieve their own justice. In Phil 3.6 he claims that in his Jewish past he was 'blameless' with regard to the justice of the Law, but he does not claim that this made him 'just'. The whole thrust of Rm 1-3 is to show that no one, either Jew or gentile, does in fact keep the Law; all alike are under the dominion of sin.

Only 2.13 might give the opposite impression, that it is possible to keep the Law: 'The ones that God will justify are not those who have heard the Law but those who have kept the Law'. But this remains merely hypothetical, and the following verses make clear that no one falls into that category.

An initial problem is how *dikaiousu/nh* can be predicated of human beings at all. Clearly human beings cannot be 'just' in the sense that God is just, that is, by being true to himself and his forgiveness. It is in fact Paul's constant concern to distance the idea of human 'justness' as far as possible from any relationship to Law. 'If the Law had been capable of giving life, then certainly *dikaiousu/nh* would have come from the Law. As it is...' (Ga 3.21). The misleadingness comes from the fact that normally human 'justness' comes from human action related to law; in this case it comes only from divine action on human beings completely unrelated to law. In any normal sense of 'justice' it is impossible for the unjust to be 'constituted' just: it is the paradigm of injustice that the unjust should be considered just. But in Paul's terminology 'by one man's action are many to be made just' (Rm 5.19). Similarly in Rm 6.13-20 the message is that the Christian must be conformed to/given over to/free to the justice of God; *dikaiousu/nh* is not a human quality at all, but a divine attitude or quality to which human beings are made subject, or are related, or in which they are enfolded.

The question therefore becomes how human beings may come to participate in this 'justness' of God. Here enters the work of Christ, which Paul describes in Romans principally in two ways, firstly by means of the 'sacrifice for reconciliation' and later through the concept of the Second Adam.

#### 1. Christ as the Sacrifice for Reconciliation

The clue here is the rich and strange term (*ilastth/rion*)<sup>16</sup>. It is normally translated 'sacrifice for reconciliation': 'God appointed him as a sacrifice for reconciliation through faith by the shedding of his blood'.

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<sup>16</sup>It is generally accepted that most of the formula of Rm 3.25-6 is pre-Pauline. It includes a number of words never used elsewhere by Paul, e.g. *i(lasth/rion, pa/resij* (forbearance), *proge/gonoj* (former), *a(ma/rthma* (sin), for all of which Paul himself normally uses an alternative word. There is also a number of words used by Paul only once elsewhere.

Apart from this usage here, the term occurs in the NT only in Hebr 9.5, and the verb significantly (apart from Lk 18.13, 'God be merciful to me a sinner') only Hebr 2.17.

The concept can be understood only with reference to its Old Testament background. The term is used principally in the OT of the lid of the ark, or the 'mercy-seat'. This is the precise place where God appeared to Moses; it remains the permanent meeting-place between God and man: 'this is where I shall come to meet you, from above the mercy-seat, between the two winged creatures which are on the ark of the Testimony' (Ex 25.22). Most especially, on the Day of Atonement or Reconciliation the high priest sprinkled the blood of the victims (note 'by the shedding of his blood') on the mercy-seat for the expiation of sins (Lv 16.14-15). Christ is therefore the place where the reconciliation occurs, as well as the victim by whose blood it is effected.

It is worth stressing on this occasion that there is no shadow of the notion, which sometimes appears in medieval theology, of appeasing the wrath of God. The verb (*ilaske/sqai* (to reconcile or propitiate) in the OT never has God as its object, as though God were being propitiated. The idea is not 'life for life', as though God's desire for vengeance was being satisfied, or the life of one person being shed in substitution for that of others. The object of the action is always human beings, so that it is a purification of human beings rather than an appeasement of God.

This in fact is also always the function of blood in the OT ritual: its function is to cleanse. 'There is no purification except by blood' is a rabbinic axiom, following Lv 17.11, 'blood is what expiates for a life'. It is because of its divine properties, because blood belongs to God and contains God's power of life, that it is sacred. A victim and its blood are always surrounded with respect and cleanliness (Lv 6.20; 10.17; Ezk 42.13). On the Day of Atonement the blood of the victims is sprinkled as a purifying factor.

The first way in which the work of Christ is described is, therefore, in terms of the sacrifice of the Day of Reconciliation. Exactly how Paul understands the effectiveness of this action becomes clear from his view of Christ as the Second Adam.

## **2. Christ the Second Adam**

Paul uses the name 'Adam' only four times, twice in 1 Cor 15 (verses 22 and 45) and twice in Rm 5.14. The importance of Adam in his thought is out of all proportion to this meagre usage. Principally it occurs in Philippians, and First Corinthians as well as Romans. We shall consider Philippians and First Corinthians first.

### *1. Philippians*

It is fascinating to speculate on the origin of the use of Adam in Paul's thought. Is it to be found in the hymn to Christ in Philippians 2?

In 1 Cor 14.26 he says 'When you come together each of you brings a psalm or some instruction or a revelation...' Two passages in Ephesians 5.19 and 3.16, closely parallel to each other, urge Christians to 'sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs among yourselves'. Early in the next century Pliny describes the Christians as coming together to sing hymns 'to Christ as to a god' (*Epistles* 10.96).

It is suggested<sup>17</sup> that Phil 2.6-11 is just such a hymn which Paul has adopted and made his own. About the authorship it does not seem possible to reach agreement. In any case the original hymn may have proceeded in six couplets, using Hebrew parallelism, by which the second line of the couplet completes the first:

Being in the form of God  
he did not count equality with God something to be exploited

but he emptied himself  
taking the form of a servant

becoming as men are  
and being in all respects as a man

he humbled himself  
becoming obedient unto death.

Therefore God raised him high  
and gave him the name above every other name

so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow  
and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Quite apart from the obvious Semitic parallelism and the elevated style, this gives fine balances within couplets (God - God; man - man; every - every), antithesis (form of God - form of a servant; humbled himself - raised him high; servant - Lord) as well as assonances audible only in the Greek text. If the original hymn was not composed by Paul, he would himself have been responsible at least for adding to the fourth couplet his characteristic stress on the Cross, 'death on a Cross', and to the final couplet the overloading and throughly Greek 'in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld'.

Whatever the origin and authorship of the hymn, it is built upon the contrast between the two Adams: both were formed in the image of God, but there the similarity ends and the contrast begins.

Adam grasped at equality with God - Christ did not

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<sup>17</sup>For a thorough discussion, see Ralph P. Martin, *Carmen Christi* (second edition, Eerdmans 1983)



Adam exalted himself - Christ emptied himself  
Adam was disobedient - Christ was obedient to death  
Adam was humbled by God - Christ was raised high by God

In using this figure Paul turns upside-down current theories on the first and second Adam. In Jewish thought at this time it was held that there were two Adams, a heavenly and an earthly Adam, corresponding to the two Adams of the two creation-stories in Genesis. The heavenly Adam came first, perfect in every way, a model and an ideal for the second. The second Adam is the earthly (or even earthy) Adam who fell. Paul turns this over: the first Adam was earthly and became the model for fallen humanity, while the second Adam is the sinless one, the true model for humanity.

### *2. First Corinthians*

The contrast between the two Adams also stands behind Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 15 on the risen Christ as the first-fruits of resurrection, the forerunner of all the redeemed and risen humanity: 'as in Adam all died, so in Christ will all be made alive' (1 Cor 15.22). This (see above, p. 29) describes the end-product, the function of the Second Adam in the final transformation, but does not concentrate on the act of reconciliation.

### *3. Romans*

In Romans the treatment, following that of First Corinthians, gives rather the opposite side of the coin. In Rm 5.12-20 Paul contrasts the first and second Adam, the Adam of the Genesis-story being the progenitor of the fallen human race, the second Adam being the progenitor of the new humanity. The passage is familiar, with its contrast of obedience/disobedience, condemnation/acquittal, offence/free gift, death/life.

If death came to many through the offence of one man, how much greater an effect the grace of God has had, coming to so many and so plentifully as a free gift through the one man Jesus Christ! One single offence brought condemnation, but now, after many offences, have come the free gift and so acquittal... Just as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience are many to be made upright.  
(Rm 5.15-18)

In this passage the reality behind the sacrificial language of the 'mercy-seat' imagery becomes clear. Christ is the i(lasth/rion because his obedience undoes the disobedience of Adam. The two passages may be combined as a statement that the climax of this obedience is the sacrifice 'by the shedding of his blood' (3.25) on the Cross.

Further, against this background it becomes obvious that the thought of the two Adams is more far-reaching than might otherwise appear. The state of sin in the first section of Romans is in fact described in terms of fallen Adam. If 'Adam' is substituted for 'they' or 'those people' in 1.20-25 the passage reads almost like a paraphrase of the creation-story:

Ever since the creation of the world, the invisible existence of God and his everlasting power have been clearly seen by the mind's understanding of created things. And so

*Adam* has no excuse: *he* knew God and yet *he* did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but *his* arguments became futile and *his* uncomprehending mind was darkened. While *he* claimed to be wise, in fact *he* was growing so stupid that *he* exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an imitation, for the image of a human being or of birds or animals or of crawling things'.

All the elements are here in this return to the creation-story, the initial knowledge of God, the refusal to honour or give thanks to God, the attempt to seek knowledge which in fact plunges into deeper ignorance, the loss of glory. The catalogue of sin which follows is again reminiscent of Genesis. First is detailed idolatry (1.24-25), which Ws 14.27 says is the beginning, cause and end of every evil (and the allusion to the serpent in v.23). Then comes sexual perversion (1.26-27), which may reflect the intercourse of the angels with the daughters of men in Gn 6.1-4, or may reflect the rabbinic teaching that lust was the serpent's original temptation. Finally the catalogue of various sins 1.28-32 reflects the general spread of evil which provoked the Flood.

Similarly, when Paul comes to assess the relationship between that deadly trio Sin, Law and Death, he does so in terms which recall the temptation in the Garden of Eden (see p. 50). In 7.7-11 Sin is represented as dormant until the Law comes. The commandment brings sin to life, 'because sin, finding its opportunity by means of the commandment beguiled me, and by means of it killed me' (7.11). 'Beguiled' is the word used of the serpent's temptation of Eve, so that Sin is here representing the serpent. The commandment represents the commandment not to eat from the tree of life. The result is the same in each case: Death. Paul represents sin, therefore, in terms of the original sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden.

Even more far-reaching is the development of the same theme in chapter 8, where the new creation in Christ is also described in terms of the new Adam (see below, p.52).

### **3. Baptism into Christ's Death**

How, then, is the Christian transferred from the sinful regime of the first, fallen Adam to the restored regime of the second Adam? It is this transference which liberates from slavery to the Law. Christ has fulfilled the Law by the obedience of his sacrifice of atonement, and has thus undone the humiliation of Adam and been raised up high. The Christian needs somehow to be joined to this. The clue for Paul is faith, expressed in baptism.

By baptism *into* (not merely *in*) Christ's death people are incorporated into Christ's being.

You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life (6.3-4).

The symbolism of baptism by immersion in water (rather than the modern pouring of water) is a clear image of burial, immersion in the tomb. Early in this century appeal was common to the pagan mystery religions, cults of Demeter, Osiris, etc, as a parallel, with the suggestion that Paul

derived from them his idea of incorporation into Christ. But the parallels with mystery religions are not sufficiently close to warrant this. They would, perhaps, have made Paul's language easier to understand to those familiar with the mystery religions, but no more. The secrets of the mystery religions have been rigorously kept, so that even the early Church Fathers seem to know little about them. Washing with water did occur in them, but seemingly only separately, as a preliminary cleansing, not as part of the actual rite. Nor is there any idea in the mystery cults of fusion with or incorporation into the deity involved; nothing more than coming near: 'I approached the boundary of death and treading on Proserpine's [the goddess of the underworld] threshold' (Apuleius 11.23).

There are sufficient Jewish parallels and forbears to account for the development of the actual rite of baptism. The understanding of the rite as expressing a sharing with Christ must come from Paul's own experience and that of the Christian communities. It is, of course, expressed by Luke in the awareness that Christ is in his followers, shown in the account of Paul's vision on the road to Damascus: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? ...I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting' (Ac 9.4-5). The value of that account as a historical verbal record is dubious. The import of it, however, has been seen already in Paul's teaching on the body in First Corinthians (see above, p. 27-28). The awareness that he is living with Christ's life is simply one of Paul's deepest convictions:

Now, as always, Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death (Phil 1.20).

I have been crucified with Christ, and yet I am alive; yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me (Ga 2.20).

It was aptly expressed by John A.T. Robinson<sup>18</sup>, 'the new tissues take on the rhythms and metabolism of the body into which they have been grafted'. To express this union with Christ Paul coins a whole series of barbarous neologisms, which occur seldom if ever elsewhere. They are all formed with the Greek prefix *συν-* (compare 'synchronise', 'synthetic', etc):

◆◆○○□□↗□✕ (Rm 8.29; Phil 3.21) 'sharing the form, shape or mould'.

◆◆○↗◆◆□*er* (Rm 6.5) 'con-grown with' - the word is used of a wound healing or a broken bone fusing together again.

◆◆◆◆☞↗ℓ◆◆*er* (Rm 6.4; Col 2.12) 'con-buried with'.

In his use of these words Paul is careful to distinguish what has already happened from what is still to come. By baptism the Christian has already joined Christ in his death, but - as he stresses in 1 Cor 15 - has not yet gone forward to resurrection. Dying with Christ in baptism is not the end of the matter; it is a long process which leaves no room for premature triumph. Some of Paul's expressions accordingly suggest an on-going relationship in a process which is still in

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<sup>18</sup>*The Body* (S.C.M. Press, 1966), p.65



The essence of Abraham's faith was that he forsook all worldly support, to trust entirely in God's dispositions when he responded to God's call, 'Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house for a country which I shall show you' (Gn 12.1). He continues to be the example of trust in God by leaving to his nephew Lot what seemed to be the best land (Gn 13), by being willing to obey God's command to sacrifice his hope of an heir (Gn 22), but trusting in God to provide a suitable spouse for his heir (Gn 24).

The stance may perhaps be usefully illustrated also by its opposite, that of King Ahaz: Isaiah offers him any sign he wishes ('either in the depths of Sheol or in the heights above') to confirm that he will be enabled to stand firm if only he takes his stand on God. Ahaz, having obviously already decided to trust to human alliance rather than divine help, will have none of it and produces the lame apology to refuse any sign, 'I will not put the Lord to the test' (Is 7.10-12).

Thus faith is primarily not any adherence to a particular set of truths, but a world-view, a 'conviction about the difference that God and the lordship of Christ have made for human history'<sup>19</sup>. It is a trust in God, 'the only possible and sufficient basis to maintain a relationship with God'<sup>20</sup>. It is correlative to God's own trustworthiness, his fidelity to his promises expressed to Abraham. This correlation is emphasised by the use of the same word, *pi'stij*, to express both divine trustworthiness/fidelity and human faith/trust. Hence Paul can write of the saving justice of God as a justice *e)k pi/stewj ei)j pi/stin*, 'from faith to faith' or 'based on trustworthiness and addressed to faith' (Rm 1.17). It is a view of the structure of the world based on human inadequacy and helplessness and on divine saving power.

Paul's Jewish contemporaries considered that this must be expressed in observance of the Law. They saw God's promises as having been made available only to those within the Covenant of the Law. Paul's key biblical quotation is Habbakuk 2.4, 'The just man will live by faith' (Ga 3.11; Rm 1.17). This text is commented at Qumran as referring only to those Jews who observe the Law: 'The interpretation of this concerns the observers of the Law in the house of Judah, whom God will deliver from the house of judgement' (1 QpHab 8.1-2).

Paul's new insights were two:

1. God's promises were unconditional and so available to any who put their trust in God, not only to physical descendants of Abraham. Jewish ethnic observances therefore do not constitute the boundary-markers of those to whom God's promises apply. This attitude of trust has nothing to do with the Law. It is not confined to those who observe the Law, or attempt to do so. The promises were made to Abraham, 430 years before the Law was given. The Law cannot therefore be the condition of their fulfilment.

2. The promises were directed to 'Abraham and his seed', meaning Christ (Ga 3.16). In Romans this scriptural argument is not used. Instead the obedience of Christ is seen as undoing the disobedience of Adam, a necessary turning-back to acceptance of the promises from the

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<sup>19</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* {Anchor Bible Commentary, Geoffrey Chapman, 1993, p. 137)

<sup>20</sup>Dunn, *Romans*, p.43

disobedience which denied them, and filled the world with the evil described in Rm 1-3. Trust in and adherence to Christ has therefore joined trust in God's promises, since they are fulfilled in Christ.

It is these which make the faith specifically Christian.

**Personal Work**

Choose one essay:

1. How does Paul in 1 Cor and Rm see the Christian as sharing with Christ?
2. In Paul's eyes, what difference does the death of Christ make?

## Chapter 7. Romans 3

### Christ and My Struggle

Once Paul has established the fusion between Christ and the Christian, he has still to explain the struggle which Christians experience in their lives. At this stage in Galatians, all was positive and optimistic, aflame with freedom from the constrictions of the Law, for there Paul was concerned above all to stress the negative effects of the Law, and the importance of liberation from the Law. In Romans the picture is more sombre - perhaps more balanced and realistic - and Paul can leave room for the tension which still exists in the Christian life. In outline, chapter 7 sketches the difficulties, and chapter 8 the hope.

#### 1. Sin and the Law

The difficulties are first delineated: again Paul reverts to the thought of the Fall, before going on to depict the drama of the struggle with evil. The whole chapter constitutes a realistic set-back between the optimism of the fusion of the Christian with Christ which precedes, and the stress on the operation of the Spirit which follows.

The comparison with the legal obligations of the marriage-bond, voided by death, should show that for the Christian there is now only freedom (7.1-6). The fact that the Christian's death to sin coincides with death to the Law immediately leads Paul to ask the surprising question whether Law itself is sin (7.7). For Paul, it seems, sin is unintelligible without Law, and Law in turn is unintelligible without Adam. Throughout this discussion Paul seems to bring very closely together three elements which do not in themselves seem identical. This makes sense only in the context of the Garden of Eden.

The three entities set together are

- *the Law* (that is, with a capital, the Torah of Israel - but be warned that in Paul's Greek there is no distinction between capitals and small letters, so you are dependent on the interpretation of an editor or translator!). Earlier Paul has insisted that the Law came into being only 430 years after the promises to Abraham. Here, by contrast, he seems to opt for the rabbinic teaching that the Law existed before the creation of the world. He may therefore intend to identify the commandment with the Law.

- *the commandment* (⌘ ■◆□●⚡). This must be the commandment not to eat of the Tree of Life. The commandment was meant to bring life, but it gave sin its opportunity to produce desire or covetousness. In the context of the Garden of Eden Paul may mean desire to eat of the Tree of Life, or alternatively the sexual lust which the Rabbis regarded as the primordial sin.

- *the law of sin*, described variously as 'the sin that lives in me' (v. 20), 'the law of sin which lives inside my body' (v. 23, 25). This is the 'evil tendency' in human beings, one of the two tendencies (to good and evil) widely accepted in contemporary Jewish theology, and sometimes identified with sexual lust. In Paul's allusive drama of the Garden of Eden, it is this law of sin which plays the part of the Serpent. It found its opportunity and 'beguiled me' (7.11), just as the Serpent beguiled Eve.

This drama of the Garden of Eden then fades into the more general drama of the moral struggle,

in which Paul describes the agonizing struggle between the two forces.

I do not understand my own behaviour; I do not act as I mean to, but I do things that I hate. Though the will to do what is good is in me, the power to do it is not: the good thing I want to do, I never do; the evil thing which I do not want - that is what I do. So I find this rule, that for me, where I want to do nothing but good, evil is close at my side. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body doomed to death? (Rm 7.15-24)

There has been considerable dispute whether Paul is here genuinely speaking in his own person or only dramatising in his person the human situation or the situation of the Jews by putting it in the first person. The intensity of Paul's language makes it unlikely that he does not at least include his own personal experience. On the other hand the first-person passage grows so continuously out of the passage focussed on Adam and Eden as the paradigm of humanity<sup>21</sup> that this more generalized dimension must surely be included. As to whether Paul is thinking primarily of the Jews or of the human race as a whole, I would doubt whether this is a fair question. Despite his opening to the gentiles, the race of the Jews still dominates his assumptions to an unfathomable degree. In much the same way the pre-Second World War Englishman, despite the Empire (and even some further territories which lacked that advantage), assumed that the Englishman was the real image intended by God.

## **2. The Spirit of Christ**

After this picture of moral frustration, the reader might well wonder what the fusion with Christ actually amounts to. It is this, in its practical consequences, that Paul now goes on to outline. The life-principle of those who have taken on the rhythms of Christ is no longer the soul, but the Spirit who is the life-principle of Christ. Romans 8 is the chapter of the Spirit: the word occurs 5 times in Rm 1-7, but 29 times in Rm 8.

The experience of the Spirit in their lives was undeniably a central factor in the life of Christians of the first generation. Paul appeals to it again and again (pp. 20, 28). Already in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul had referred to the risen Christ as a life-giving Spirit, the exemplar of risen Christians who are no longer *yuxikoi*/ but *pneumatikoi*/ (p. 28-29). There Paul had been concerned to teach about the final transformation of Christians in the resurrection, stressing that it has not yet all occurred. Now he is teaching about the influence of Christ in the present life of the Christian. He will return to the same theme in the later part of the letter: Christians work for the Lord bubbling or (the image is of water boiling) 'boiling' in the Spirit (Rm 12.11)

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<sup>21</sup>It is fashionable to pity the ancients for their acceptance of Adam and Eve as historical figures, and their consequent inability to understand the first chapters of Genesis as myth or an analysis (in the form of a story) of the present human condition. Paul, however, though he does not deny the historicity of the stories, consistently does just this, treating Adam as the paradigm of humanity.



In Rm 8.9-11 Paul is concerned only to teach that Christ is the motive force within Christians. He has not had a course in Chalcedonian theology, and nor worked out the doctrine of the Trinity. He does not distinguish clearly between three factors: Christ, the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ<sup>22</sup>:

The *Spirit of God* has made a home in you. Indeed, anyone who does not have the *Spirit of Christ* does not belong to him. But when *Christ* is in you...and if the *Spirit* of him who raised Jesus from the dead has made his home in you...

Whatever the relationship between Christ and the Spirit, it is immediately the Spirit which gives life to the Christian and to the new creation. There must be allusion here also to the creation-story of Genesis, where the spirit of God hovers over the waters (Gn 1.2) and where God breathes the breath of life into Adam (Gn 2.7). This reaches its climax in the presentation of a new creation in Christ. The work of the Spirit extends to giving life not merely to the new eschatological humanity, but to the whole of creation made new.

### *1. Christians adopted through the Spirit*

The first part of Paul's argument, centred on Christians as adopted sons, relies more on the Abraham-symbolism which is also prominent in the letter. When Paul mentions 'Abba, Father' (Rm 8.15), his thought-world moves to the world of Abraham and the promises given to him; this is clear from Ga 3.16, 26-4.7). Christians succeed to the position of sons of God which was Israel's primary title and purpose. They share in the inheritance promised to Abraham, his 'portion' in the land promised to him. This adoption-theme is a particularly Pauline motif in the New Testament.

### *2. Creation renewed through the Spirit*

The second part, however, extends beyond human beings, and embraces the whole of creation; the eschatological new creation in Christ is not confined to his adopted sons, the new children of Abraham, but extends to the whole universe; 'creation' occurs in every verse 19-22. The presentation balances that of fallen creation in Adam of chapter 1. Fallen *creation* was rendered futile, did not *glorify* God, but exchanged his *glory* for the *image* of a mortal human being (1.20-23). So now the *creation* that was condemned to frustration is brought into *glorious* freedom (8.20-22), moulded into the *image* of his Son and brought into *glory* (8.29-30). Particularly prominent is the theme of glory, lost (as we have seen above) by Adam, but now returned; this brackets the section about the new creation: 'the glory which is destined to be disclosed for us' (8.18), as we are 'brought into his glory' (8.30). The lynch-pin of it all is the new Adam, the first-born (8.29) as Adam was, and the image which Adam had been intended to be. All these themes are already present in 2 Corinthians 3, but are made more explicit here. There may be further allusion to the Genesis story in the groaning in travail (8.22, 26) which is the current condition of creation, reflecting the travail imposed on the woman after the Fall (Gen 3.16). The whole of this new creation is the work of the Spirit.

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<sup>22</sup>Similarly in 2 Cor 3.17-18 it is unclear who 'the Lord' is, Christ or God, and what the relationship is between the Lord and the Spirit: 'this Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is...!'

Romans 8 concludes with an elevated passage on the glory which awaits those who share the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God. In the Bible glory is always a divine concept, and it is clear from 1 Corinthians 15.43-44 that those who share the Spirit of Christ and are transformed after the model of the New Adam are transferred into the sphere of the divine (from perishable to imperishable, from contemptible to glorious, from weak to powerful, as from natural to spiritual, see p. 29). In Rm Paul expresses this with the mounting climax, 'it was those so destined that he called, those he called he justified, those that he has justified he brought into glory', and concludes with the hymn to Christ's love. It is only after this that he can turn to the agonising problem of his brothers the Jews, who were destined to receive the promises of God and have refused.

### 3. The Place of Israel Today

Scholars have suggested (e.g. C.H. Dodd) that Rm 9-11 was an independent sermon of Paul which he added onto the main section of his exposition. Consonantly with this view, the prescribed text of Romans in the Oxford BA course concludes with chapter 8. This implies that Rm 9-11 is to be considered as a sort of appendix. On the contrary, it is the climax of the argumentation of the letter, giving the solution to the basic problematic of the situation of the churches at Rome. The letter begins with the situation of Jew and gentile apart from Christ. Now, having discussed the situation of those who accept Christ, he must for completeness turn to that of those who were destined for Christ but do not yet accept him.

It is important also politically today, when 'Holocaust Theology' is so much to the fore. It is no chance that almost all the scriptural quotations from the section of *Nostra Aetate* dealing with the Jews are from this section of Romans<sup>23</sup>. Anti-Semitism has been described as the most widespread heresy in the Church, and these chapters finally give the lie to its theological motivation.

Before filling out this point, I would like to make some preliminary remarks:

1. The whole argumentation of the letter has been centred on the will of God. For a Jew the will of God is expressed in scripture. So here the argument from scripture is paramount, and in fact some 30% of these chapters is scriptural quotation. Of this 40% is from Isaiah, but Paul is careful to bolster his argument also from the other prophets and the other two components of scripture, the Law and the Writings. The whole style, drawing the argument out of scripture, is an excellent example of midrash.
2. Paul's concern and personal involvement are shown throughout this section not only by his passionate statements, 'there is great sorrow and unremitting agony in my heart; I could pray that I myself might be accursed...if this could benefit the brothers who are my own flesh and blood' (9.2-3), or 'I take pride in this work of service, and I want to be the means of rousing to envy the people who are my own blood-relations and so of saving some of them' (11.13-14). Statements

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<sup>23</sup>see Austin Flannery's edition, *Documents of Vatican II*, pp. 740-42

and questions in the first person are far more frequent here than elsewhere. It is shown also by the frequency of the tussling diatribe style, the rhetorical questions, the pressing interrogation of the reader, the repeated vehement replies, 'Out of the question!', etc.

3. The question of predestination over which Calvin agonised is far from Paul's mind. We will not consider the tricky question of the dual causality of God.

The question at the centre of Paul's enquiry in Romans is how human beings receive the mercy or the saving justice of God. In this climactic section the question is whether God's mercy, to which Judaism was directed, has failed. Two answers are given, one immediate and one final. The first answer is that not all Israel is the Israel of the promise: 'Not all born Israelites belong to Israel, and not all the descendants of Abraham count as his children' (9.6), but only the remnant who respond.

This answer is perfectly coherent and consistent with scripture, but Paul simply refuses to accept it as final, since it involves the final rejection of some of the Jews. So he turns to the further solution, that the acceptance of the gentiles was meant to stir Israel to jealousy and eventual salvation: 'part of Israel had its mind hardened, but only until the gentiles have wholly come in' (11.25). The branches of wild olive are grafted on, but it is within the power of God to graft back the severed branches of the original too.

Finally Paul returns to the main theme of his letter. The whole section ends with a hymn to God's mercy and wisdom, 'how rich and deep are the wisdom and the knowledge of God, etc'. Before that Paul gives a series of carefully sculpted contrasts, circling round his favourite concepts of election, obedience and mercy.

As regards the **gospel** they are enemies, but for your sake.

As regards **election** they are beloved for the sake of the fathers (for the gifts of God and his call are irreversible).

Just as in the past **you were disobedient**,  
but now have **you received mercy** through their disobedience,  
So too now **they are disobedient**,  
so that **they may receive mercy**  
through the mercy shown to you.

For God imprisoned **all** people in disobedience  
that he might have mercy on them **all**.

(Rm 11.28-32)

This sums up the whole teaching of the letter, with its message of God's constancy and justice, his fidelity to his own promises of mercy made to Abraham.

## Personal Work

Choose an essay:

1. Does the experience of the Spirit in Christianity at the present day correspond even partially to that which Paul expects. If not, why not?
2. Does Paul's account of the refusal of belief by some of the Jews throw any light on the refusal to believe nowadays, either by the Jews or by others?

## Chapter 8. More Trouble at Corinth

The Christians at Corinth were not an easy community (pp. 34-36). There were the wide and natural divisions between the different classes and kinds of people in the community, inevitable in such a port-town, and both natural and healthy for a normal Christian community. First Corinthians reveals a number of disturbances and difficulties in the community. Paul had been moved to write to them by two groups of problems. Delegates had come from Corinth to ask him questions about observance and behaviour; these he answers tolerantly and steadily in the second half of that letter. But the envoys had also told Paul of factions, rivalries and other upsets within the community; with these Paul deals less patiently and gently in the first half of the letter. It is not altogether easy to see the underlying problem at the root of all their difficulties, but it does seem to have been connected with an overconfidence in the Spirit, a complacency at being transformed and set free by the Spirit (pp. 38-40).

After First Corinthians, the further communication between Paul and Corinth was stormy. It seems that First Corinthians did nothing to allay the troubles. On the contrary Paul's opponents were so riled by the vigour of Paul's criticism (especially of their wisdom, for people who vaunt their wisdom are seldom open to criticism) that it had wholly negative effect. Between First and Second Corinthians there seems to have been a series of further communication between Paul and the Corinthians:

1. A brief and painful visit (2 Cor 1.23-2.1).
2. The visit of a representative of Paul to sort out the problems. In fact this visit only made matters worse, for his authority was flouted (2 Cor 2.5-10; 7.12).
3. A severe letter from Paul, 'written in agony of mind' (2 Cor 2.3-9).
4. News to Paul via Titus that this letter had been effective in bringing them to their senses (2 Cor 7.8-13).

### 1. Division of Second Corinthians

It seems most likely that Second Corinthians is not in fact a single letter, but at least two letters, perhaps a collection of several letters. These would have been put together when Paul's letters were being sent in to whoever made the collection of the letters, and lumped together as a single letter. The components in question are:

2 Cor 1-9, which will be discussed at length shortly. Basically Paul is here celebrating his reconciliation with the Corinthians after all the foregoing troubles. He is obviously still rather tentative and lacking in confidence, careful not to alienate them by criticism, and still anxious to win them to his side. Within this unit it has been suggested that there are two passages which once constituted separate letters:

6.14-7.1 This little passage has a quite different tone, and can, moreover, be cut out of the text without spoiling or interrupting any argument: it stands up on its own. It is a strong warning to Paul's correspondents to separate themselves from some evil partners. The Corinthians should not associate with 'unbelievers'. It has been argued that this xenophobia is so contrary to Paul's normal missionary openness that it cannot have been written by him. Paul does not forbid Christians to associate with non-Christians. There is also a series of words used rarely or never elsewhere by Paul. The exclusiveness and series of oppositions set up is, it is argued, reminiscent of the dualism familiar from the Qumran texts, belief and unbelief, uprightness and lawbreaking, light and darkness, Christ and Beliar. To this those who hold that Paul wrote this passage, and for inclusion at this point, oppose a different meaning of 'belief': Paul is talking about practical belief: full belief requires a true scale of values and action compatible with centring life on Christ, and requires avoidance of the opposite kind of behaviour.

9.1-15 has no specific reference to Corinth, but mentions Achaia, the province in which Corinth lies. Chapter 8 concerns the collection for the Church at Jerusalem, which bulked so large in Paul's thoughts at this time (see p. 44). Chapter 9 starts afresh, as though no mention of the collection had been made, 'About the help to God's holy people there is really no need for me to write to you'. This is, of course, the familiar rhetorical figure of *praeteritio* or 'passing over' ('I don't need to tell you about...'), but it rings strangely after a whole chapter on the matter! Could it be an independent letter, written to the Churches of the whole of Achaia, which has simply been inserted here after the other passage about the collection which formed part of the appeal addressed specifically to Corinth?

A final decision on either of these passages is not crucial to an understanding of the letter as a whole. Much more important is the status of chapters 10-13. Here the tone is utterly different from anything which precedes. Instead of being conciliatory or even wheedling, reaching out for the friendship and sympathy of his correspondents, Paul is explosively ironical and sarcastic. At the very least, his mood has changed drastically. The most convincing explanation is that these chapters were written separately, some time after the earlier part of the letter, and that some events intervened which left Paul no alternative to justifying himself and re-asserting his authority in this aggressive manner. Accordingly, we shall treat the two passages as separate letters:

Letter A = 2 Cor 1-9  
Letter B = 2 Cor 10-13

## **2. The Purpose and Strategy of Letter A**

After the reconciliation and acceptance of Paul's rebuke which was reported by Titus, Paul still has some fences to mend. Principally and firstly he has to explain why he changed his plan to come to Corinth. Perhaps more broadly, he has to counter accusations that in person - as opposed to the temper of his letters - he is gentle, submissive and even unimpressive. But the important question is, to whom does he need to give these explanations? Who has made the objections?

In First Corinthians (see p. 00) Paul had been dealing with people who were complacent in the

Spirit. They were so well aware of the presence of the Spirit among them that they thought there was nothing more to wait for. Paul attempted to adjust this over-confidence in two directions. Firstly he insisted that the gifts of the Spirit have value and should be used only as they build up the Body of Christ, rather than for individual glorification and gratification. Secondly he insisted that the full transformation into Christ is still in the future, in the resurrection; they could not sit back and assume that all is already complete.

In Second Corinthians, however, Paul several times contrasts his apostolate of the Christian message with the work of Moses. This suggests that those to whom he is writing are putting a great deal of emphasis on Moses - a new feature at Corinth, which did not occur in First Corinthians, unless perhaps under the heading of the group who claimed that they were for Cephas (1 Cor 1.12). So Murphy O'Connor suggests<sup>24</sup> that Paul is now dealing not only with the 'Spirit-people' but also with a specifically Jewish group. They claimed the patronage of Moses as Lawgiver. Others may have claimed his patronage as the ideal figure of wisdom, the source of all wisdom, according to Philo (*Leg. Alleg.*, 1.395; *Gig.* 54).

On the positive side, from the very beginning of the letter Paul's contention is that all his action as apostle is an imitation of Christ. Firstly he needs to explain why he changed his plans to come to Corinth. Paul's opponents at Corinth had obviously accused him of inconsistency and unreliability in not coming as he had promised:

I had been meaning to come to you first... both on my way to Macedonia and then to return to you from Macedonia... Since that was my purpose, do you think I lightly changed my mind?  
(2 Cor 1.15-17)

To this accusation he replies on two levels, explaining firstly that his change had been out of consideration for them, and secondly that he had behaved not unreliably but with the reliability of Christ. This first argument shows just how deep the cleft between Paul and the Corinthians had been. If he had fulfilled his intentions of coming, it would have been 'a painful visit', and consequently he refrained from coming in order to spare them (1.23-2.4). He felt that a visit would be counter-productive until they were in a better frame of mind.

### **3. Paul the Servant of Christ**

The other explanation Paul gives is also rich in showing his conception of Christ. It is the first instance of the frame of mind which recurs so repeatedly throughout the letter that it must be said to be the background of all Paul's thought: his assimilation to Christ in his apostolate. Now Paul claims that he has behaved as Christ did, and Christ is the reliability of God, the fulfilment of the promises of God, the living proof of God's own trustworthiness. This is what he means by calling Christ the 'Yes' of God (1.20), in whom we answer 'Amen' to give praise to God. Christ shows the fidelity of God to his promises, and so his reliability. This had been the theme of much of Romans, but there Paul did not seem to have thought of this useful little pun on the word 'Amen'.

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<sup>24</sup>*The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (Cambridge University Press, 1991)

In Hebrew the root of 'Amen' אָמֵן means 'true, firm, sure'. So 'Amen' expresses acceptance for myself of the words of others, 'that goes for me, too'. At the great thanksgiving, when Ezra promulgated the Law, at the end 'Ezra praised Yahweh, the great God, and all the people raised their hands and answered, "Amen, Amen"' (Nehemiah 8.6). Saying 'Amen' to a prayer therefore means acceptance of that prayer as one's own. Hence there is a Jewish proverb, 'Only a fool says "Amen" to his own prayer'.

Paul also now gives the clue to all his thought on the matter, making another pun, this time visible in the Greek. The verse 1.21 reads literally, 'God fixed us firmly with you in Christ (ἰσχυροποιήσας ἡμᾶς ἐν Χριστῷ) and christed (ἁγιασθεὶς) us, who also sealed us and gave us the pledge of the Spirit in our hearts'. The word I have rendered 'christed' is etymologically as well as phonetically related to 'Christ', for 'Christ' means 'anointed', whence the conventional translation, 'God...anointed us'. But the pun expresses well the intensity with which Paul feels his integration into or identification with Christ. Similarly the gift of the 'pledge' of the Spirit of Christ bespeaks the same integration, for the word used for 'pledge' is used of a first down-payment or deposit, a payment which makes sense only if further payment is to follow. Paul is being careful not to contradict what he said in First Corinthians 15; he wants to emphasise the real, effective presence of the Spirit without suggesting that such a presence of Christ's Spirit in this world is already the ultimate transforming presence of the resurrection.

The other expression which Paul uses early in this letter to express his relationship with Christ is also rich and somewhat involved. In 2.14 Paul writes of God 'always leading us in the triumphal procession in Christ'. Already in First Thessalonians Paul had used the image of Christ's triumphal procession, meeting Christ in the clouds (see p. 00). Here the imagery is rather darker. Immediately afterwards Paul twice uses the imagery of 'fragrance of Christ'. For a Jew such imagery conjures up 'the sweet smell of sacrifice' which arises to God in the Temple. Paul is being led in Christ's triumphal procession precisely as a sacrifice, for the conclusion of a Roman triumphal procession was the slaughter of captives in the Temple.

Paul takes a stand in direct contrast to the pride, arrogance and complacency of the 'Spirit people'. Already in First Corinthians he had maintained that the Wisdom of Christ is totally other than the wisdom of the Greek philosophy on which they took their stand (pp. 38-41). Since then these same 'Spirit people' had mocked Paul for his seeming insignificance, contrasting the sternness of his letters with his actual presence among them (1 Cor 10.10). Now, throughout this letter, he is careful not to upset or alienate them again by criticism. It looks as though he had realised that he had upset them and alienated them too much by his criticisms in First Corinthians. There he had quoted against them their own slogans, 'For me everything is permissible (1 Cor 6.12; 10.23) and destroyed them. Now he constantly stresses his affection for them, calling them 'my dear friends' (2 Cor 7.1), stressing that he wishes to work for their joy (1.24), not to cause them pain, that they are a letter 'written on our hearts' (3.2; 7.3). What criticism there is remains tactful and gentle<sup>25</sup>. When he says, 'It is not ourselves we are

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<sup>25</sup>He can, however, still be stern. In 6.13 he severely calls them 'kids'. Despite some



proclaiming but Christ Jesus as the Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Christ's sake' (3.18), there must underlie a suggestion either that he has been accused of proclaiming himself rather than Christ, or that others have been too self-important; but the criticism is certainly tactful!

Instead of criticising them, he shows how his own humiliation and hardships unite him to Christ's humiliation and constitute the badge of his apostolate. Already in the initial thanksgiving (always an important clue to Paul's approach in each letter) he underlines his hardships in the apostolate for their sake:

Just as the sufferings of Christ overflow into our lives, so too does the encouragement we receive through Christ. So if we have hardship to undergo, this will contribute to your encouragement and your salvation.

(1.5)

Later, and with a touch of rhetoric in the series of antitheses, he gives more detail:

We hold this treasure in pots of earthenware<sup>26</sup>, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own.

We are subjected to every kind of hardship but never distressed,  
we see no way out but we never despair,  
we are pursued but never cut off,  
knocked down but still have some life in us.

We carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus too may be visible in our body.

Indeed, while we are still alive, we are constantly being handed over to death.

(4.7-11)

Paul is even more explicit that his hardships not only unite him to Christ but are positively the sign of his authentic service. It is because of this that he can call himself an 'ambassador' of Christ (5.20), with God urging them through him. The passage also gives us more details than does Luke in Acts of the actual sort of trials he underwent:

But in everything we prove ourselves authentic servants of God; by resolute perseverance in times of hardships, difficulties and distress,  
when we are flogged or sent to prison or mobbed,

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translations, there is no affectionate '*my children*', and the '*children*' alone does imply some inadequacy.

<sup>26</sup>It was attractively suggested by C. Spicq that the imagery is drawn from wrestling, and provoked by the image of an earthenware pot. Wrestlers oiled themselves before a bout, and after the number of falls onto a clay floor suggested by Paul would themselves look like clay pots. The other antitheses fit wrestling-bouts well.

labouring sleepless, starving,  
    in times of honour or disgrace, blame or praise,  
taken for impostors and yet we are genuine,  
    unknown and yet we are acknowledged,  
dying, and here we are alive,  
    scourged but not executed,  
in pain yet always full of joy,  
    poor and yet making many people rich,  
having nothing and yet owning everything.           (6.4-10)

He will return to the same theme in Letter B, and there contend that the lack of such sufferings shows that his opponents are not authentic apostles (11.23). By relating his own sufferings to those of Christ he shows what a central part in his own spirituality is played by the cross of Christ: 'we carry in our body the death of Christ' (4.10).

It is in this connection, claiming Christ as the exemplar he follows in his work, that Paul reaches his most extreme formulation of the work of Christ: God 'made the sinless one into sin' (5.11). He cannot here mean that God actually made Christ sinful. He must mean that for our sake Christ underwent death, the consequence of sin. He may also be playing on the Hebrew word *hatta't* (tafj), which means both 'sin' and 'sacrifice for sin', suggesting that Christ was the perfect sin-offering.

#### **4. A Ministry of Glory**

Besides stressing his humiliation as a sign of his union with Christ and a badge of his service for Christ, Paul also compares his ministry with that of Moses. The tactful criticism of the complacent 'Spirit people', who prided themselves on their wisdom and dignity, is in direct continuity with the criticisms of First Corinthians. The comparison with Moses is, however, a new element (see p. 71). We have already come across the threat posed to Paul's ministry by those who insisted on observance of Mosaic ritual (pp. 26-30). Besides sending agents to Antioch and Galatia, they may well have sent envoys to Corinth to counter the effects both of Paul's 'libertarianism' and of the extreme libertarianism of the 'Spirit people'. If they objected to Paul's freedom from legal observance, they would object even more strongly to the cavalier attitudes of the Corinthians. In one way an alliance between these two wings of opposition to Paul is unlikely. On the other hand, it may be that opposition to Paul might be the one factor to unite the two of them!

Paul hints that he has to counter a group who were both foreign to Corinth and somehow connected to Moses. He contrasts himself to those who need letters of commendation to them. He has no need of such letters, for the Corinthians themselves, he says, are his letter of commendation. They are written on his heart, as opposed to letters written on stone tablets; this sardonic (or even sarcastic) comment must refer to the stone tablets of the Law brought down by Moses from Sinai (3.1-3).

Not content, however, with such a riposte, Paul again goes on to a rich positive teaching. He

gives due credit to the ministry of Moses by calling it a ministry of glory. The concept of glory is an awesome and inspiring one (p. 66). But, great as this glorious ministry of Moses was, it contrasts unfavourably with the ministry of the Spirit, and in four ways. The ministry of the letter kills, whereas the Spirit gives life (3.6). It brought condemnation rather than saving justice (3.9). It was transitory rather than lasting for ever (3.11). Perhaps the most important of all is the last, which depends on a nice little piece of midrash: the ministry of Moses is linked to the veil which Moses kept over his face. According to Ex 34.29-34, his face was 'horned' (not like Michelangelo's *Moses*, but rather, so to say, calloused) by the intensity of the glory of God which he had experienced on the mountain, so that when he was not actually communicating with God, he wore a veil. Paul (somewhat unfairly) transfers this veil from Moses to those who hear his message, and represents it as a constriction, contrasting with the liberty of the his gospel (3.12-17).

The climax of this comparison comes at the end. As Christ in the Wisdom terminology (see p. 41) is the mirror and the image of God:

[Wisdom] is a reflection of the eternal light,  
untarnished mirror of God's active power,  
and image of his goodness.

So now Paul sees the Christian as reflecting further this image and being progressively transformed into it:

All of us, with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory; this is the working of the Lord wh is the Spirit.

(3.17-18)

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## 5. Letter B

By the time Paul comes to write the letter now printed as 2 Cor 10-13 further incidents must have occurred. Letter B is a reaction. Paul is obviously furious and hurt. No doubt he was upset that his second tactic had failed to win the Corinthians. First, in First Corinthians, he had corrected them severely. This turned out to be a failure, and merely alienated influential members of the community so thoroughly that the community as a whole failed to support Paul. Then (in 2 Cor 1-9), after considerable intervening negotiations, he had tried the softly-softly approach, gently explaining himself and avoiding any stern criticism. Now he abandons that tactic and takes the offensive with a massive attack. We can form an idea of what had happened to upset Paul from the defence which he makes.

Twice in the first paragraph he intimates that when he visited them he had been found to be insufficiently forceful.

I, the one who is so humble when he is facing you but full of boldness at a distance...

Someone said, 'His letters are weighty enough and full of strength, but when you see him in person he makes no impression and his powers of speaking are negligible'.  
(10.1, 10)

There is also, running through both Letter A and Letter B, a persistent series of allusions to money. This suggests that part of the accusation against Paul was that he embezzled or misappropriated some money from the great collection. He had taken precautions against such an accusation, and points out that he had a collaborator, 'so that no one should be able to make any accusation against us about the large sum we are administering' (8.21). Nevertheless he still needs to protest, 'it is not your possessions that I want, but yourselves' (12.14).

## 6. Who were Paul's Accusers?

Paul's critics, and now his targets, can be characterised also by his sarcastic comments on them: 'I know how happy you are to put up with fools, being so wise yourselves' (11.20). They commend themselves boastfully, so that Paul can say, 'We are not venturing to rank ourselves, or even to compare ourselves with certain people who provide their own commendations' (10.12), and later, 'I will cut the ground from under the feet of those who are looking for a chance to be proved my equals in grounds for boasting' (11.12). Their own claims must have included being true and pure representatives of Israel, for this is the first way in which Paul puts his counter-claims (11.21-22):

Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are the descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? I speak in utter folly - I am too, and more than they are.

The last element is important, showing that they claimed to be Christians as well as Jews. We are back to the old opposition of the Judaising Christians, who preached what Paul considered to be another gospel, which they held to be the true message of Christ (see p. 00). For this reason Paul can mock them as 'super-apostles' (11.5; 12.11).

The most embarrassed part of Paul's reply to them concerns the visions and experiences which he received. Presumably he is forced into this by claims of his opponents to have received special revelations. Nevertheless, he is so embarrassed at having to recount them that he pretends to hide behind a third party:

I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - still in the body? I do not know, or out of the body? I do not know; God knows - was caught up into the third heaven. And I know that this man - still in the body? or outside the body? I do not know; God knows - was caught up into Paradise and heard words said that cannot and may not be spoken.  
(12.2-4)

This is most uncharacteristic of Paul, for normally he places little value on such extraordinary manifestations of the Spirit. He protests that he too has the gift of speaking in tongues, but 'would

rather say five words with my mind, to instruct others as well, than ten thousand words in a tongue' (1 Cor 14.19). He prefers to stress those manifestations of the Spirit which directly build up the Christian community. But the very fact that he here forces himself, against his better judgement ('I have turned into a fool, but you forced me to it' 12.11), to oppose his own mystical experiences to their claims, suggests that we have to do also with the 'Spirit people' who were criticised in First Corinthians for making so much of extraordinary spiritual phenomena.

## 7. Paul's Counter-Offensive

In reply to all this Paul uses all the weapons of sarcasm and irony. He who preached against Greek wisdom here shows that he is a master of contemporary rhetoric. We have seen already the way Paul can use the hellenistic convention of diatribe (p. 47) and balanced, contrasting phrases (p. 74). Another recommended method of rhetoric was Comparison. Meleager's comparison of pease-porridge to lentil-soup was a famous exercise of the schools. Plutarch develops a great series of *Parallel Lives*, comparing Greek and Roman statesmen. So now Paul mounts his attack on his critics by comparing himself to them.

It is important to realise that the modern conventions of modesty and self-deprecation were not yet valued. Self-praise was an accepted convention, though there were firm conventions also about its limits. Thus Lucian, in *A Professor of Public Speaking* (13.21) claims to drive out his rivals 'as trumpets drown flutes or cicadas bees'. Plutarch, on the other hand, lays down rules *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively*, and Dio Chrysostom (*Discourse 57*) excuses Nestor's boasting as designed duly to humiliate Agamemnon and Achilles. So Paul is constrained to compare himself to his rivals, but carefully avoids the excesses of boasting by referring to 'a man in Christ'.

The most forceful weapon in his attack, however, is the whole direction of his assertions. 'With ruthless irony he turns the conventions upside down and parodies the self-display of his opponents by highlighting what he should hide and minimizing what should be accentuated'<sup>27</sup>. As in Letter A, his purpose is to show that the mark of an apostle is not their self-advertisement but his sharing in the sufferings of Christ. So he lists in devastatingly quick succession the humiliating hardships he has undergone, echoing the humiliations of his Master, and ending up with the ridiculous situation of being let down in a basket through a window in the wall:

I have been in prison more. I have been flogged more severely, many times exposed to death. Five times I have been given the thirty-nine lashes by the Jews; three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I have been shipwrecked and once I was in the open sea for a night and a day; continuously travelling, I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from brigands, in danger from my own people and from the gentiles, etc. (11.23-29)

The dangers of travel must have been a constant feature of Paul's life. Ancient literary sources paint a graphic picture of the discomforts and dangers of journeying, and such accounts were

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<sup>27</sup>Jerome Murphy O'Connor, *The Theology of the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (C.U.P. 1991), p. 115.

written by those who would have enjoyed considerably more resources than Paul. There was no police force. Major routes had magnificent roads (though the lone foot-traveller would often find himself pushed aside by official or military traffic), contrasting sharply with unmapped and tortuous lesser paths. The roads were infested with brigands, ready not only to despoil, but to kidnap and sell into slavery any serviceable person. In some areas 'the district was overrun by packs of enormous wolves, grown so bold that they even turned highwaymen and pulled down travellers on the roads or stormed farm-buildings' (Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 8.15). The major roads had inns at more or less regular intervals, but for the lone traveller these would provide little security and no privacy. This was, however, an improvement on huddling down in a cloak at the roadside, an open prey to robbers or other predators. For a graphic account see J. Murphy O'Connor, *Paul, a critical life*, p. 96-100.

Writing to the Philippians, too, Paul shows how constant is this motivation for him, 'that I may come to know him and the power of his resurrection and the sharing in his sufferings by being moulded to the pattern of his death' (Phil 3.10). This is what he means by 'Christ will be glorified in my body, whether by my life or by my death. Life to me, of course, is Christ, but then death would be a positive gain' (Phil 1.20-21).

## Chapter 9. A Summing up of Paul's Message

The last two letters of the Pauline corpus to be considered are those to the Ephesians and Colossians. The claim is strong that both letters are by an author later than Paul, who writes in his name, and feels himself to be an interpreter of Paul, carrying on or applying Paul's teaching to a different situation. As we have seen with regard to Second Thessalonians (p. 21-22), it is entirely within the conventions of the time that such an author should simply attribute his writings to the author whose message he is applying. The authorship of these letters must therefore be the first question discussed.

### The Authorship of Colossians

Stylistically it is difficult or impossible to attribute the letter to the writer of the great epistles.

#### 1. Vocabulary

Various word-lists have been published, but they lack conviction because the absence of certain words could be the consequence of different subject-matter: it is not surprising that words from the root δίκαιος (righteous) are absent in a letter where justice and justification play little part, and the Jewish problematic has passed.

#### 2. Sentence Structure

More convincing is that general argument from sentence-structure; the cut-and-thrust of diatribe has given place to an ample, rhetorical or even liturgical style. Thus in Col 1 verses 3-8 and verses 9-20 may each be construed as a single sentence, phrase piled upon phrase.

#### 3. Grammatical Construction

The argument which I find most convincing is that of grammatical construction: conjunctions denoting logical connection are far less used than in the genuine letters (μ\_ν γάρ, δή, τοίνυν, ε\_τε...ε\_τε, etc ('therefore', 'accordingly', 'indeed'))<sup>28</sup>. Instead the constructions are loose, relying on connections such as \_ν, δι\_ ('i', 'through'), and piled up genitives of quality. On the other hand, the use of relative clauses and participial constructions is considerably higher.

#### 4. Difference of approach

Evidence for a different approach as well as different circumstances is provided by the vagueness of characterisation of opponents: previously Paul had been crisply specific about his opponents and their tendencies. The generality of the approach in Colossians is shown by the number of different heresies suggested as the author's target, ranging from Pythagoreanism, Mithraism, Essenism, Gnosticism, syncretistic mystery cult to Judaism - 13 of them, according to Kiley<sup>29</sup>. The references to Jewish practices are moderate and gentle compared to the virulent denunciations of Judaisers in the earlier letters: 'He has wiped out the record of our debt to the Law' (2.13). The mild reminder, 'Never let anyone criticise you for what you eat or drink or about observance of annual festivals, New Moons or Sabbaths' (2.16) is very different in tone

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<sup>28</sup>Evidence in Mark Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy* (1986), p.51-52.

<sup>29</sup>*op. cit.*, p. 61-62.

from the polemics against Judaizers of Galatians and Philippians.

### 5. *Imitation*

A further phenomenon which carries implications about the author is the use of whole phrases from Philippians and Philemon. These must be the fruit of deliberate imitation. The author must be carefully trying to make the letter as Pauline as possible. A particular difficulty is that whole phrases and lines 'are taken from different contexts in Colossians and moulded into new contexts with at times slight but subtle changes in nuance and emphasis' (Tuckett, p. 81).

### **The Authorship of Ephesians**

Before discussing the authorship of the letter we must consider its character, and particularly that of the first part. Paul's letters regularly begin with an address to his correspondents, followed by a thanksgiving and prayer, which introduce the subject of the letter (see p. 14). In the oldest tradition of the text of Ephesians (represented by some good ancient manuscripts, and by the quotations in the writers of the second century) the address includes no name. Another unprecedented feature is that this mode of prayer and thanksgiving extends not only through an introductory paragraph, but through the whole of the first, doctrinal part of the letter. The blessing comprises the whole of the hymn in 1.3-14, after which there follows the thanksgiving for the faith and fidelity of the readers (1.15-2.22), the whole section concluding with a prayer for their deeper understanding (3.14-21). Interposed before this is a reflection on Paul's apostolate (3.1-13). All these elements are standard in the introductions to Paul's letters, but in a much shorter compass. By contrast, at the end (6.21-24), there is only the faintest sketch of the usual Pauline 'news and greetings' at the end of a letter - and what there is is only a repetition of Col 4.7-8!

The whole difficulty, of course, in deciding on the authorship of the letter is that the author does in fact succeed in his object to 'pass on an interpretation of the Pauline tradition in a way that will speak to... the needs of his readers'<sup>30</sup>. Heinrich Schlier, in his great commentary on the letter, calls the author a 'Paul after Paul'. The pseud tries to think the thoughts of the name, and in this case does so with a confusing degree of success.

It is therefore more profitable to detail differences from the Pauline letters than to delay on the question of authorship. The pattern of differences is consistent, and shows both why scholarly opinion is still divided, and why the question who actually wrote the letter is not of primary importance. The author takes Pauline elements, but gives them a different stress. Thus

1. Paul mentions the τὸ μυστήριον (the mystery) in Rm 11.25 and 1 Cor 2.1 (never elsewhere with the same meaning and weight nor with the article), whereas in Eph it comes 6 times and in Col 4 times. Similarly he does speak of the πλήρωμα (fullness, completion) in Christ, whereas in Ephesians the term is used much more widely and fully (4 times and twice in Col). The usage is also slightly different between the two letters: in Col the mystery is Christ, whereas in Eph the mystery is the union of all things in Christ. In Rm 11-15 πλήρωμα is used four times to mean fulfilment of the Law. In Eph it

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<sup>30</sup>Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* [Word Commentary, 1990], p.83.



means either the fullness of time (it is used thus once in Ga) or the completion of the world.

2. Paul's theology is centred on the Cross (see particularly the previous chapter), though the resurrection is also important to him. In Ephesians the Cross is mentioned only 2.16, whereas the emphasis is all on the resurrection and exaltation of Christ.

3. Paul often mentions his apostolic task, whereas Eph 3.1-13 reads like a retrospective estimate of his whole apostolate. It is a good deal too complacent for the earlier Paul. Despite calling himself 'the least of God's holy people', he does seem to be remarkably full of his achievements. On the other hand, there are no details of his sufferings and hardships, whereas Paul delighted to detail and list them. Now there is only general reference to Paul's trials, an interpretation of them and an appeal that they should be an inspiration to the Ephesians rather than a stumbling-block: 'I beg you, do not let the hardships I undergo on your behalf make you waver; they are for your glory' (3.13).

4. For Paul the fate of Israel is a burning issue and an anguished concern (e.g. Rm 9-11). By contrast, in Ephesians Israel is a simply thing of the past, something from which gentiles used to be excluded (2.12). The strongest difference from Pauline theology is that Paul insisted that Christ had not rendered the Law void (especially in Ga and Rm, but also in 1-2 Cor), whereas in Eph 2.15 he starkly affirms that Christ destroyed (the same very word καταργέω is used for 'annulling') the Law of the commandments.

5. Paul does speak of the Church of God as an entity which he persecuted (Ga 1.13; 1 Cor 15.9); but he normally speaks of 'the churches', communities in particular places. Ephesians regularly speaks of the universal Church as a single entity, and rather more as a theological entity than as a particular gathering of people in one place.

6. The most notable difference of course is the style, and it was the style which first alerted the Renaissance scholar Erasmus to the problem of Pauline authorship. Gone is the darting, questing diatribe (see p. 46-47), replaced by long periods (1.3-14, 15-23; 2.1-7; 3.1-7, 14-19; 4.11-16; 5.7-13; 6.14-20). This is a pleonastic, rhetorical style, almost liturgical in its rotundity. Sanday and Headlam wrote unkindly in 1902 (*The Epistle to the Romans*), 'We shut up the epistle to the Romans, and we open that to the Ephesians; how great is the contrast! We cannot speak here of vivacity, hardly of energy...In its place we have a slowly moving, onwards advancing mass, like a glacier working its way inch by inch down the valley.'

6. There are expressions frequent in Ephesians which depart from Pauline custom: for 'in the heavens' the author writes  $\nu$  το $\varsigma$   $\nu$ πουρανίοις (5 times) instead of  $\nu$  το $\varsigma$  ο $\rho$ ανο $\varsigma$ ; he uses 'the devil' (twice) instead of Paul's 'Satan'. Above all, there is a plethora of qualifying and complementary genitives which impart a quite un-Pauline rotundity to the language, and qualifying phrases tacked on by  $\kappa\alpha\tau$  and  $\nu$  ('according to')

and 'in'). Significant for the placing of the letter is a list of nine words<sup>31</sup> unique to Ephesians in the New Testament but common in the post-apostolic literature. This fits well with the changed situation of a church settling into the world: whereas Paul regarded marriage as an appeasement for the weak, hardly sensible in view of the threatening final catastrophes, Ephesians 5.22 honours it to the extent of comparing it to the relationship of Christ to the Church.

7. The most curious feature of all is that the letter slavishly uses phrases taken especially from Colossians. Over a quarter of the 2,411 words used in Ephesians are used also in Colossians, and in the passage recommending Tychicus (Eph 6.21) 23 consecutive words are the same as Col 4.7. Particularly the section 4.17-24 takes up words and phrases used in Col 3.5-11, re-using them and changing them sometimes in a curious way. Another instance is 5.20, where the author re-uses the phrases of Col 3.15-17, but in a different order and connection: particularly 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' now refers not to all activity of the Christian (as in Col) but specifically to thanksgiving.

After this it is not necessary from the theological point of view to come to a final decision about the authorship of Ephesians. The author certainly may be deduced from his use of Colossians to have seen Colossians as a model, presumably - rightly or wrongly - by Paul. If Ephesians is not by Paul, it is at least a faithful development from Paul. The lexicographical data, the admiration for Paul as an apostolic figure, the moderation of eschatological expectation, all point to a later date, soon after the Paul we know from the letters. The letter is in faithful continuity with the earlier Paul, representing a sensitive and legitimate development from the earlier letters.

The situation, however, has changed. The problematic is no longer the delay of the return of Christ, nor the relationship of Christianity to the Jews, nor yet the running sore of disorder at Corinth. The barrier between Jew and gentile has been broken down, so that the two have become united in the single New Man (1.15-16). Christ himself is viewed in a cosmic perspective, his resurrection from the dead leading straight on to his enthronement 'in heaven, far above every principality, ruling force, power or sovereignty or any other name that can be named' (1.21).

A variety of solutions has been suggested. Of course the problem of the authorship of Colossians cannot be separated from that of the authorship of Ephesians. So in 1872 H.J. Holtzmann suggested that they were each evolved from a common core. In 1933 E.J. Goodspeed suggested that Ephesians was written by someone thoroughly familiar with Paul's writing, to be the preface of the published collection of letters. Opinion has lately been tending in the direction suggested by M. Goguel in 1935, that Ephesians is an expansion of a genuine Pauline letter. So in 1999 M-E. Boismard suggested (*L'Enigme de la lettre aux Ephésiens*) that Ephesians was written by Paul from Rome, and then expanded by an author familiar with Colossians. Colossians itself is, holds Boismard (*La lettre de Saint Paul aux Laodicéens : retrouvée et commentée*, 1999), an expansion of the Letter to the Laodiceans, mentioned in Col 4.16. Similarly John Muddiman (*The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 2001) suggests that 'Ephesians' was originally written by Paul at Ephesus as a

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<sup>31</sup>Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p.lxv.

letter to the Church at Laodicea. It was expanded by someone familiar with the Pauline tradition, but not on all points in agreement with Paul, just as the gospel of Mark was expanded by Matthew, and the gospel of John expanded by the addition of John 21. This would account for a certain tension between different passages within the letter. The identification with the lost letter to the Laodiceans is suggested by the appearance in Ephesians of many of the themes which Colossians 2.2 announces are Paul's concerns with regard to Laodicea (encourage their hearts as Eph 6.22; union in love as Eph 4.16; the riches [as Eph 1.18] of understanding the mystery [as Eph 3.3-4]).

Perhaps the most attractive solution to these problems<sup>32</sup> is to regard Ephesians as a mediation, or even a celebration of Paul's teaching, probably written by a follower of Paul, using especially Colossians as a template.

#### 4. The Hymn of Colossians

A consideration of Colossians can profitably start with an investigation of the Christological hymn of 1.15-10.

The hymn provides an ideal focus for the Christological thought of the letter. This is probably an earlier hymn in two strophes. Despite the characteristically Pauline mention of the Cross, it has an unusually high proportion of non-Pauline words and words which do not occur elsewhere in these letters (see E. Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon*, 1971). The first strophe is a meditation on the Logos which penetrates the universe, which could well stem from Hellenistic-Jewish circles. The second strophe is a meditation which applies this to Christ. The whole has been adapted by the letter-writer to his own purposes. The two strophes correspond to each other:

**Who is** the image of the unseen God  
**the firstborn** of all creation,

**for in him** all things were created  
**in heaven and on earth,**  
visible and invisible,  
whether thrones or ruling forces  
or sovereignties or powers  
**all things** were created  
**through him and for him.**

He exists before all things  
and in him all things hold together  
and he is the head of the body  
(the Church).

**Who is** the beginning,

**the firstborn** from the dead  
so that he be supreme in every way  
**for in him** it pleased **all** fullness to dwell,

to reconcile **all things**  
**through him and for him,** making peace  
(through blood of his cross) through him,  
whether **on earth or in heaven**

Notes:

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<sup>32</sup>See 'Ephesians', article by James D.G. Dunn in *Oxford Bible Commentary* (forthcoming).

1. The first (bracketed) insertion is characteristic of Paul's emphasis on the cross, which otherwise plays little part in this letter. Grammatically it is awkward, giving two  $\delta\iota$ 's in the same sense. It is, however, unmistakably Pauline, for outside the gospels virtually only Paul in the whole of the New Testament refers to the Cross (elsewhere once in Hebrews 12.2) or crucifixion (elsewhere once in Rv 11.3). It goes unmentioned in the Pastoral Letters, and the whole of the Catholic Epistles.

2. The application of 'the body' to the Church in the second insertion is again characteristic of the letter, as we shall see later.

The first stanza fits well into the milieu of Hellenistic Jewish speculation about the Logos as it appears in Philo and other writers. There was constant concern to explain Judaism to the Hellenistic public in terms of philosophies familiar to them. The Logos, or reason, was the perfect means of welding philosophy to Jewish Old Testament speculations about Wisdom, which we considered in relation to First Corinthians (see p.39). The first stanza can be understood only in the light of all these. Perhaps the most striking features are  $\epsilon\chi\ \diamond\ \kappa\omega\nu$  (image) and  $\pi\rho\omega\tau\acute{o}\tau\omicron\kappa\omicron\varsigma$  (firstborn). The former corresponds to Wisdom texts where Wisdom is referred to as  $\diamond\ \diamond\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\upsilon\gamma\alpha\sigma\mu\alpha$  (shining brilliance) of God; for the ancients an image is not a mere external look-alike, but is thought to have the same power as the original in some way. The latter clearly refers to Wisdom in Proverbs 8.22-23.

The hymn has similarities to the thought patterns of Paul which we saw with regard to Christ as the Second Adam. In Romans Christ is seen as the principle of the new creation, the re-founded humanity, contrasting with Adam in whom humanity was first created. Now, however, the thought goes back beyond the Garden of Eden to the Creation itself and before. Christ is the Wisdom of God, existing before all things, in whom the creation of the world itself occurred, the agent of creation (Proverbs 3.9; Ps 104.24; Philo *Fug* 109). This is not a departure from Paul's earlier thought, but a development of it, for in First Corinthians 8.6 already Christ was seen as the Wisdom of God. Colossians, however, goes further than previous writings, for now Christ is also the goal of creation ('created *for* him'), which formerly had been God alone.

It is suggested that the Colossians were bemused by speculation about cosmic forces, Thrones, Principalities, Powers. What was the relationship of Christ to these powers? 'Do not be cheated of your prize by anyone who chooses to grovel to angels and worship them' (2.18). Were these powers superior, parallel or inferior to him? Just as in the Old Testament, during the Babylonian exile, the contact with the gods of Babylon forced the Jews to think out the relationship of Yahweh to the creation and to other forces said to rule creation, so this challenge led the author to greater clarity about the relationship of Christ to the so-called ruling powers of the universe: Christ 'has stripped the sovereignties and ruling forces, and paraded them in public, behind him in his triumphal procession' (2.15). Christopher Tuckett concludes, 'Some real sense of the pre-existence and pre-existent cosmic creative activity of Jesus seems to be asserted here. Jesus is here being put up into the realm of the divine in a way that exceeds much of the rest of the New

Testament' (*Christology and the New Testament*, 2001, p.79)

The second stanza mirrors the first, applying it to Christ by means of two ideas which both fit Pauline thought. As in First Corinthians 15, Christ is seen as firstborn from the dead. This echoes also the conception of Christ as the Second Adam, the exemplar and model of the new humanity. Here, however, the conception is wider than in the earlier letters, for it extends to the whole of being. He is 'supreme in every way, for in him it pleased all fullness to dwell.' Secondly, the reconciliation takes place through the Cross, as so often in Romans, where Christ is seen as the  $\text{XII} \bullet \text{C} \blacklozenge \text{Z} \text{A} \text{B} \text{C} \text{D} \text{E} \text{F} \text{G} \text{H} \text{I} \text{K} \text{L} \text{M}$ . The same language, 'through him ... making peace through the blood of his cross' (1.20), is used as at Rm 5.1, 'we are at peace with God through Jesus Christ'.

The third change, which is especially characteristic of these letters rather than the Pauline writings as a whole is the restriction of Christ's headship to the Church. By the addition of 'the Church' the universality of the original hymn is restricted to human beings. This is further reinforced by the verses following the hymn, which refer it to the recipients of the letter. There is, indeed, a constant wavering in these letters over what is envisaged by 'the Body'. Accordingly the differing relationship can be discovered only by a consideration of the Pauline teaching on the body of Christ.

### **5. The Body of Christ**

In the genuine Paulines the author uses the expression 'Body of Christ' in three different ways, without seeming to realise that these are different ways (see p.37-38). For him they are all interlocked, and form one idea:

1. My body and your body are physically Christ's body. Such is the realism with which he views the matter, that it is wrong for me to bed with a prostitute, because I am taking Christ's own body and defiling it. If I live with Christ's life, this is quite logical. Everything I am is Christ's, even my flesh and bones and bodily parts (1 Cor 6.15-16). This use is the first to occur in Corinthians, and may well be taken to be the basis of the other usages.
2. The body of Christ which is the loaf we eat. The eucharist without the community makes no sense; it is the eucharist of the community gathered in Christ. It is the means of creating and strengthening the body of Christ because by our joining to the eucharistic body we are integrated more fully into the body of Christ, 'the bread that we break is a communion with the body of Christ'. Nor is it only a communion with the body of the Lord. It is the body of the Lord itself, so that 'anyone who eats the bread and drinks the cup unworthily is answerable for the body and blood of the Lord... A person who eats and drinks without recognising the body is eating and drinking his own damnation' (1 Cor 11.27-29).
3. Together we form the one body of Christ, each part having its own particular function. Some are healers, some teachers, some speak in tongues, some interpret the tongues (1 Cor 12-14). The body is used frequently in ancient literature as an image for what we now call a 'corporation'. The earliest usage seems to be in early Rome, when Menenius

Agrippa used the image to persuade the seceding plebs to return to Rome, politely telling them that they were the belly while the patricians were the head of the body, and neither could get on without the other (Livy 2.32). The difference from this in the Pauline usage is that the body *is* Christ. Nowhere else is this corporate body said to be a real person. In the genuine Paulines this body, as 'the Church', is always the body of Christ (or the Church) in a particular place.

In the deutero-Paulines the image of the body carrying the connotation of the interdependence of the members occurs only in a subsidiary way in two related passages, Eph 4.14, 'We shall grow completely into Christ who is the head, by whom the whole body is fitted and joined together, each joint adding its own strength, for each individual part to work according to its function' (cf. Col 2.19). Here it seems that the Body is the Christian body or the Church.

But elsewhere the optic has changed. No longer do all the parts go to make up the body of Christ, but Christ stands over against the body as its head. This is in consequence of the new perception of the position of Christ. But is Christ head of the body only or of the whole cosmos? In the hymn at the beginning of Ephesians the word  $\Sigma$  ❖ νακεφαλαιώσασθαι is used, everything in heaven and on earth is to be brought together under Christ as head (1.10); in this case the body is far wider than the Church. The basic idea is the same as that already expressed in 1 Cor 15.24-28, that all creation is subject to Christ (dependent on the use, so frequent in the New Testament, of Ps 110.1 - all things 'under his feet'). On the other hand, in 1.22-23 'God has put all things under his feet, and has given him, as he is above all things, to the Church as κεφαλ\_, head'. The two aspects are related but not identical: the former concept expressed in  $\Sigma$  ❖ νακεφαλαιώσασθαι is related to κεφάλαιον, which means 'a summing up', as love sums up all the other commands in Rm 10.9, or a recapitulation, which makes sense of an argument and puts everything in order. The latter concept, κεφαλ\_, has three principal connotations:

1. The head is the classic concept in Hebrew history for a ruler or authority, a king at the head of his people.
2. In ancient medicine, already in Hippocrates but more fully in Galenius, the head is the source of nourishment and co-ordination, ruling the nerves and functioning of the body.
3. The head is also in Philo (*Quaestiones in Exod* 2.117), by means of the Logos or Reason by which God rules the universe, the ruling principle of the cosmos.

## 6. The Blessing of Ephesians

Many of these ideas feed into the great prayer of Ephesians. If Ephesians is regarded as a meditation and reflection, looking back on Paul's message, the first three chapters should be seen as a prayer. They begin with the lyrical blessing of 1.3-14, leading directly into the prayer (1.15-

23) for an understanding of the 'mind-blowing Christology' (Dunn) of its final verses. There follows a meditative break on the renewal of humanity (2.1-3.13) before the final burst of praise in 3.14-21.

### *1. The Blessing (1.3-14)*

The paradox of Ephesians is fully expressed in the paradox of this capacious blessing. It grows out of the whole richness of the Old Testament traditions of the choice of Israel, and yet opens out to stretch this choice beyond the bounds of Israel. In time it extends from 'before the world was made' to 'when the times had run their course'. In space it extends from heaven to earth. In form it adopts the biblical formula of a blessing to God, frequently used in the psalms. It is full of the key concepts of Israel's choice, many of which have been familiar in Paul's thought, adoption as sons, inheritance, God's love leading to forgiveness, the Beloved Son (in the Old Testament this is Israel, but here the concept is transferred to Christ). There are also the concepts which became central in Romans, freedom through Christ's blood and the plan of God's purpose finally revealed. The concept of the mystery to be revealed at the end of time is deep in the Jewish tradition, drawing on both the Wisdom and the prophetic traditions (Ws 2.22; Dan 2.18 and NJB notes). It was especially important at Qumran, where the revealing of the mystery was eagerly awaited; 'mystery' was, so to speak, a 'buzz-word'. Paul had already used it in Romans 16.25; it is characteristic of Ephesians to take up and expand these Pauline concepts.

In shape this blessing is a parabola. It starts with the Father, descends to gather up all humanity, as 'he would bring everything together under Christ as head' (v.10, see p. 86), finally returning to the Father with 'the praise of his glory'. From the human point of view the richness of this blessing is that it expresses in so many ways the Christian experience of forgiveness and acceptance in Christ. It has been divided into seven distinct blessings showered upon humanity:

v. 4	God's call
v. 5	adoptive sonship
v. 7	forgiveness
v. 9	revelation of the mystery
v. 11	inheritance
v. 13a	call of the gentiles
v. 13b	the seal of the Spirit.

All are centred on Christ, and all could be considered different ways in which the experience of forgiveness and acceptance in Christ has been experienced.

### *2. The Prayer (1.15-23)*

The prayer continues the elevated vein of the blessing. It is a prayer for a deep understanding, in the Spirit of wisdom, of the mystery revealed. It is not a prayer for mere knowledge, but for perception: 'may he enlighten the eyes of your mind' (1.18). The object of this understanding is the position of Christ. Only in Ephesians is Christ described as seated 'in the heavenly places' (1.3, 20; 2.6). Perhaps more striking is the supremacy of Christ to all the powers which might

seem to determine the course of world events, 'every principality, ruling force, power or sovereignty, or any other name that could be named'. Most notable of all is the immense power by which God has placed the exalted Christ in this position. The terms are piled on top of each other. So Christ's exaltation was effected by 'the overriding greatness of his power... according to the energy of the power of his strength' (1.19).

The climax of the assertions about Christ's position in the world comes by use of the term *plh/rwma*.

In its basic and normal sense this term means the cargo of a ship, the population of a town, the contents. In the LXX it is used for the totality of the contents of land and sea (Jer 8.16; Ezek 12.19; Ps 24.1). Gal 4.4 uses the *πλήρωμα* of time to mean the fullness of time, the moment which completes time.

To the six uses in Colossians and Ephesians the background is primarily biblical: God fills the earth. In Is 6.3, the vision of God in the Temple, 'his glory fills the whole earth'. This becomes a frequent cry, 'May the whole world be filled with his glory' (Ps 72.19; Hab 3.3). In the Wisdom literature too, 'the Lord looked at the earth and filled it with his good things' (Sir 16.29). So also Wisdom is God's presence in all things (Sir 24.22-30). This fullness or filling is now seen to be Christ himself. A secondary allusion may be to the idea in popular Stoic pantheist philosophy that the divine principle fills all and is filled by all.

The idea is applied slightly differently in the two letters. In Colossians the idea is primarily passive, Christ is filled with the fullness of divinity: 'because God wanted all fullness to be found in him' (1.19) becomes more precise in 2.9, 'In him in bodily form lives divinity in all its fullness'. In Ephesians 1.23 this fullness is active, perhaps both active and passive, both filled with God and filling all things with the divine presence. In some way, which is far from clear, there is a special relationship between Christ, this fullness of divinity, and the Church, for God has 'given him to the Church as head above all'. Later it seems that the fullness transfers to God's holy people by the fact of Christ indwelling them and filling them: 'so that Christ may live in your hearts...and that you may be filled with the utter fullness of God' (3.17-19) or equivalently, 'until we all form the perfect Man, fully mature with the fullness of Christ himself' (4.13).

### *3. Meditation on the changed condition of humanity (2.1-3.13)*

The themes of this middle section are all familiar from earlier letters. First the writer outlines the condition of humanity without Christ and lost in sin (2.1-10). As in Romans, this leads him to reflect on the different positions of Jew and Gentile, different in themselves but alike without hope except in Christ.

In his answer, however, there is a new triumph. Whereas in Paul salvation was always in the future (p. 20), now it has already been won: 'it is through grace you have been saved, and raised up with him and given a place with him in heaven, in Christ Jesus (2.5-6).

In Romans the union of Jew and gentile Christian was described in terms of being grafted into the olive-tree (p. 68). It is only in the future that this grafting will be complete. In Ephesians the



image used is a wall destroyed. This image of the wall is perhaps drawn from the wall in the Temple which divided the forbidden Court of the Jews from the Court of the Gentiles. The inscription from it has recently been found, prescribing the death penalty for any gentile who transgressed it. Again the picture is far more positive: Christ is the peace between Jew and gentile and has already destroyed the hostility between them, fashioning 'a single New Man out of the two of them' (2.15).

The climax picks up again the image of a building, the building being the new Temple. The living Temple of the Church has taken the place of the Temple of Jerusalem as the place of God's presence. Jesus Christ is the corner-stone, and the foundation stones are apostles and prophets (2.20). The order (apostles, followed by prophets) suggests that Paul has in mind Christian, rather than Old Testament prophets; their prominent position is another reminder of the importance of the 'charismatic' in the early Church. The image is used in such a way as to suggest again the organic unity of the Body of Christ in Paul: it is 'knit together in him' and still 'growing into a holy temple... *being* built into a dwelling-place of God'(3.21-22).

Finally (3.1-13) the author describes Paul's part in the work of salvation. This was a feature of the earlier letters of Paul, but (see p. 81) it now occurs in quite a new fashion, not without bombast, and as though looking back on a whole apostolic career.

#### *4. The Praise (3.14-21)*

Prayer and wonder have never been far below the surface. Now the writer breaks out again explicitly into prayer, a noble trinitarian prayer. As in the initial blessing, the Father is the source of all. By this characterisation of the Father as the source of all 'fatherhood' or even 'family' (the Greek *patri/a* has a wider sense than just 'fatherhood'), the prayer looks ahead to the counsels on the family which will be given in 5.21-6.9. The final doxology also draws the praise back to the Father's glory which is the purpose and goal of the whole process of revelation. The means of all this is the real appreciation and awareness in 'your inner self... in your hearts' (3.16-17) of the surpassing love of Christ 'which is beyond all knowledge'; it is no mere knowledge but a deep and inward experience. The enabling power is the Spirit, lived in the community, 'with all God's holy people... in the Church' (3.18, 21). Thus this astonishingly positive and forward-looking prayer sums up the objectives of the initial blessing of the letter.

#### **7. Exhortation - the basics of the Christian Life**

The moral advice on living the Christian life which concludes the letter is marked by several notable features.

1. The heading to the whole exhortation is a trumpet call to support one another in love and to preserve the unity of the Spirit which binds you together: one Body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all (4.2-6).

2. According to the conventions of the time the father of the household held undisputed authority over his wife and family. This is repeatedly put within the context of Christian discipleship. God's love and generosity are to be the pattern (5.1). All relationships are to be 'in the Lord' (15

times in chapter 5 and 6).

3. Thus the conventional submission of wife to husband is softened and balanced by a comparison of the love of husband for wife with the generosity and self-sacrifice of Christ, the love of Christ for the Church, and by a reminder of the archetypal teaching of Genesis that 'the two become one flesh' (5.31).

4. The conventionally absolute authority of parents over children is mitigated by the counsel to parents 'never drive your children to resentment but bring them up with correction and advice inspired by the Lord' (6.4).

5. Similarly the institution of slavery is not itself questioned, but the obedience of slaves to their masters has changed its character. It is seen as a Christian obedience, 'as to Christ' and 'for the sake of the Lord' (6.6, 7). As the children, the fact that slaves are directly addressed dignifies them as full members of the congregation (6.1, 5) who render their obedience willingly and with their own responsibility. Even a slave 'will be rewarded by the Lord for whatever work he has done well' (6.8).

Finally the biblical image of God as a warrior is brilliantly applied to the struggle against the powers of evil. The 'principalities and powers and evil powers who are masters of the darkness in this world' (6.12) have been repeatedly said to be subject to Christ, but the writer is not so naive as to suppose that the battle is over. So the warfare of the Spirit is to be carried on with the weapons of

the belt of truth against lying and deception,

the breastplate of uprightness, or knowledge of the Lord's fidelity to his promises (see p. 60, 72),

the shoes of eagerness to spread the gospel,

the shield - like the breastplate, a defensive weapon - of faith, or trust in the Lord's strength,

the helmet of salvation, as in 1 Thess 5.8, the confidence of ultimate triumph,

the sword of the Spirit (the single active weapon), that is the word of God, the spoken and inspiring message of salvation.

All these implements of individual warfare are to be supported by the mutual prayer of the whole community: 'never get tired of staying awake to pray for all God's people'.

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**Personal Work**

1. How does the Christology of these letters develop and sum up that of the earlier Pauline letters?
2. What use does the author of these letters make of the image of the Body of Christ? How does it relate to earlier Pauline teaching?