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Paul's Missionary Practice and Policy in Romans

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Introduction

Paul was the doyen of missionary theologians in the early days of the church. Not only did he spend his life in urgent compulsive evangelisation but he also wrote and argued for a theology of Gentile mission that necessitated a revised understanding of the church's outreach and development.

Romans has traditionally and, in our opinion, wrongly been regarded as a summary of Paul's theology. This designation would have more substance were the letter regarded as a summary of Paul's theology of mission which in fact can be seen to occupy a substantial part of the letter when chapters 9-11 are included in the discussion. (1)

1 The Contextual Nature of Paul's Statements in his Letters

It has become increasingly clear to New Testament scholars in recent years that Paul did not set out to develop in his letters a systematic theology. We can no longer therefore legitimately use his statements as if they were abstract and timeless theology. E P Sanders concluded from his study of Paul and the law that though 'a priori' one would expect Paul to have had a clear position on the law, in fact because Paul's statements depend on the question asked or the problem posed, he does appear to have said different things on differing occasions. This may be because "Paul did not abstract his statements about the law from the context in which they were made, nor did he consider them in their relationship to one another apart from the questions they were intended to answer". (2) There is general agreement, however, that although Paul's statements on any topic are contingent upon the circumstances he addresses, nevertheless coherence as well as contingency is the hallmark of his thought. (3) The relevance of this for our immediate enquiry is that we must interpret

Paul's statements about mission in Romans in the light of the context out of which the letter originated and to which it was addressed.

Although we cannot discuss in any detail here the reason why Paul wrote the letter to the Romans, one thing is clear. There is some factor whether in Paul's situation, or, as seems more probable in our opinion, in the situation of the Roman Christians which necessitated a consideration of the Jewish people and their response to the gospel. This explains the unique discussion of Israel in chapters 9-11 of the letter. (4) A curious but related factor is that no one would guess from Paul's statements concerning his mission plans in chapter 1 that he is not coming immediately to Rome, but is in fact on his way to Jerusalem instead. He eventually gets round to mentioning this in chapter 15. But why the silence in chapter 1? Is this due to Paul's embarrassment about his relations with the 'Urgemeinde' in Jerusalem, or perhaps about the collection gathered from the Gentile churches for the poor saints in Jerusalem? It may even be that Paul is aware that he is suspected of being too patriotic because of his own ethnic origin in Judaism?

It seems to us that any balanced approach to the reason why Paul wrote the letter must find some basis both in the situation at Rome such as divisions within the Christian community there, and also some factor in the mission or situation of Paul himself that is somehow intimately connected with, or influenced by, the situation of the Roman Christians. Only in this way can we avoid seeing the letter as being completely determined by Paul's own needs and problems as he heads for Jerusalem, or as reflecting only the situation at Rome without any relation to the wider issues of Paul's mission policy. It will suffice at this stage simply to note that there is evidence in chapters 14-15 of divisions between "the weak" and "the strong" which may reflect divisions between Jewish and Gentile Christians. There is evidence also of Gentile arrogance over against Jews in chapter 11:13f and there is some indication that

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Paul in chapter 4 has in mind to demonstrate that Jewish, proselyte and Gentile Christians share a common ancestry in their "father Abraham".

Whatever the precise impetus that led to the letter being written, we are thankful for it since it has provided the fullest discussion in the New Testament of the purpose of God for both Jew and Gentile: a discussion moreover which consciously faces the realities of Jew-Gentile differences whether in cultural heritage or in relations within the churches. It is likely in view of statements by Paul, such as that he has long intended to visit the Romans and that their faith is spoken of throughout the world, that there had been Christians in Rome for a decade or more when Paul wrote his letter in 57-58 AD. According to chapter 16 which we take to be part of the original letter, there may have been at least five different house churches and there may have been a not inconsiderable number of Christians since Paul lists no less than twenty-five with whom he is acquainted. One of these references is to a couple, probably husband and wife, described as noteworthy apostles who were in Christ before Paul (16:17). (5) The fact that Paul addresses his letter "to all God's beloved in Rome" (1:7) may indicate that there were different groups within the Roman Christian community who did not fully accept each other as Christians and chapters 14-15 may be further evidence for this; we note especially Paul's final admonition to "accept one another as Christ also accepted us" (15:7). It is possible that the differences, if such there were, within Roman Christianity, arose not simply from cultural differences but from "ecclesiastical" differences, ie the Roman Christians may have migrated to Rome from other areas where they may have been evangelised by different Christian missionaries - hence their differing interpretation of the Christian message. We must return to this in more detail later.

II Paul's Mission Plans in Relation to Rome

Paul understands himself to be called in the manner of

the prophets of old to be an apostle (Rom 1:1, cf. also Gal 1:15). More precisely, he regards himself as "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13), called by God and given grace "to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles" (15:16-17). In liturgical terms Paul conceives of his ministry as a priestly service whereby he offers up the Gentiles to God as "an acceptable sacrifice, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (15:16).

Paul appears to have regarded Jerusalem as both the point of origin of his mission and also the centre of the church. However much he may be aware of the political significance of Rome, it comes behind Jerusalem in religious significance. By 57 AD, Paul has already pursued his ministry throughout the regions bordering the Mediterranean - from Jerusalem to the western shores of Greece. His pattern was to set up congregations in the main provincial centres and then move on, leaving them to evangelise their own region. But Paul would still care for them pastorally or write or visit as circumstances permitted because they are for him evidence of the validity of his own ministry and apostleship - so that effectively his own Christian achievements are bound up with theirs.

To evangelise in Paul's understanding meant not only the initial preaching of the gospel but also the support and upbuilding of his converts who themselves would then continue the proclamation which Paul had initiated. This policy is important in helping to resolve what some regard as a clear contradiction in Paul's statements between chapters 1 and 15 of Romans. From Greece, Paul plans to move further west to Rome and then to the farthest borders of the west - to Spain. The reason why he heads for Rome and Spain at this time is because he has now no more room for evangelising in the East (15:23). This announcement is preceded in 15:19-20 by Paul's statement that he has "fully preached the gospel of Christ... not where Christ was already named" - lest he build on another man's foundation. The policy Paul follows here is supported by a scriptural citation from Isaiah 52:15, a passage which refers to "many nations".

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As further explanation for his plans to visit Rome, Paul claims that for many years "he has had a great desire to visit them" (15:23). He immediately hastens to add that his main purpose is to make his journey into Spain and it would appear that what he really wants from the Romans is missionary support for his evangelistic work in Spain. He hopes to be "sent on his way" by them. He uses the term "propemphthenai", probably a technical term for providing such necessary missionary support as offering a place to stay, assistance with travel and also possibly acting as a link between the new mission station and the sending churches. (6)

So much for chapter 15, but already in chapter 1, Paul had spoken of being ready "to evangelise" in Rome also (1:15). In v 11 he had spoken of imparting some spiritual gift to the Romans and then, as if he were afraid of sounding too presumptuous, goes on to talk of a mutual strengthening of faith between them (v 12). Again in v 13 he speaks of "gaining some fruit among the Romans, as amongst other Gentiles". The latter statement implies what we already know to be true - that Paul has not as yet visited or preached in Rome. But how are we to reconcile the use of the same verb "to evangelise" in 1:15 and 15:20, coming as the latter does, immediately after Paul's stated intention of avoiding duplication or conflict by building on another man's foundation?

The explanation must be, as we have suggested, that Paul understands evangelisation to apply also to the upbuilding of Christians in the gospel. Moreover the explanation for moving to Rome is that Paul has no more room in the East - therefore he cannot now be faithful to his former policy - only in Spain can he continue his pioneer work. To get there he needs the help of the Roman Christians and to ensure that help he needs an undivided Christian community. His evangelising there has this limited sense of ensuring proper support for future mission in Spain. (7)

It is probable for various reasons that no particular apostle had been instrumental in founding the Christian congregations at Rome. Paul seems to have had many friends there and probably the best explanation is that he did not feel entirely responsible for the Roman Christians because he had not founded that church, and also because there were Christians there from other branches of the Christian mission - possibly converted through the Jerusalem church. But Paul, as God's agent in winning some of these Christians to Christ and as apostle to the Gentiles generally, has the right and obligation, not only to pray for them (1:9) but also to visit Rome to encourage and strengthen his own Gentile converts. Hence Paul's summing up of the content of his letter in 15:15 as reminding them of that which he expects them already to know.

He formally states, however, that the gospel obligates him to all men, all races and all cultures. He is indebted to the Greek and the barbarian not only because he has learnt from both Judaism and Hellenism, but because in the gospel he is obligated to witness to all men since the gospel itself concerns all, whether Jew or Greek, barbarian, bond or free etc.

In concluding this section we note the possibility that there may have been differing groups of Christians in Rome who originated from differing branches of the Christian mission. We have already drawn attention to Paul's caution in addressing the Romans. If some of these Christians were Jewish converts of the Jerusalem church which, according to Gaston, did not believe in evangelising Gentiles, (8) then perhaps the origin of the phrase "to the Jew first" might be attributed to this group. It would be important for Paul as he heads for Jerusalem with the collection not to cause misunderstanding there by interfering in a Christian community which had its earliest roots in Jerusalem. If the phrase "There is no distinction" - attributable possibly also to Paul himself, did originate from the Christians in Antioch, then it could be that Paul in Romans is addressing a situation where competing Christian groups

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antagonise each other with slogans of their respective places of origin or allegiance, emphasising their differences rather than their common belonging to Christ. Whatever their situation, Paul's concern is that their quarrels or divisions should not become a hindrance to the success of the gospel - either in his forthcoming visit to Jerusalem or in his intended evangelisation of Spain. Hence his serious concern expressed in his call for them to join together in prayer for him in both these projects (15:30f).

III Paul's Gospel

(a) **God's Act in Christ as the Foundation of Paul's Missionary Proclamation.**

In important statements in the first chapter of Romans Paul declares he is not ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God into salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. According to Paul, in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed through faith. For Paul righteousness describes a relationship - the covenant relationship between God and his people. To be "just" or "righteous" is to uphold the covenant, to act in accordance with it; to be "unrighteous" is to act in such a way that the covenant is broken. The fact that God can always be relied upon to keep His part of the covenant means that He can also be described as faithful (Rom 3:5) and the good news of the gospel for Paul consists in the fact that God has acted in Christ to uphold His covenant with humanity despite the faithlessness of His people Israel in refusing his gospel. In 3:21-30 Paul demonstrates that God's act in Christ is both the sign of God's righteousness and the means of righteousness for those who have faith (3:25-26). (9)

Although God's act in Christ is consistent with what is already known of God's faithfulness in the Old Testament, it is nevertheless so qualitatively new in its effects and what it offers that Paul can contrast this new aeon with all that has gone before. In Rom 7 in

particular, Paul shows how prior to Christ the law was weakened through the power of sin and that only through His deliverance and with the aid of the power of the Spirit (Rom 8) may men be restored to fellowship with God. So Paul emphasises the newness of the gospel. He begins in 3:21 "But now the righteousness of God is manifested..." and in 8:1 he says "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus". In the Christ event God offers as a gift to humanity a restored relationship with Himself. With the gift goes also the demand to accept the Lordship of the Creator who is now in this way acting to restore His control over His rebellious creation. (10) It is God's purpose not only to save human beings, but the whole creation looks for its eventual redemption when the full adoption of God's sons is realised into the full redemption of their bodies (8:19f).

Along with the cosmic aspects of Paul's gospel goes his stress on the gospel as universal. All men both Jew and Greek are frequently referred to in Romans and Paul is at pains to emphasise that what God has done in Christ applies equally to everyone. Since God is One, there can be only one way of salvation and the centrality of faith in the new aeon means that anyone is able to enter the kingdom. Since in this respect there is no distinction (3:22) then Jews and Gentiles are equally able to enter the kingdom and conversely neither are exempt from this challenge. The reason for Paul's heavy stress upon faith is precisely to emphasise the universality of the gospel which the entrance requirement of faith ensures. The possession of the law, though itself a privilege for God's people, had placed racial limits on entry to the covenant people (3:30). But what the law does not do - "apply equally to all" - righteousness by faith does. (11) Yet this righteousness by faith is not to be seen in total discontinuity from the law or from Judaism. The presupposition of faith in Paul is the grace of God and it is under this theme that we will study another aspect of his gospel.

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(b) Paul's Gospel as the Fulfillment of the Hope of Israel

Paul's ministry to the Gentiles is itself the result of God's grace (15:15,12:3). His gospel presupposes the elective purpose of God for Israel which he strikingly describes (with reference to the remnant) as "the election of grace". The theme of grace denotes continuity and consistency between God's revelation of Himself in the past and in the present. Grace is probably what Abraham found when, according to the Genesis narrative, God called him and made him the first of the faithful. As such he is the prototype of all men of faith, including Christians. He is "the father of us all" (Rom 4:16). In his choice of Abraham, Paul is not simply making an arbitrary selection to obtain a representative believer. Abraham stands at the beginning of God's ways with Israel and demonstrates, at the outset of the giving of God's promise to bless the world in and through him (Abraham) and his descendants, that the promise originated in grace. (12) Its fulfillment to be firm (bebaian) must needs also be based on grace (4:16). The blessing promised to Abraham who was to be "the father of many nations" (4:17), Paul believes to have arrived in Christ, whom he describes as having become "a servant to the circumcision so as to confirm (eis to bebaiosai) the promise of the fathers and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy" (15:8-9).

In chapters 5-6 Paul sees the Christ event in terms of God's grace. By him - the Lord Jesus Christ - we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand (5:2). Paul contrasts the reign of grace with the reign of sin. The grace of God and the gift of grace through Jesus Christ far exceed the reign of sin in Adam. "Where sin abounded, grace superabounded" (5:20), so that those who are united with Christ cannot possibly continue in sin (6:1).

Thus Romans, more than any other letter of Paul, demonstrates continuity in the divine initiative in grace. (13) The gifts and the call of God are irrev-

ocable (11:29) and therefore Paul can speak of the privileges of Israel as a present, and not as a past, reality (9:4-5).

But this does not mean that Israel may presume and interpret the experience of divine election as a state of "electedness". Paul sees the failure of Jews to respond to the gospel partly in terms of their having an exclusive understanding of election. Gaston and Sanders correctly interpret 9:30f as indicating that the Jews have sought a righteousness of their own, ie a righteousness available to Jews alone. (14) The result is that they have failed to see in Christ the goal of the law and Paul is full of sorrow as he realises how few of his fellow Jews have responded to the gospel.

But he does not, because of this, deny them a future in God's purposes. He does not think in terms of their displacement by Gentiles, but rather of Gentiles being brought in to share the richness of the olive tree (11:17). Here, as 11:16 indicates, Paul is thinking in terms of corporate wholes rather than individuals "If the first fruit is holy, so is the whole lump...".

It is through his understanding of the term "Israel" that Paul is able to hold together what many of his interpreters have found contradictory, ie the actual state of Israel, by and large not responding favourably to the gospel - and the possession of the name Israel, indicating participation in the divine purpose of election. Israel for Paul is a fluid rather than a fixed entity.(15)

In his overview of Israel's history in chapter 9, he illustrates how God throughout this history has exercised His freedom amongst the Israelites, to choose people for His overall purposes of mercy. The conclusion of Paul's argument in Rom 9 and Rom 11 is that God remains free to retain the Jews within His purposes, even if they are now disobedient to the gospel, and that He is also free to bring in the Gentiles to share in their inheritance.

Thus Paul knows nothing of any doctrine which suggests that since the coming of Christ, the people of Israel have been reduced to the same level as other Gentiles as if election were a thing of the past. Rather what Paul offers is the opportunity for Gentiles to share in the inheritance of Israel. (16) He does not suggest a diminishing of Israel's privileges but rather an increase in the privileges of Gentiles. This is why at the end of his letter to Rome, he can write of "the root of Jesse in whom the Gentiles shall hope" (15:12). The same emphasis is found in Eph 2:18-20 "Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God: and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets."

Paul sees it as his task to proclaim the gospel in the period between the resurrection and the parousia seeking by means of his mission to bridge the great gap between Israel's actual state and her divine destiny.

IV Paul's Revision of Priorities in the Christian Mission in View of the Contemporary Outcome of the Gospel Proclamation

Whatever the precise origin of the phrase "to the Jew first", its inclusion in Rom 1:16 in association with its corollary "and also to the Greek" indicates that there was still some discussion as to whether it was right to concentrate the Christian mission primarily on Jews, whether it should now extend to Gentiles also, or perhaps - in the short term - should aim at Gentiles only. Lloyd Gaston has recently highlighted the great theological differences between Paul and Jerusalem despite the fact of their mutual recognition. "The Jerusalem church is characterised by circumcision, by Torah, and by a mission restricted to Israel." (17) Raymond Brown has similarly outlined the diversity that existed within the early Christian mission, identifying four main types of Jewish-Gentile Christianity each of which conducted their own mission work and made their

own converts. (18) One main function of Roms 9-11 is to present an "apologia" on behalf of Paul's own understanding of the relation between his mission work and the eventual salvation of Israel. (19) It is quite clear though Paul differs from earlier missionaries in no longer holding that Israel must be restored prior to the coming in of the Gentiles, this revision of priorities does not signify complete and utter despair over Israel. What we wish to consider briefly is the possible factors that led Paul to this particular missionary outlook and strategy.

It would appear that throughout his career as apostle Paul held, in common with the Jerusalem church, a fundamental belief that God would save Israel. Where they differed was on the interpretation of the means by which this end would be achieved. It follows from this that Paul must have been responsible for introducing a different view involving a different strategy from the original disciples. How did Paul arrive at this view? Did Paul's new understanding coincide with his conversion call? Alternatively did he only gradually come to realise that God had called him to be apostle to the Gentiles? This would account for the fact that we know rather little about Paul's earlier missionary work and also why the admission of Gentiles to the church became a problem only at a later date. Did Paul first of all concentrate his efforts on winning Jews and only as a result of his failure to win Jews did he then turn to the Gentiles? (20) Rom 11 suggests a very close connection between the failure of the Jews to respond to the Christian message and the origin of a mission to the Gentiles. "Through their failure salvation has come to the Gentiles." "If their trespass means riches for the world (11:11-12); if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world (11:11-15) you have received mercy because of their disobedience." (11:30)

Paul seems to be indicating a clear causal connection between the failure of the mission to Jews and the inception of a mission to Gentiles. This might, of course, be only a general reference, referring to the

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rejection of Jesus by the leaders of the Jewish people. But in Romans it appears more immediate than this. There we get the impression that God almost had to remove some (Jewish) branches of the tree in order to make room for the unnatural inclusion of Gentile branches. (21) This would suggest that it was Paul's own reflection upon the fact of the failure of the Jews to respond that has led him to preach to the Gentiles. He concludes that God has hardened the hearts of the Jews temporarily with the explicit intention of saving the Gentiles first. It was doubtless the fact that some Gentiles demonstrated the charismatic effects of the Spirit in their lives, taken along with the negative response of the Jews, that led Paul in a secondary theological reflection on this primary historical and social reality to conclude that it was through the Gentiles God would save Israel. (22) What is not clear is the length of time that may have elapsed between Paul's conversion call and his full realization of the required sequence of events as described in Rom 11. At the height of his career did he regard himself as a missionary only to the Gentiles or does he now evangelise also the Jews of the Diaspora as Luke in Acts suggests?

According to Gal 2:7-9 the division of labour agreed at the Council of Jerusalem was ethnographic rather than geographic - Paul is to go to the uncircumcised, Peter to the circumcised. E P Sanders therefore finds it unlikely that 1 Cor 9:19-23 can be taken literally. When Paul's statement in Rom 15:19, where he depicts himself as working in a circle from Jerusalem to Illyricum, is put alongside 1 Cor 9:19-23, it implies that Paul is apostle to everyone in the Mediterranean area, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Sanders does not deny that Paul sometimes lived as a Jew but he cannot conceive of Paul establishing two different churches in one area - observing the law in one and not in the other. Sander's solution to what he regards as a difficult question is that Peter, Paul and the others in their urgent desire to carry out their respective missions, made no special provision for Diaspora

Jews. (23)

The evidence of Acts and of Rom 11:14 is that Paul did hope to win some Jews. Munck cites Jülicher's criticism of Paul's claim to have fully preached the gospel in the east as "gross exaggeration"; Munck himself has a better understanding of Paul. He equates "the offering (he prosphora) of the Gentiles" by Paul as their priest in Rom 15:16 with the "fulness (to plērōma) of the Gentiles" of 11:25 and the obedience of the Gentiles of 15:18. It is obvious that Paul has not preached the gospel to every individual in these areas mentioned. But Paul is able to claim he has finished his work because, as already noted, he thinks representatively, ie in terms of nations - Galatians, Achaians, Macedonians etc. (24) Munck also believes that according to Rom 10:14-21, the gospel has already been preached to the Jews. Paul cites Ps 19:4 "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the earth". Although the apostles to the Jews have finished their task, like Paul in the East, "they have not been everywhere or preached the gospel to every individual Jew, yet their task in respect of the whole of Israel has been completed. Those parts of Israel to which they have preached stand for the whole, for the Jewish people; and Paul can therefore go on to assert (10:21, and ch 11) that Israel is unbelieving and hardened". (25) The logic of Paul's policy is further spelt out in Rom 11:16, "For if the first fruit is holy, the lump is holy; and if the root is holy so are the branches". Even though the immediate reference here is to Israel (to which we must return), Munck is correct to see that this view of Paul also extended to the nations.

Sanders may therefore be correct in his view that no particular agreement had been reached concerning the Jews in the Diaspora. The reason however is not just the urgency of the early Christian mission but the fact that Paul sees himself as apostle to the nations which may mean that whilst he is apostle to the Gentiles, his work is not exclusively limited to Gentiles, but like Jesus before him, he is willing and able to spend time

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with individuals who ethnically are outside the main focus of his mission. (26)

Thus far Paul has emerged as a practical missionary who was willing to adjust and revise his mission policies in the light of the Spirit's guidance in the face of the changing circumstances of his ministry. But Paul's awareness of the divine purpose was not simply gleaned from day to day situations in the midst of his churches. Munck has rightly stressed Paul's strong eschatological interest and the apostle's conviction that he is specially called to be the apostle to the (Gentile) nations. Paul was also a serious student of scripture; thus his authorization for turning to the Gentiles and conducting a mission among them - instead of waiting for the conversion of Israel first - has a basis in scripture as well as in intense reflection upon the significance of success or failure in the proclamation of the gospel. Hence the wealth of scriptural citation in Rom 9-11. (27)

In the traditional imagery of the end times, the Gentiles were to be blessed as a result of God's blessing upon Israel. Indirectly and derivatively they would share in salvation. As Paul writes Romans, however, two things are crystal clear - Israel as a whole is unbelieving and Paul's mission to the Gentiles is eminently successful. In reflection upon the scriptures Paul has come to realise that it can no longer depend on Israel whether the Gentiles may partake in the blessedness of the kingdom of God, as Jewish apocalyptic doctrine taught. The source of Paul's thought here is his perception of how God throughout Israel's history has used the nations both for Israel's salvation and Israel's correction. In Rom 9 Paul notes how God used Pharaoh no less than Israel to reveal his power and proclaim his mercy because "he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills" (9:18) for "it depends not upon man's will or exertion but upon God's mercy" (9:20). Thus according to Paul, scripture shows that God can use nations and their leaders both positively and negatively

in his purpose of mercy. (28) At times Israel may experience the chastening hand of God's judgment by means of Gentile nations but her ultimate destiny is still the object of His providential purpose.

This is one source of Paul's thinking on the pattern of events in the early Christian mission. The success of the Gentile mission and the relative failure of the Jewish mission caused him to look to scripture for a new understanding of the divine activity. Just as God used the nations or their leaders for the ultimate good of Israel in times past, so now in the present, He will use the nations or Gentiles once again to bring Israel back to Himself. Thus Paul sees himself as indirectly enabling the salvation of Israel while focusing his main attention upon the Gentiles.

There seems to be general agreement that Paul believed that the final restoration of Israel would be the work of God himself. (29) The "no" of Israel to the gospel - her partial hardening (11:25) - would persist until the Parousia. All Israel will then be saved (11:26-32) when the fullness (plērōma) of the Gentiles has come in. This has normally been taken to represent "the full number of the elect from among the Gentiles", but Paul thinks representatively and collectively rather than in terms of elect individuals. As Munck shows, behind this is the tradition which we find in Mk 13:10 "that the Gospel must first be preached to all nations before the Parousia". (30) Paul has in mind the conversion of representatives from all the nations, the first fruits of the harvest of redeemed humanity. It is this offering which Paul as apostle to the Gentiles seeks to provide and thus to fulfil the expected pilgrimage of the nations to worship the God of Zion.

One other aspect of Israel's final redemption probably originated from Paul's study of scripture. The final "yes" of Israel will come after "the fullness of the nations" but Paul envisages it as happening through jealousy. In the words of Deut 32:21, "I will provoke them to jealousy with them that are no nation, I will

anger them with a nation void of understanding", Paul found a clue as to the means which he believed would be effective in finally turning the Jews to God. (31) When they perceived the blessings enjoyed by Gentiles, they themselves would be jealous when they realised what they were missing. The importance for us of this perception of Paul is not so much in whether history has shown it to be justified, but rather in the fact that he studied the scriptures for guidance in seeking solutions to missionary problems which from a human point of view seemed insurmountable, ie "the hardening of the Jews". One question still remains unanswered - what is the relationship between the jealousy resulting from the fullness of the nations and the final conversion of Israel. As we noted, this is generally taken to be by the direct action of God Himself - but the jealousy motif suggests that it is in fact the winning of the representatives from the nations which causes Israel's restoration. The latter fits in better with Paul's own statements and policy which suggest that he sees himself as indirectly contributing to the salvation of Israel.

V Unity and Diversity: Paul's Mission in a Pluralistic Situation

Although it appears that Paul's normal practice would be to establish one church for both Jews and Gentiles in each area where he worked, it is possible that there was greater diversity in Rome than was normal because it was a Christian community lacking any one apostolic founder. What is distinctive in this letter is that Paul in chapters 14-15 accepts the right of both "the weak" and "the strong" Christians to follow their own consciences.

He calls for tolerance and mutual acceptance, not in the short term only until differences are overcome, but they are to accept one another openly and without reservation as Christ has accepted them. (32) Thus it would appear that although Paul can be somewhat authoritarian and uncompromising when the truth of the gospel is at stake, as in Galatians, when it is a matter of differing Christians following different lifestyles, he is in

fact very tolerant. As far as is humanly possible, he seeks for explicit evidence of Christian oneness in Christ. He is not afraid to indicate that he sides with "the strong" (15:1), but nevertheless he insists on the freedom of "the weak" to live differently. This corresponds well with his statements in 1 Cor 7:17, where he outlines his policy that Christians should continue in the calling in which they were called. (33) Thus it seems that in discerning the will of God Paul was careful to accept as given the situation which originated in Rome either prior to, or independently of, his own mission (rather than trying to undo it). He accepts the diversity as given and as an abiding reality.

His collection project which he has organised over a long period of time is now, as he writes to the Romans, well-nigh complete and he heads for Jerusalem with the collection and representatives of the Gentile churches. This collection is an expression of Paul's concern with unity between the Jewish and Gentile wings of the church. He accepts the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem as brethren, but there is some doubt about whether they will feel free to accept a collection from Gentiles that might compromise them with their Jewish neighbours.

It would appear then that Paul recognised the autonomy of the Christian conscience and was particularly willing to accommodate to the practices of others in a context where his pattern of Christian living differed from that to which these Christians had been originally introduced. Diversity in unity rather than a monochrome uniformity is the model of the church which emerges from Paul's letter to Rome.

Conclusion

Romans is written after the earlier period of Paul's mission work in which the concordat about respecting separate mission areas and spheres of work had been operative. After Paul lost the battle over table-fellowship between Jews and Gentiles at Antioch, he was

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forced to branch out as an independent missionary doing pioneer work and concentrating on setting up mixed churches mainly of Gentiles with some Jews who no longer followed a Jewish life-style. (34) But he has now finished all such work in the East and needs the help of the Romans for a mission in the West. (35) The peculiar origin and development of the house churches in Rome meant that there was the possibility that Paul could have been accused of building on another apostle's foundation. But Paul as apostle to the Gentile nations feels called and obligated to come to Rome. In so doing he is forced to consider his own and the Roman Christian attitude to Christians (and Jews) who differ radically from them.

Paul's theology of mission is thus constructed to meet the demands inherent in this diverse context. The picture of the apostle that emerges here is far from being that of a thoughtless activist rushing around the world under the duress of an overwhelming but unenlightened zeal. We discover instead an apostle pursuing a definite policy which has both an apocalyptic and a scriptural basis. Although Paul may sometimes give the appearance of being somewhat in a strait-jacket, this is certainly not true. He is neither unaware of, nor unwilling to adjust to, changing circumstances in his mission work. Romans shows how seriously and positively he took these into account. Paul looks for divine guidance as to the detailed policy and strategy required to put into practice the divine will in each given situation.

Paul sees himself as called to co-operate with God's universal and cosmic purpose revealed in the Christ-event. His call is thus similar to the prophets of old, and the pattern of divine activity is to be discerned from a study of the scriptures. The final events of salvation will turn out to be a modified version of the hopes expressed by the prophets, especially Second Isaiah. Paul is like the prophets who called Israel to covenant faithfulness, in the context of the nations whom Yahweh could use to discipline her

when unfaithful. But in Romans it is not a question of Israel over against the nations. Nor is it a question of Jew or Gentile, but Jew and Gentile within the overarching plan of God. The mission of Jesus, like that of Paul according to Romans concerns both Jew and Gentile (15:8-12). Gentile inclusion does not signify the revoking of Israel's heritage (11:29) but rather the way in which Israel will be restored in a renewed covenant which includes Gentiles also. In the renewed covenant there is no need for Gentiles to become Jews and, correspondingly, there is no need for Jews to give up their Jewishness on accepting the gospel.

In the diversity of the Roman house churches, some of which were possibly loosely attached to synagogues, the renewed covenant demands mutual acceptance in Christ, despite cultural or racial differences. On the one hand this meant that a mainly Gentile house church must be willing to accept a Christian Jew who wanted to worship with them. But it would also mean that if there were Jewish house-churches still in contact with synagogue life and discipline, the churches of the Gentiles must likewise acknowledge such as fellow-members in Christ, despite their differing life-style (and vice-versa). Only thus will all God's beloved in Rome be able to assist in preventing the rejection of Paul and the collection in Jerusalem, and likewise provide the proper missionary support for the new outreach in Spain. Only as the Gentiles are brought to faith will Israel be provoked to emulation and Israel's recovery of faith usher in the eschaton, the resurrection of the dead. (36)

We see thus that in respect of Israel, the covenant, the law and the scriptures Paul's mission theology is not simply the inbreaking of a new order with the subsequent destruction of the old - it is rather the transformation of the old by Him who makes all things new. (37)

*The original draft of this paper was prepared in 1985-6 at the request of Professor John Ferguson, then President of the Selly Oak Colleges. It is published here

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in grateful appreciation and memory of his life and work, particularly at Selly Oak.

NOTES

- 1 Cf. N. A. Dahl, "The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans," Studies in Paul 70f. Dahl is one of a small number of scholars who have considered Romans in this light. He stresses that Paul's theology and his missionary activity were inseparable from each other; he characterises Paul's theology as a "christocentric theology of mission with biblical history and eschatology as its framework" (pp. 70-1).
- 2 In Paul, the Law and the Jewish People, (Fortress Press, 1983) 145f.
- 3 Cf. J. C. Beker, Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Thought and Life (Fortress Press 1980) especially 92.
- 4 Cf. my article "Why did Paul write Romans," Expository Times 85 (1973-4) 264-9. Dahl has a different view, "It is not the problems of a local church but the universal gospel and Paul's own mission which in this letter provide the point of departure for theological discussion" (op. cit. 78). For other viewpoints see The Romans Debate (ed. by K. P. Donfried; Augsburg, 1977) and Dieter Zeller, Der Brief an die Römer (Regensburg, 1985) 11f.
- 5 Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield, The International Critical Commentary: Romans, Vol 2 (T. & T. Clark, 1979) 780f.
- 6 Cf. E. Käsemann Commentary on Romans (SCM, 1979) 398-404; c.f also the as yet unpublished paper by Robert Jewett, "Paul, Phoebe and the Spanish Mission," in The Social World of Early Christianity and Judaism Essays in Tribute to K C Kee ed J Neusner et al, (Fortress Press, 1988) 142-61.
- 7 Cf. Käsemann's comment, "If Paul is speaking emphatically of 'evangelising', all the reservations in vv 10-12 seem to be 'pointless' ", op. cit. p. 20. Cf. Also M. Kettunen's comment, "Rome

- therefore has its importance for Paul primarily in reference to the journey to Spain", Der Abfassungszweck des Römersbriefes (Helsinki, 1979) 161. W Schmithals, because of the apparent conflict between 1:13f and 15:14f, concludes that Paul wrote two letters to Rome, Der Römerbrief als historisches Problem (Gütersloh, 1975). However, there is little manuscript evidence for his thesis. Cf. H. Gamble The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans (Eerdmans, 1977).
- 8 L. Gaston, "Paul and Jerusalem" in From Jesus to Paul (eds. P. Richardson and J. C. Hurd; Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1984) 61-73.
- 9 Cf. P. Achtemeier, Romans: Interpretation Commentary (John Knox Press, 1985) 67f.
- 10 Cf. E Käsemann, op. cit. 29.
- 11 Cf. Achtemeier, op. cit. 69.
- 12 Cf. my article "Romans III is a Key to the Structure and Thought of the Letter," Novum Testamentum XXIII (1981) 35f.
- 13 This is not to deny a strong element of discontinuity, cf. my article, "Christianity and Judaism: Continuity and Discontinuity" International Bulletin of Missionary Research 8 (2) April (1984) 54f.
- 14 Cf. L. Gaston "Paul and the Torah" in Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity (ed A. T. Davies; New York, 1979) 66, and Sanders op. cit. 38.
- 15 Cf. my article "The Freedom and Faithfulness of God in Relation to Israel" Journal for the Study of the New Testament 13 (1981) 27f.
- 16 Ibid p. 33, cf. also Achtemeier op. cit. p. 165.
- 17 "Paul and Jerusalem" op. cit. p. 65-6.
- 18 R. E. Brown and J. P. Meier, Antioch and Rome: New Testament Cradles of Catholic Christianity (Paulist Press, 1983) 1-8.
- 19 Contra Beker who speaks of a dialogue with Jews op. cit. 91. Beker does recognise the apologetic element in Romans but puts too much emphasis upon polemic op. cit. p. 78-83.

- 20 Cf. Sanders op. cit. p. 185-90. On Paul's conversion cf. "Some Notes on Paul's Conversion" by J. Gager, NTS 27 697f.
- 21 Cf. Achtemeier op. cit. p. 177f.
- 22 Cf. my article "The Freedom and Faithfulness of God in Relation to Israel" op. cit. p. 36.
- 23 Op. cit. p. 189.
- 24 Cf. J. Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind (SCM, 1959) 52; see also A. Hultgren, Paul's Gospel and Mission (Fortress, 1985) which I received just as I was completing this paper.
- 25 Op. cit. p. 53f.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Cf. my article in n. 15 above. Much research is now being devoted to this aspect of Paul. Cf. H. Hübner, Law in Paul's Thought (Edinburgh; T. T. Clark, 1984) and H. Räisänen, Paul and the Law (Tübingen; Mohr, 1983).
- 28 Paul's theology derives from the premise that God has consigned (sunekleisen) all to disobedience "so that He might have mercy upon all (11:32). Cf. my article in n. 15 above (p. 31).
- 29 Cf. Sanders op. cit. pp. 194-5.
- 30 Op. cit. pp. 134f, Cranfield, op. cit. p. 575.
- 31 Cf. Cranfield op. cit. p. 556.
- 32 Cf. R. Jewett, Christian Tolerance (Westminster, 1982) p. 134.
- 33 Contrary to some recent scholarship, Paul did not force all Jewish Christians to make a complete break with Jewish law, customs etc, cf. my article in n. 15 above, p. 44, n. 60; also Cranfield op. cit. pp. 845f and E. Larsson "Paul: Law and Salvation" New Testament Studies 31 (1985) 425-36; contra F. Watson, Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles (Cambridge, 1986) 100.
- 34 Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch," JSNT 18 (1983) 3-57.
- 35 Cf. R. D. Aus, "Paul's Travel Plans to Spain and the 'Full Number of the Gentiles' of Rom 11:25," NT 21 (1979) 232-62.
- 36 R. P. Martin takes Rom 11:12 (a), Israel's fall into unbelief and riches resulting for the Gentiles

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(the reconciliation of the world) as the first event leading to the eschaton; the second will be Israel's recovery of faith leading to the resurrection of the dead (Rom 11:15): Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology (Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1981) 134.

- 37 Cf. my article "Salvation for Jews and Gentiles: Krister Stendahl and Paul's Letter to the Romans" Studia Biblica 3 (1978) , Sheffield University Press (1981) 65-72.

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