# PAUL AND THE MIND OF CHRIST

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RTSF Monographs

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by

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## PREFACE

The contents of this monograph were originally delivered as the Griffith Thomas Lectures in Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, in November 1982. These lectures, delivered annually, commemorate a former Principal of the Hall. As I present them in this form, I recall with much gratitude the kindness and hospitality of the present principal and Mrs. Shaw while I was in Oxford for the lectures. I have also pleasant memories of the late Bishop Stephen Neill, then resident at Wycliffe Hall, who honoured the lectures with his encouraging presence.

I am glad to offer the lectures in this revised form to the TSF monograph series.

F.F.B.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the final sentence of a book about Paul, after summing up his ethics in the statement that 'to serve in love is perfect freedom', I concluded: 'In this, as in so many other respects, Paul has remained unsurpassed in his insight into the mind of Christ.'[1]

When the Principal of Wycliffe Hall invited me to deliver the Griffith Thomas Lectures for 1982, he suggested that an amplification of that last remark would be an acceptable theme for the lectures. I readily acceded to his suggestion, for I could think of no theme more congenial.

### Ascertaining the mind of Christ

One question arises immediately when the mind of Christ is mentioned. Where do we find the mind of Christ clearly expressed? Unless this question can be answered satisfactorily, it will be difficult to assess how far Paul, or anyone else, has enjoyed insight into his mind.

Several years ago Professor Paul Minear commented on the readiness of many churchmen, especially in ecumenical gatherings, to make confident pronouncements about the mind of Christ in relation to one issue or another of the present day, without being at all clear about the source from which their knowledge of his mind is derived.

> 'It is true that on virtually every controverted issue, appeals are made to Christ as Lord of the Church, but almost never does such an appeal involve a sustained reasoned study of his teachings or example. There are, of course, many kinds of docetism, but the kind most widely current today is the partisan claim that Christ is a protagonist for some messianism without any initial effort to define his own historical message and mission by reference to the Gospel sources.'[2]

I should not like the same complaint to be made about these lectures.

Many scholars nowadays would say that the mind of Christ, for Paul, was the mind of the exalted Christ, to which he had – or believed he had – immediate access; they would add that the mind of the historical Jesus was of little interest to Paul and that, even if it had been of great interest to him, we in our day have no certain source of information about it. One scholar assured me in 1965 that only six, or at most eight, of the sayings ascribed to Jesus anywhere in the Gospels were probably authentic; I doubt if these would provide a sufficiently broad basis for ascertaining the mind of the historical Jesus.

For my part, I do not share the 'disseminated incredulity' in this regard which T.W.Manson once deplored in some of his continental colleagues.[3] For present purposes the mind of the historical Jesus is well enough expressed in the earliest gospel strata, and confidence is increased when the same outlook or message is found to be conveyed by different sayings or actions

independently recorded in two or more strata. The more independent one of the other any two strata or sources are, the more telling is their evidence when they agree on some emphasis in the teaching of Jesus. If, for example, I find such agreement in the special material of Matthew and of Luke, and then recognize the same emphasis in Paul, I am encouraged to believe that here Paul has grasped and reproduced the mind of the historical Jesus, which is no different from the mind of the exalted Christ.[4] It is essential to Paul's gospel that the exalted Christ, with whom he was directly acquainted, is identical and continuous with the earthly Jesus, the crucified one, whom he had never known.

So far as the Fourth Gospel is concerned, these lectures have not drawn upon it for evidence regarding the mind of Christ. I believe indeed, with William Temple, that 'the mind of Jesus Himself was what the Fourth Gospel disclosed'[5]; but that this is so would have to be argued in a parallel set of lectures. If it can be separately shown (as I am confident it can) that Paul and John, each in his own way, apprehended and expounded the mind of Christ, the cross-correspondences between them will be the more impressive; but here we confine ourselves almost entirely to the synoptic sources as a basis for comparison with Paul.

## 1. 'WE HAVE THE MIND OF CHRIST'

### The imitation of Christ

There is one place in his surviving correspondence where Paul claims to have the mind of Christ. In the context in which the claim is made he is concerned about the tendency evident among some of his Corinthian converts to profess a higher wisdom than that attained by ordinary Christians. The higher wisdom which they professed, however, was really a form of secular wisdom – that wisdom which had been exposed as folly by the moral effectiveness of the gospel of Christ crucified. The true wisdom, Paul insists, is that which is imparted by the Spirit of God – none but the Spirit can fathom or communicate the depths of the divine thoughts. 'For who', he asks (echoing Isaiah 40:13), 'has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?' Then he adds, making his customary transition from the Septuagintal kyrios as the equivalent of Yahweh to the Christian kyrios as the name bestowed on Christ, 'But we have the mind (nous) of Christ' – not indeed 'so as to instruct him' but so as to be instructed by him (1 Corinthians 2:16). Christ, he has said earlier in the same letter, is himself 'the wisdom of God' (1 Corinthians 1:24,30) or, as it is put more fully in Colossians 2:3, 'in him are concealed all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'

For Paul, however, the mind of Christ had ethical as well as intellectual implications. To him 'knowledge' (gnōsis) was an empty thing in the absence of love, and the mind of Christ was a mind of love. This appears from the reference to the mind of Christ in the introduction to the Christ hymn (Philippians 2:5), where the Philippian Christians are urged to put others' interests before their own and thus have this mind among themselves which was manifested in Christ. The Greek wording is different (touto phroneite en hymin, not nous or its related verb), but that is of minor importance: the point is that the mind of Christ is revealed in self-denying concern for others.

The Christ hymn (to which we shall return) may well be an independent composition which Paul reproduces in full because it is so apposite to his appeal for humility and unity of heart. But Paul is quite capable of expressing the same thought in his own words, as he does in 2 Corinthians 8:9 where, after appealing to the Christians of Corinth to make a liberal donation to the Jerusalem relief fund, he adduces the example of Christ as the supreme pattern of generosity: 'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that through his poverty you might be enriched.'

It is plain that Paul set himself to reproduce Christ's example of loving self-sacrifice and humility in his own life. This was no easy exercise for him, but thanks to assiduous self-discipline, reinforced by the grace of the Spirit, Paul reached the point where he could recommend his own example to others as an instance of what it meant to follow the example of Christ: 'Be imitators of me, as I for my part am an imitator of Christ' (1 Corinthians 11:1). 'With these words', says Geza Vermes, 'Paul, deviating from the Jewish imitation of God, introduced intermediaries

between the imitator and his ultimate divine model. First of all, imitate me: who am an imitator of Jesus: who imitated God.'[6] He contrasts Ephesians 5:1, 'Be imitators of God, as dear children', where no intermediary appears.

Let this be said first: in Paul's thought Jesus is not merely an imitator of God; he is the image of God. In him the character of God is embodied in a human life, set forth for all to see.

Secondly, even in the gospel tradition Jesus presents himself as an example: 'Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart', he says, speaking in the role of the divine wisdom (Matthew 11:29). Thirdly (as Dr. Vermes recognizes), when Paul offers himself for imitation, he does so not as providing an independent standard but as being himself an imitator of Christ. It was one thing to commend the *imitatio dei* to Jews and God-fearers who had learned something of the character of the God of Israel, and who, in addition, could probably recall saints who were themselves Godlike in their lives. But Paul was addressing former pagans, who were strangers to the true God before the gospel reached them and who had never seen Christian behaviour until the apostle and his companions visited them. Should any of these former pagans ask how the *imitatio dei* worked out in practice, it would be helpful to point to a living example and say, 'This is how an imitator of Christ lives.' And if the person to whom the question was put was the only Christian known to the questioner, then it was a challenge - a sobering challenge indeed - to that Christian so to live that the imitating of him was *ipso facto* the imitating of Christ (and therefore of God).

Paul's distinctive approach to Christian ethics appears in his teaching about the Spirit's creation of the Christ-likeness within the believer. He sets this over against the principle of righteousness by law-keeping, whether one thinks of the acquiring of a righteous status in the sight of God or of the cultivation of practical righteousness in daily life. But this teaching does not exclude the ethical motif of the imitation of Christ. It is clear that Paul himself practised the imitation of Christ. When he exhorts his friends in Corinth 'by the meekness and gentleness of Christ' (2 Corinthians 10:1), he speaks of qualities which he knows to have characterized the historical Jesus: that he viewed them (as some have argued) rather as qualities of the exalted Lord is improbable. To insist that he did so view them suggests a determination to allow the historical Jesus to play a minimal part in Paul's thinking. Meekness and gentleness were not qualities that came naturally to Paul, but he set himself to cultivate them because they were manifested in Jesus on earth and also, no doubt, because experience taught him that they were indispensable qualities for the discharge of a pastoral ministry. The cultivation of these qualities, moreover, was not left to his own unaided effort: Meekness and gentleness were the fruit of the Spirit of Christ, who reproduced them, with other elements in the Christ-image, in those whose lives he indwelt. Indeed, apart from the presence and power of the Spirit, imitation of Christ could become another form of legalism, if Christ's example were treated as an external standard to which believers were required to conform. But if, as Paul maintained, believers lived in Christ and had

Christ living in them, his example was far from being a merely external standard.

When, as we have seen, Paul holds up to those same Corinthians, as an incentive to generous giving, 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ' who impoverished himself for the enrichment of others, this involves not simply the imitation of Jesus' daily attitude and conduct: it is a matter, in B B Warfield's words, of 'imitating the incarnation'[7] - reflecting the grace which the Lord displayed in humbling himself to become man. But it is not the humility of his incarnation alone that is in view: he impoverished himself supremely by enduring death on the cross. No one is quite so poor as a crucified person, stripped of the last vestiges both of material property and of human dignity.

**'Let this mind be in you ...'**

In this regard, however, the outstanding text is the Christ hymn of Philippians 2:6-11, already referred to. Two preliminary questions arise: does this hymn express the thought of Paul, and do the words which introduce it encourage the readers or hearers to look to Christ as their example?

To the first question the answer is 'Yes'. Whether the Christ hymn is Paul's original composition or not, he would not have introduced it at this stage of a very practical exhortation if it had not said exactly what he wanted to say.

To the other question my answer would again be 'Yes'. Paul has just been urging the Philippian Christians to esteem others better than themselves, to consider the interests of others rather than their own, to cultivate a common mind of love and sympathy. How can this be achieved? By cultivating the mind of Christ: touto phroneite en hymin ho kai en Christō Iēsou.

The precise force of this injunction depends on the verb implied but not expressed in the subordinate clause. ' Have this mind among yourselves which also ... in Christ Jesus.' It is argued, indeed, that 'in Christ Jesus' is the regular incorporative expression so characteristic of Paul, and that the verb to be supplied in the relative clause is identical with the form in the principal clause, phroneite - treated this time, however, as indicative, not as imperative. 'Think thus (be thus minded) among yourselves which you also think (as you are also minded) in Christ Jesus' - that is, as members of his society, incorporated into him.

But if Paul refers, as he no doubt does, to their common life 'in Christ Jesus', he insists that this life 'in Christ Jesus' is to be marked by those qualities which marked the personal life of Christ. So Professor Moule understands him: 'Adopt towards one another, in your mutual relations, the same attitude which was found in Christ Jesus.'[8] Once again Paul adduces the humility which Christ displayed in becoming man, emptying himself rather than exploiting his equality with God in self-aggrandisement - the same humility as he displayed throughout his earthly life, when 'He

walked the path of obedience all the way to death, and that, the death of the cross' (GNB), where his humiliation reached rock bottom.

But if the imitation of Christ is recommended in Philippians 2:5, it is his self-forgetful concern for the interests of others that is to be imitated. This same attitude of consideration for one another, and especially consideration of the weaker by the stronger, was the point of Paul's recommendation of his own example to the Christians of Corinth: 'Place no stumbling-block in the way of Jews, Greeks or church of God', he says at the end of his treatment of the Christian attitude to the question of food offered to idols, 'even as I for my part please all people in all things, not seeking my own advantage but that of the many, with a view to their salvation' (1 Corinthians 10:32f.).

From these words it appears that Paul knew that consideration for others and refusal to insist on his own rights were characteristic of Christ. He made it his aim to follow the example of Christ in this, so that his own example might be safely followed by others. We need not suppose that Paul was confining his attention here to Christ's humility in becoming man or even in submitting to death. True, Paul would have agreed that Christ's incarnation and crucifixion were outstanding tokens of his concern for others, but he evidently had positive knowledge that Christ's course of life between these two poles was marked by the same concern.

In the other places where Paul recommends his own example to his converts, the precedent of Christ's attitude and conduct is not invoked so explicitly as it is in 1 Corinthians 11:1, but it is implied: he would not have thought of setting himself up as an independent standard of behaviour. His 'ways' were 'ways in Christ', as he says earlier in the same letter, in another 'imitation context: 'Please, be imitators of me. This is why I am sending Timothy to you; he is my dear and trusty child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways in Christ (my Christian way of life), as I teach everywhere in every church' (1 Corinthians 4:16 f.). Timothy would remind them of Paul's 'ways' not only by word of mouth but by attitude and conduct: as Paul said of him to another church, 'I have no one like him, who will be genuinely anxious for your welfare' (Philippians 2:20). And Paul's own ways could not have been 'ways in Christ', whether he commended them by precept or by example, if they had not been consonant with the ways of Christ himself.[9]

## 2. PAUL'S KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST

To speak about Paul's knowledge of Christ is to speak ambiguously: do we mean his knowledge about Christ or his personally knowing Christ? And what is meant by 'Christ' - the historical Jesus or the exalted Lord? This chapter is not restricted to one or the other of these alternatives, but the distinctions involved are real and important.

Paul knew about the historical Jesus; he never knew him personally. He knew about the exalted Lord, but more than that: he knew him personally, and his greatest ambition was to know him better.

**Knowledge 'after the flesh'**

No discussion of this subject can dispense with some consideration of Paul's much canvassed words in 2 Corinthians 5:16, 'even if we once knew Christ after the flesh, henceforth we know him (so) no longer. 'We shall understand them better if we forget all about the idea that Paul here deprecates any interest in the historical Jesus. The phrase 'after the flesh' (kata sarka) is adverbial, not adjectival; it is a modifier of the verb 'know' ('knew'), not a qualifier of the noun 'Christ'. When people become united to Christ by faith, Paul says, their whole perspective alters. Their perspective on human beings in general, and certainly their perspective on Christ, undergoes a change. As his words are rendered in the New English Bible: 'With us therefore worldly standards have ceased to count in our estimate of any man; even if once they counted in our understanding of Christ, they do so now no longer.'

There is a minor question here: does Paul refer to a changed understanding of Jesus, the once crucified and now exalted Son of God, or does he refer to a changed understanding of the Messiah? It is a minor question, because in either case his language would be equally valid. If he refers to the personal Jesus, then he means that, whereas he formerly thought of him as an imposter, now he has come to know him as the risen Lord; whereas he formerly thought that he 'ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth' (Acts 26:9), now he knows himself called to proclaim him among the nations for the 'obedience of faith' (Romans 1:5). If, on the other hand, he refers to the concept of the Messiah's character and achievement, he means that, whereas formerly his concept was a worldly one, now he has learned to identify the Messiah with Jesus, so that his understanding of the Messiah's character and achievement is determined by his knowledge of the character and achievement of Jesus.

The evidence rules out the view of William Wrede, who held that Paul had an antecedent concept of the Messiah as a 'supramundane, divine being' which he retained after his conversion. With his conversion he was able to give this concept a local habitation and a name, by transferring to the Jesus of his Damascus-road vision all the qualities which he had formerly attached to his ideal Messiah.[10] The truth is otherwise: when the Damascus-road vision showed Paul that Jesus was the Son of God, and therefore Messiah, he forthwith dismissed from his reckoning the 'Christ' whom, in his

imagination, he had previously known 'after the flesh'.

**The historical Jesus and the exalted Christ**

Since that first enounter with Jesus impressed on him that Jesus was the risen Lord, it was this aspect of Jesus' identity that remained uppermost in his consciousness. Paul's continuous experience of the risen Lord from his conversion onward amounted to a personal knowledge of him - constantly increasing but destined to remain incomplete until the limitations of mortality were removed. But the risen Lord with whom he enjoyed this immediate and continuing personal acquaintance was, in his mind, identical with the historical Jesus, with whom he had not enjoyed such acquaintance. This might perhaps account for his preference for the word-order 'Christ Jesus' - the exalted Christ who is also the crucified Jesus.

With regard to Paul's knowledge about the historical Jesus, he certainly had access to first-hand sources of information about him if he chose to make use of them. We recall C H Dodd's famous remark about the topics of conversation between Paul and Cephas during the fortnight which they spent in each other's company in Jerusalem about A.D.35: 'we may presume they did not spend all the time talking about the weather.'[11] Our situation today is different. The ever-living Christ may be as immediately real to his people now as he was to Paul then, but we have no opportunity for face-to-face encounter with eyewitnesses such as Paul had.

It is commonly said nowadays that we do not know enough about the historical Jesus to write his life, or even to compose a Who's Who entry on him. Fifty years ago a distinguished series of Bampton lectures before the University of Oxford ended with the reflexion that 'the form of the earthly no less than of the heavenly Christ is for the most part hidden from us. For all the inestimable value of the gospels, they yield us little more than a whisper of his voice; we trace in them but the outskirts of his ways'.[12] The lecturer, indeed, complained that he had been misrepresented by those who quoted these words out of context [13], and it must be freely acknowledged that in their context they are coupled with a fine expression of Christian hope: 'Only when we see him hereafter in his fullness shall we know him also as he was on earth.'[14] That is reminiscent of Paul's contrast between the present, when we know only 'in part', and the future consummation, when we shall know as we ourselves are known (1 Corinthians 13:12). But quite a number of scholars today would say that Professor Lightfoot's words about the limits of our knowledge express their own position exactly, and they would not complain of being misrepresented.

Let me say (although this is not the place to embark on a new quest of the historical Jesus) that in the gospel tradition we have indeed the basis for an adequate knowledge of the historical Jesus, even if it is not so extensive as historians might desire. Nor should the Fourth Gospel be omitted from this assessment, for even if it contains a greater proportion of redaction to tradition than do the others, yet the historical tradition is reliable and the redaction provides a permanently true interpretation of it.

**Paul's witness to the resurrection**

To return to Paul: why did he so insistently conclude that the Jesus who appeared to him on the Damascus road had been raised from the dead? Resurrection was not the only way in which Jesus could have been vindicated after his rejection and death. It has often been suggested that, in the gospel predictions of the suffering and vindication of the Son of Man, rising from the dead and coming on the clouds of heaven are two alternative figures for vindication. Jesus might conceivably have been taken up to God directly from the cross. Indeed if we had only the evidence of the letter to the Hebrews to guide us, it could be concluded that this is precisely what happened. And there was, so far as we can tell, nothing in the Damascus-road vision itself to give a different impression. Paul saw the glorified Lord, but there was apparently nothing to show how in fact he had entered into his glory.

If a glorious translation and a resurrection from the dead were originally alternative figures of vindication, the reason for the apostles' insistence that Jesus had truly been raised from the dead lay in their own experience. With their own eyes they had seen him risen, and they turned their witness into proclamation. Herein, too, lies the importance of the empty tomb, which some at least of them had seen. An empty tomb, indeed, is not most naturally explained in terms of the reanimation of the body that was intended to occupy it. If the tomb is empty, the most natural explanation is that the body has been placed somewhere else, as Mary Magdalene supposed in the Fourth Evangelist's account. But when the discovery of the empty tomb was followed by the appearance of Jesus 'alive after his passion', the inevitable conclusion was that he had been brought back to life and had vacated the tomb in which he had been buried. This conclusion underlies the summary of resurrection appearances presented by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:5-7.

Paul's summary of resurrection appearances is something which he claims to have 'received'. It is noteworthy that it insists not only on Christ's death 'for our sins, according to the scriptures' and on his being 'raised the third day, according to the scriptures', but also, between these two events, on his burial. The mention of the burial on the one hand underlines the finality of his death - to say that someone is dead and buried is more emphatic than to say simply that he is dead - but on the other hand it implies that the resurrection which is about to be mentioned is a resurrection from the tomb, a bodily resurrection.

The risen Christ, then, appeared to a series of witnesses - Cephas, James and others - and Paul adds to this series the appearance to himself on the Damascus road. He did not identify the Lord who there appeared to him as one who had undergone a direct assumption from death to glory; he identified him as one who had been raised from the dead, and thus he placed himself in the succession to earlier witnesses of the resurrection.

It looks as if Paul recognized that the Lord who appeared to him had experienced resurrection, not translation, even before he had an opportunity of comparing notes with Peter and James in the third year after his conversion. But if there was nothing in the conversion event itself to make

him prefer resurrection to translation as the means by which the crucified one had been glorified, what was the cause of his preference?

He certainly knew that the disciples of Jesus claimed that their Master had been raised from the dead. He had repudiated this claim as imposture and blasphemy. But now that he had received the direct personal evidence that the crucified one was alive and glorified, he was convinced that they were right and that he himself had been wrong. But if they were right, their claim to be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection must be admitted. He accepted the resurrection of Jesus, attested by them, as the means by which Jesus entered the glory in which he himself had seen him. He believed already in a resurrection of the righteous at the end of the present age: he believed now that the first act in this resurrection had taken place in the raising up of Jesus. The resurrection age had begun: Paul had the witness in himself that this was so because he had seen the risen Lord. He therefore not only added his own testimony to those which he had 'received', but insisted on resurrection as a sine qua non of the gospel: 'If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain' (1 Corinthians 15:14)

Martin Buber suggests that a mission to Jews based on the preaching of Jesus' translation could have won Jews, as they would have had little difficulty in adding Jesus' name to those of earlier individuals who had been translated, such as Enoch and Elijah. A mission based on the preaching of his resurrection, on the other hand, was unacceptable to them, because to them resurrection was a matter of the race, not of an individual. It was acceptable to Gentiles, however, for whom resurrection was for the individual specially favoured by heaven, not for the race or the mass.[15]

On this last point it should be said that the resurrection of the body, as distinct from the immortality of the soul, seems to have been generally unacceptable to Greeks, even where an individual alone was concerned. They would have found a translation or apotheosis more credible. As for Jews, the translation of a crucified person would have been practically as unthinkable as his resurrection: any form of divine vindication for one who died the death of the curse was a contradiction in terms. But once Paul found a solution to the scandal of the cross, he had no difficulty in accepting the resurrection of Christ as the firstfruits of the resurrection harvest: the resurrection of the one was the first instalment of the resurrection of the many and indeed guaranteed it.

For all Paul's inherited solidarity with the thought of his people, the resurrection of Jesus was to him an established fact when once he was constrained to concede that the disciples' testimony was true; therefore it was in terms of Jesus' resurrection that his conversion experience had to be interpreted. Hence, too, the centrality of the resurrection in his preaching.

Had he been content to interpret his conversion experience in isolation from the witness of those who were in Christ before him, he might well have regarded it not as a belated participation on his part in the sequence of

resurrection appearances but as an advance participation in the expected manifestation of Christ in glory at the parousia. For wherein, it may be asked, did the glory of God revealed in the face of Christ on the Damascus road differ from 'the glory that is to be revealed to us' of which Paul speaks in Romans 8:18, except insofar as the former revelation was private whereas the latter is shared by all the children of God and fraught with blessing to the whole creation?

**Two types of faith?**

To revert to Martin Buber, he sees the basic difference between Jesus and Paul in the 'two types of faith' which they respectively represent. These two types are 'faith in ...' and 'faith that ...'. For Jesus, he says, as for the higher Jewish religion, faith in God does not involve the conscious faith that God exists; God is there, and is believed in. For Paul, Christ is the object of faith (as God is) – 'to us there is one God, the Father, of faith because of the antecedent faith that 'Jesus died and rose again'[16].

Faith in God as the one who is there and is believed in was essential to Paul's heritage and religious outlook before his conversion as much as after it. But Paul had learned from earliest days to believe in God as the one who raises the dead, and when his encounter with the once crucified Jesus persuaded him that God had raised him from the dead, this supplied a new dimension to his ancestral faith in God. His faith that was founded on his faith in. The God who raises the dead had actually begun to do so in Christ, 'the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep' (1 Corinthians 15:20). And even Paul's faith that 'Jesus died and rose again' sprang out of his faith in Jesus as the one who was there and was believed in from the moment when God revealed his Son on the Damascus road. But his faith in God remained unimpaired; it was rather enhanced through his confrontation with the personal image of God. When, however, this immediate faith had to be expressed propositionally for the instruction of others, then 'faith in' had to be translated into terms of 'faith that'.

**'The fellowship of his sufferings'**

Personal knowledge, as we experience it, is something that keeps on growing, and so it was with Paul's knowledge of Christ. In one remarkable passage (Philippians 3:10,11) he confesses that his life's ambition is wholly concentrated on the knowledge of Christ – 'to come to know him (tou gnōnai auton) and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if so I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.'

Paul had already advanced far in the knowledge of Christ when he expressed himself thus, but he was conscious that he had a long way to go. He found in Christ an inexhaustible fulness: there was always more of him to know. So much was this knowledge a matter of interpersonal union that 'to know Christ' meant to experience the power of his resurrection and to have a share in his sufferings. It is, according to Paul, in the resurrection of Christ that the power of God is supremely demonstrated, and those who are

united by faith to the risen Christ have this power imparted to them. This is the power which, among other things, enables the believer to ignore or defy the dictates and enticements of sin and to lead the life of holiness which pleases God. It is communicated through the indwelling Spirit: 'if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you', Paul tells the Roman Christians, 'he who raised Christ from the dead will quicken also your mortal bodies through his Spirit who indwells you' (Romans 8:11). These words not only point forward to the resurrection of the believer's body; they also express his enjoyment of the power of Christ's resurrection even here and now in mortal life.

But if, on one plane, the knowledge of Christ involved for Paul the sharing of Christ's risen power, it involved, on another plane, the sharing of his sufferings. To suffer for Christ, says Paul, is a privilege (Philippians 1:29); moreover, to suffer for him is to suffer with him, to experience the fellowship of his sufferings. If Paul accepted the sufferings which he endured for Christ's sake in the course of his apostolic ministry as his share in Christ's own sufferings, this acceptance transfigured and glorified them. 'The sufferings of Christ abound in us', he says in 2 Corinthians 1:5 - not by way of complaint but by way of rejoicing. When he encourages others to 'rejoice in tribulations' (Romans 5:3), he sets them a personal example. But this rejoicing in tribulations arises from no masochistic impulse. Paul regarded the hardships of apostolic service not only as honourable scars received in the course of campaigning for Christ but as positive tokens of Christ's appreciation of his service, not only as evidence of his participation in Christ's own suffering but as the means of relieving his fellow-Christians (and especially his converts) of some of the sufferings which they might otherwise have to endure for their faith in Christ. This is the best way of understanding his words in 2 Corinthians 1:6, 'if we are afflicted, it is for the sake of your comfort and deliverance.' The idea becomes quite explicit in Colossians 1:24, 'I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.'

Paul seems to envisage a quantum of sufferings to be endured by Christ in his body. The primary sufferings were endured personally by Christ in his death on the cross; Paul hoped that he himself, as a member of the body of Christ, might absorb as many as possible of the secondary sufferings which were to be endured by that body, so that his fellow-members might have the less to endure. Thus Paul might make some recompense for the zeal with which he had once made the people of Christ suffer, so making Christ suffer in his people. The undesigned coincidence between the conversion narrative of Acts and Paul's own words on this subject is quite impressive: 'Why are you persecuting me?' said the Lord to the persecutor of his disciples, while to Ananias of Damascus the same Lord said, speaking of his latest disciple, 'I will show him how many things he must suffer for the sake of my name' (Acts 9:4,16).

All this provides an eloquent commentary on the words of Jesus to his disciples: 'If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me' (Mark 8:34). The disciples to whom this was

said proved its truth, but none entered more fully into its power than that later disciple, 'born out of due time', who spoke of himself as 'always carrying about in the body the dying (nekrōsis) of Jesus, that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal body' (2 Corinthians 4:10). The present manifestation of the life of Jesus, as we have seen from Romans 8:11, anticipates its final manifestation on the day of resurrection. Moreover, resurrection life and the hope of glory are not for Paul the mere recompense for present suffering; they are the product of the suffering. 'This slight momentary affliction is working out for us (katergazetai hēmin) an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison' (2 Corinthians 4:17).

Without 'the power of his resurrection' it would not have been possible for Paul to enter so fully into 'the fellowship of his sufferings'. But it is plain that these were the means by which he hoped to attain his ambition of knowing Christ, gaining Christ, being found in Christ. The aorists of Philippians 3:8–11 (kerdēsō, heurethō, gnōnai, katantēsō) probably all point (as katantēsō certainly does), to the consummation of this experience at the resurrection. It is then that, as Paul put it elsewhere, he would know Christ no longer 'dimly, as in a mirror' but 'face to face' (1 Corinthians 13:12). If 'knowing as I have been known' points forward to the resurrection so far as Paul's full knowledge of Christ is concerned, it points back to the Damascus road so far as Christ's knowledge of him is concerned. The same combination of ideas appears in Philippians 3:12, where Paul speaks of himself as pressing forward to the goal 'so as to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus laid hold of me'.

**'The excellency of the knowledge'**

There was nothing in the world or out of it that meant so much to Paul as this personal knowledge of Christ – 'the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord', as he called it (Philippians 3:8). For this all-surpassing knowledge he counted everything else well lost.

The knowledge of God was of paramount value in the eyes of the great prophets of Israel (Hosea 6:6); for Paul the knowledge of God was supremely mediated through Christ, and in being so mediated it was immensely enriched. But it was a person-to-person knowledge that mattered so much to Paul, not the partly intellectual and partly mystical gnōsis that was so widely cultivated in the Hellenistic world. Such gnōsis was highly esteemed in the Corinthian church, but Paul attached little importance to it: it inflated people, he said, but did not build them up as love did. The knowledge which meant most to Paul was inseparable from love: any one who loves God has been known by him (1 Corinthians 8:1–3). A community was helped to grow to maturity much more by love – love to God and love to one another – than by gnōsis.

The 'excellency of the knowledge of Christ' includes the assurance of being loved by him and loving him, and loving, for his sake, all for whom he died. Such knowledge, for Paul, is the only kind of knowledge worth having, a knowledge so transcendent that, set against it, every other form of gain is turned into loss. If Christ comprises in himself 'all the treasures of

wisdom and knowledge' (Colossians 2:3), then to know him means to have access to those treasures; but to know him for his own sake was what mattered to Paul most of all.

Paul, as we said, had never known the earthly Jesus. If, during Jesus' ministry, Paul learned anything about his teaching and activities, it would have met with his disapproval. After Jesus' crucifixion Paul thought of him with repulsion as one who, by the very manner of his death, had incurred the divine curse. Those who proclaimed such a person to be the Lord's Anointed, as the disciples of Jesus did, were blasphemers. The well-being of Israel demanded their extinction. And, quite apart from Paul's antipathy to all that Jesus stood for, how can one enjoy a personal relationship with a man who has died, and whom one never knew?

When, on the Damascus road, God chose to reveal his Son to Paul, the Son of God at the same time made himself directly known to him, introducing himself in the words: 'I am Jesus'. There and then Paul was taken captive by him and became his willing slave for life. 'What shall I do, Lord?' he asked, and the whole of his subsequent career was his response of obedience to the answer which that question drew forth. In that moment Paul knew himself to be loved by the Son of God who, as he was later to put it, 'loved me and gave himself up for me' (Galatians 2:20). For him thenceforth the first and great commandment of love to God was honoured in his love for Christ, the image of God. A relationship of mutual knowledge was established on the spot between the apostle on earth and his exalted Lord, and to explore the fulness of this relationship became Paul's constant and unfailing joy. For him, in short, life was Christ - to know Christ, to love Christ, to gain Christ: 'Christ is the way, and Christ the prize.'

## 3. FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE

**Faith and love**

'Faith working through love' is Paul's phrase; he uses it, of all places, in the letter to the Galatians. 'In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any validity; what matters is faith, working through love' (Galatians 5:6). The Gentile Christians to whom this letter was sent were being encouraged by visiting agitators to attach great importance to the external rite of circumcision. This had the utmost importance, under the old order of the law, as an initiatory rite for Jewish males; but in the new order - 'in Christ Jesus', as Paul puts it - it had no relevance or value. Paul himself, a Jew by birth, was as a matter of course circumcised when he was eight days old, and when he lived under the law he gloried in the fact that, like his fellow-Israelites, he bore in his body the seal of God's covenant with their forefather Abraham. But it ceased to have any religious significance when he began to live as a man in Christ, and it was deplorable that Gentile believers should listen to suggestions that, even if they were 'in Christ Jesus', they were nevertheless required by God to submit to this rite - that, in fact, they were not properly 'in Christ Jesus' without it. If they bowed to such pressure, their attention would be distracted from the one thing that did matter in the new order - 'faith, working through love'.

I am taking it for granted that the participle energoumenē is to be construed as middle voice ('working') rather than passive ('being inwrought'). In fact, in every New Testament occurrence of a form of this verb which might be either middle or passive the context supports the middle sense, and so it is here. G S Duncan, indeed, argues for the rendering 'faith ... which is set in motion by love'[17], the love being the love of Christ celebrated in Galatians 2:20, 'the Son of God ... loved me and gave himself up for me.' Faith, in other words, was Paul's response to that love manifested to him when God 'revealed his Son' on the Damascus road (Galatians 1:16). No doubt it was; but in the context of Galatians 5:6 the love mentioned there is more likely to be Christian love, as it is a few sentences below in verse 13: 'through love serve one another.'

Some expositors have betrayed a measure of uneasiness lest love, in Galatians 5:6, should be thought to play a causative part in the justifying process. Luther, for example, in his comment on this verse points out that, 'while works based on faith are wrought through love, it is not by love that one is justified'.[18]

There are, as is well known, two extremes to be avoided when we think of justifying faith. On the one hand, the faith that justifies has been regarded as a Christian virtue, on the ground of which justification is merited. In place of a multiplicity of good works one alone, faith, is required. This, of course, is to bring back justification by works through the window when it has been driven out through the door. On the other hand, the doctrine is sometimes stated in such a way that faith ceases to

have any significant content and becomes, so to say, 'part of the process of justification. In our anxiety to exclude the idea of merit', as T W Manson put it in his forthright way, 'we exclude all initiative whatsoever on the human side and treat man as a mere bottle to be filled with the water of life.'[19]

If faith were a virtue which merited the justifying grace of God, then grace would no longer be grace. But faith is not a bloodless, mechanical thing; it is the positive attitude of the person who exercises it, the set of his or her mind towards God. Being a living attitude, it has ethical content - at least potentially. This ethical content will inevitably reflect the character of the God towards whom the faith is directed; it will, in short, reflect the divine love.

**Justification in the parables**

The only place in the recorded teaching of Jesus where the term 'justified' occurs in anything like its Pauline sense is in Luke 18:14, at the end of the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector: the tax-collector went home, we are told, 'justified rather than the other' (Luke 18:14) - which does not mean 'more justified than the other' but 'justified, as the other was not'. And why? Not because the tax-collector was a better man than the Pharisee - he was in every way a much less desirable character - but because he acknowledged his sinfulness and cast himself on the divine mercy. God therefore set him in a right relationship with himself, put him 'in the clear'. The Pharisee, on the other hand, led a most exemplary life and relied on his good record to win him acceptance when he approached God. In Pauline terminology, he expected to be justified by the deeds of the law - in fact, he went beyond what the letter of the law required - but that is not the basis on which men and women are justified by God.

But if the term 'justified' is found in one parable only, the reality which the term signifies appears in many. In a book published in 1962 Eberhard Jungel, following his mentor Ernst Fuchs, gave good reason for insisting that it is in Jesus' parables that the kingdom of God which he proclaimed finds clearest expression; he discerned in them the same eschatological note as is struck in Paul's teaching about justification by faith.[20] This is true, no matter to which sources or strata of gospel tradition the various parables are assigned.

The parable of the labourers in the vineyard, for example, belongs to Matthew's special material (Matthew 20:1-16). In this parable the first-hired labourers agreed with their employer about the rate for the job - a denarius for a day's work - but the last-hired were in no position to bargain with him: they accepted his undertaking to give them whatever was just and fair. Had they bargained, they might each have received a pondion, one-twelfth of a denarius; as it was, they received a complete denarius apiece. Those who were paid at the rate to which they themselves had agreed had no cause to complain that they were unjustly treated; those who relied on the owner's good pleasure had good reason to be glad that they had not tried to bargain with him. The grace of God, the lesson seems to be, is not to be parcelled out and nicely adjusted to the varieties of personal

merit. When God bestows his grace, he bestows it without reserve.

Like the parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector, the parable of the prodigal son belongs to Luke's special material (Luke 15:11-32). Here again the same point is made. When the prodigal came home with his carefully rehearsed speech, his father might justifiably have said, 'That's all very well, young man; we have heard fine speeches before. But if you really mean what you say, then you can buckle to and work as you have never worked before. If you do, we may let you work your passage; but we can't let by-gones be by-gones as though nothing had happened.' That would not have been ungenerous; it would have gone beyond what the prodigal asked for, and even the elder brother might have been content to have him placed on probation.

But the grace of God does not operate like that. God does not put repentant sinners on probation to see how they will turn out; he gives them a wholehearted welcome and treats them as his sons and daughters. For Jesus, as for Paul, the initiative always rests with the grace of God: God bestows the reconciliation; we receive it. 'Treat me as one of your hired servants', says the prodigal, but the father calls him 'this my son'. 'So', says Paul, 'through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir'. (Galatians 4:7)

There is yet another Lukan parable that is specially relevant to the principle of 'faith working through love' - indeed, it is more than a parable; it is a living situation to which a parable is applied. When Simon the Pharisee entertained Jesus to a meal in his house but neglected certain courtesies normally shown by a host to a guest, a woman who ventured in from the street lavished her grateful affection on Jesus by wetting his feet with her tears and then drying them with her hair. Only our familiarity with the story can blind us to the extraordinary and indeed embarrassing nature of her conduct. What Simon thought about it was what anyone would have thought, even apart from the woman's doubtful reputation. But Jesus, far from being as ignorant of the facts of the case as Simon supposed, read the situation accurately and told the parable of the two debtors (Luke 7:40-43) to drive home the lesson that one who has been forgiven a great debt will respond with great love, whereas no special response will be forthcoming from one whose sense of having been forgiven is minimal. (It might be interposed by a debater that the man who was forgiven a colossal debt in another parable of two debtors - that of Matthew 18:23-35 - showed precious little love in return; but it is implied that his conduct was unnatural: the two parables are addressed to two different situations, and forgiveness and love are not subject to rules of iron necessity.) Where there is a genuine response of love, there will be a forgiving spirit; and where there is a forgiving spirit there will be a correspondingly greater appreciation of God's pardoning grace, and still greater love in consequence. It is God's pardoning grace that finds expression in his act of justification.

Some commentators find difficuty with Jesus' words about the woman: 'her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much.' The logic of the parable, they say, would require 'she loves much, for her many sins have been forgiven.' Indeed, an attempt has been made to argue that the

original Aramaic wording put it that way;[21] but such an attempt is wholly futile. If Luke had intended to report Jesus as saying that, he would have reported him as saying that; as it is, he reports him as saying what lies in all our texts. The truth is that love and forgiveness set up a chain-reaction: the more forgiveness, the more love; the more love, the more forgiveness.

In view of the plain sense of these parables, it is odd that James Moffatt should have said so peremptorily many years ago, 'Jesus did not preach justification; Paul did.'[22] If Jesus did not use the term, he preached the reality; in fact, we may say with Joachim Jeremias that 'nowhere is the connexion between Paul and Jesus so clear as here'.[23]

**Jesus, Paul and the law**

Paul's teaching that one is 'justified by faith apart from works of law' (Romans 3:28) is bound up with his revolutionary attitude to the law of his fathers. How does this attitude relate to that shown by Jesus?

There is a well-known agraphon which has found its way into the text of Codex Bezae between verses 4 and 5 of Luke 6: 'The same day, seeing a certain person working on the sabbath, he (Jesus) said to him, "Man, if you know what you are doing, you are happy; but if you do not know, you are accursed and a law-breaker".' There is no strong reason for regarding this as an authentic verbum Christi, and yet it has a curious consistency with Jesus' teaching. The law of God should be kept, not automatically but intelligently, not only in the letter but also in the spirit. Indeed, there may be occasions when to keep it strictly in letter would be to violate it in spirit. Hence the importance of doing the will of God because one knows it to be the will of God - to use a Hebrew expression, doing it lishmah ('for the sake of the thing itself', as Martin Buber translates it).[24]

In the agraphon just quoted, if the man did not know what he was doing - if he was working on the sabbath regardless of the sabbath law, or in defiance of the sabbath law - then he was breaking the law, and that was that. But if he knew what he was doing, it is implied that he had a good reason for doing it. He knew that it was the sabbath, and he knew that work was prohibited on that day, but there was some consideration which overrode the sabbath law and justified him in what he was doing.

There are some things, Jesus taught, that are so important that they override the sabbath law. His hearers agreed that this was so. The priests in the temple had more work to do on the sabbath than on other days, and were quite free from blame when they did it. If the eighth day of a male infant's life fell on the sabbath, he was circumcised, sabbath or not.[25] Yet these permitted activities were 'ritual' in character (so, at least, we should say), not of the sort that Jesus or Paul regarded as important. The works which they regarded as important were those that glorified God and helped human beings.

In rabbinical rulings generally matters of life and death took precedence over ritual law: if delay till the sabbath was past might endanger the life

of some person, or even of some animal, then let there be no delay in rendering what help was essential. But this is not how Jesus argued. The sabbath, he said, was given for the rest and relief of human beings. Therefore anything that promoted God's purpose in giving it could properly be done on that day - healing the sick, for example, regardless of the question of urgency or 'emergency'. The sabbath was, indeed, a specially suitable day for the performance of such an action, for such an action honoured the sabbath by fulfilling the purpose for which it was instituted, and thereby honoured the Creator himself.

In so arguing and acting, Jesus maintained that he was keeping, not breaking, the fourth commandment. But his attitude to the sabbath did ride roughshod over the rabbinical halakhah. That this was the first source of conflict between him and the scribes is attested as clearly by the Gospel of John as by the Synoptic records. If, in Mark's account, he defends his disciples for plucking ears of wheat or barley on the sabbath and rubbing them in their hands to extract the kernels, he shows that he does not seriously consider that they were guilty of violating the sanctity of the day by doing things which, in the eyes of some legal experts, amounted to reaping and grinding.[26] If, in the Fourth Gospel, he tells the man at the pool of Bethesda to carry his mat home on the sabbath or puts a mud poultice on the eyes of the blind man before sending him to wash it off in the pool of Siloam, he does not seriously consider that the one action infringes the ban on carrying a burden on the sabbath or that the other is a form of kneading and therefore prohibited on the holy day.[27] The coincidence of the Synoptic and Johannine accounts on this provides as solid evidence as any one could wish for the historicity of this aspect of Jesus' ministry.

What Jesus' attitude amounts to is this: rules are made for the sake of people, and not vice versa. Where the letter of the law clashes with the interests of human beings, their interests should prevail. Where appropriate, Jesus appealed not only from the oral tradition but from the letter of the written law to the creation ordinances, interpreted in the light of the Creator's purpose in laying them down.

Doing the will of God is not a matter of working to rule. This, of course, would have been accepted by many teachers in Israel: the 'tell-me-my-duty-and-I-will-do-it' type of Pharisee was in a minority and did not command the approval of his colleagues. But the principle of acting lishmah was radicalized by Jesus - and also by Paul.

That in Jesus' eyes and Paul's alike people mattered more than things is plain. But the same is true of all religious teachers worth their salt. There are many, however, who readily agree that people matter more than things but would insist that principles or laws are more important than people. For the sake of principle they are prepared to put people to inconvenience, not to use a stronger term; if it be urged that someone is liable to suffer injustice because they stand pat on principle, they will plead that 'hard cases make bad laws', as though that were a final answer.[28]

We know how Jesus dealt with this kind of argument. He took seriously the prophet's warning that people might draw near to God so far as lip-service was concerned while they were far away from him at heart. If a current interpretation of the law relating to vows interfered with a son's duty to his parents, then, said Jesus, the legal interpretation must give way: human relationships were vastly more important.

Paul takes the same line. Rules and regulations cannot coexist peacefully with the spiritual freedom proclaimed and made effective by the gospel. Rules and regulations have a deadening effect; it is the Spirit that gives life. Sabbath-observance or non-observance is for Paul a matter of no importance: what matters is good and happy relations among people - between the observers and the non-observers.[29] It is good, to be sure, that a Christian should act out of conviction in such a matter, but strong convictions either way should not lead to animosity, censoriousness or contempt towards those of different, even opposite, convictions.

This emphasis which Paul lays on personal conviction in areas where believers are free to choose one way or the other - 'Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind' (Romans 14:5) - ties in remarkably well with the point of the Bezan agraphon quoted above.

As Paul puts it again, with direct reference not to the keeping of the sabbath (to which the principle is nevertheless applicable) but to the eating of food forbidden by the Jewish law, 'he who doubts is condemned if he eats, ... for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin' (Romans14:23) - that is, his conscience will condemn him if he does something of which it does not wholly approve. The person, on the other hand, who says grace over his food and eats it with a good conscience is exercising the freedom with which Christ has set him free. (If, however, he refrains from eating out of consideration for another's weaker conscience, he is equally exercising his Christian freedom; he is not under constraint one way or the other.)

**The creation ordinances**

In Jewish thought, Gentiles were subject not to the law of Moses but to the seven precepts laid down for Noah and his descendants after the flood (Genesis 9:4). Paul makes no reference to the Noachian precepts. But it was generally recognized among the rabbis that six out of the seven precepts were already creation ordinances, the exception being the prohibition of eating flesh with the blood in it. It is fairly clear that Paul acknowledged the creation ordinances as binding. The prohibition of eating flesh with the blood in it was (in Jewish eyes) widely violated in the Gentile world, and account was taken of it in the apostolic decree of Acts 15:29. Paul has nothing to say about it in his extant letters, but it may be supposed that if he had been asked about it, his answer would have been in line with his answer about meat that had been offered to idols. If, when living among Gentiles, he conformed to Gentile ways (as he did), sitting at Gentile tables and eating Gentile food, he could not be sure that meat which was served to him came from animals which had been slaughtered according to levitical rule. On food in general his attitude

seems to have been quite similar to that of Jesus, who on one memorable occasion made a statement which had the effect, according to Mark 7:19, of 'making all kinds of food clean' - of wiping out the distinction between food that was kosher and food that was not.

When, however, some of Paul's converts were disposed to treat sex on the same level as food, Paul demurred. The creation ordinances were relevant here as they were not in respect of food. From the Creator's institution of marriage Paul inferred, as Jesus did, that 'each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband' (1 Corinthians 7:2) - not in the sense that marriage was obligatory for all but in the insistence on monogamy and lifelong mutual fidelity for husband and wife alike. For Paul, as for Jesus, there was no double standard of sexual morality.

If some of Paul's male converts saw no great harm in occasional fornication, they took it for granted that such license should be open for them but certainly not for their wives. Paul, as usual, put the matter on a personal footing. Intercourse with a harlot is not the mere gratification of a bodily appetite, as eating or drinking is. It involves another human being; it sets up, even in the most casual encounter, an interpersonal relation which is as inconsistent with Christian ethics as idolatry is with Christian worship. 'He who joins himself to a harlot becomes one body with her', says Paul (1 Corinthians 6:16), applying to this very temporary liaison the language used of marriage in the creation ordinance and so exposing it as a shabby parody of lifelong marital union. This thought of Paul's, in D Sherwin Bailey's words, 'apparently owes nothing to any antecedent notions, and displays a psychological insight into human sexuality which is altogether exceptional by first-century standards.'[30]

Jesus refused to relax the Old Testament marriage law as some contemporary teachers in Israel did. But in giving an interpretation of it which happens to approximate more to the Shammaite than to the Hillelite ruling, he was far from imposing an arbitrary restriction on freedom of divorce. As with the sabbath law, he went back to the divine purpose in the creation ordinance, and redressed, in effect, the unequal balance which operated to the disadvantage of women. The wife under Jewish law could not normally initiate divorce proceedings against her husband, and she had little chance of redress if he successfully initiated divorce proceedings against her. The 'milder' interpretation of Hillel and his school was milder in the liberty which it granted to the husband in extending the grounds for divorce - in widening the definition of 'some unseemly thing' ('erwaṯ dāḇār) of Deuteronomy 24:1 - but it did not operate mildly towards the wife. Jesus' disciples grasped the effect of his interpretation readily enough: if that is the way of it, they said, if a man is stuck with his wife all life long, then 'it is not expedient to marry' (Matthew 19:10).

Paul, for his part, found the celibate way of life congenial. When he was invited to give rulings on marriage and divorce, he reproduced Jesus' interpretation as something which, bearing the Lord's authority, was beyond dispute; for the rest, he gave his own judgment in a spirit of

responsibility but did not impose it as binding.

In this regard, however, one point is of special interest: the so-called 'Pauline privilege'. Where a married man or woman was converted to faith in Christ and the spouse remained a pagan, what then? Why, says Paul, if the unbelieving spouse is content to go on living with the pagan, that is good. Far from the unbeliever conveying defilement to the believer, the influence works in the opposite direction: the believing partner sanctifies the unbelieving one, and this sanctification extends to their children. This could be a transference to the personal plane of the Old Testament ritual principle: 'whatever touches the altar shall become holy' (Exodus 29:37). But what if the unbeliever walks out on the believing partner, with no prospect of return or hope of reconciliation? Just accept the situation, says Paul; the obligations of the marriage bond have lapsed.

If Jesus' interpretation of the creation ordinance were regarded as a binding regulation, then the Pauline privilege might seem to be a modification of it - a more far-reaching modification than the exceptive clauses of Matthew 5:32 and 19:9. But Paul is really concerned, as Jesus was, with the highest interests of human beings. The situation envisaged in the Pauline privilege is one that must have cropped up repeatedly in the course of Paul's apostolic ministry; it might indeed have been one that Paul had experienced personally at the time of his conversion. It was best that the couple should stay together, not only for the preservation of domestic peace but also because of the probability that the unbeliever would be won by the believer's witness and the family would constitute a Christian 'cell'.

If, on the other hand, an attempt by the believer to retain the unbeliever willy-nilly would lead to continual conflict, then let the unbeliever go in peace. Paul had to decide what was in the best interests of the two parties, of their children and of the Christian community, bearing in mind that God called his people to peace and not to conflict.

**The external and the ethical**

When Jesus made his radical pronouncement on the traditional dietary laws which, as Mark the evangelist saw it, involved the abrogation of all food-restrictions, he insisted that the things of supreme importance were the springs of ethical conduct, whatever comes out of the human heart, not material things like food, whatever goes into the human stomach (Mark 7:18-23).

This refusal to accord religious status to material things in themselves is echoed by Paul. Food, in his eyes, was ethically neutral, and should not be made the subject of religious regulations. When his Corinthian converts asked him about food that had been offered in sacrifice to idols, they may well have been aware that the church of Jerusalem had issued an edict on this very matter. Paul certainly knew the Jerusalem edict, but he does not appeal to it; indeed, he makes no reference to it at all. He brings the question on to the ethical level: it is people that matter, not food, which is neither better nor worse for having been offered in a pagan temple. If I

thank God for the food and eat it with a clear conscience, he says, let no one criticize me. But if my eating it harms another person, that is a consideration which takes precedence over my freedom. My freedom works both ways: I am free to eat, and I am free to abstain. In which way I should exercise my freedom may be decided by brotherly love. Christian charity is more important even than Christian liberty, because it affects my relation to others. In point of charity, in concern for the interest of others, 'Christ did not please himself' (Romans 15:3).

The details of the Jerusalem edict were of local and temporary application: the end which they were designed to promote, the avoidance of friction in social contact between Jewish and Gentile Christians, was the important matter. The dictates of Christian charity are of eternal and universal relevance, and they cannot by their very nature be imposed from without; they must proceed from the indwelling Spirit of Christ.

The same principle appears in Paul's attitude to circumcision. Circmcision does not figure in the ministry of Jesus as it does in Paul's, because it was not an issue in Jesus' entirely Jewish environment. When Paul warns his Galatian converts against circumcision, it is not the rite in itself that he has in mind, but the rite imposed or undergone as a religious obligation, as a condition of acceptance by God. Such a view of circumcision, in Paul's eyes, subverted the gospel of free grace; therefore, he told the Galatians, 'if you get yourselves circumcised, Christ will do you no good' (Galatians 5:2). But the external rite in itself, as he says to the Galatians twice over, is neither here nor there; it has no ethical or religious importance.

An appreciation of Paul's attitude will go far to remove the difficulty which some have in accepting Luke's statement that Paul circumcised Timothy for a practical purpose - not to improve his standing before God but to regularize his status in contemporary society (Acts 16:3).[31] When the elders of the Jerusalem church dismissed as slanders the rumours that Paul taught the Jews of the diaspora (whether followers of the Way or not) to give up circumcising their sons (Acts 21:20–24), they were probably right: to the practice of circumcision as an ancestral custom, as to the observance of the sabbath and other holy days, Paul had no objection. For Jews to do what Jews had always done was one thing; for Gentile converts to take over Jewish customs as though they were of the essence of the gospel was quite another.

**The sacraments**

Is it relevant to raise here the question of baptism and the holy communion? Did Paul treat the water in the former sacrament and the bread and wine in the other as purely external or material things?

These sacraments belonged to the tradition which Paul 'received'. He says so explicitly with regard to the holy communion (1 Corinthians 11:23), and he implies it in his references to baptism. His commission was not to baptize but to preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17); but baptism was already an established practice. He takes it for granted that the

Christians to whom he writes had been baptized, whether they were converts of his (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:13; Galatians 3:27) or not (cf. Romans 6:3, 4); and we infer from his letters that he himself had been baptized (cf. the inclusive 'we' of Romans 6:4; 1 Corinthians 12:13)[32]. Baptism and the holy communion, over and above their theological significance, had a social relevance for Christians as identity markers, as circumcision, the sabbath and the food restrictions had for Jews. But Paul makes it clear that the external acts of baptism and participation in the eucharistic bread and cup are religiously worthless apart from the inward and spiritual grace which they signify, just as the Israelites' safe passage through the sea and their partaking of the manna and the water from the rock did them no good without the response of faith and obedience (1 Corinthians 10:1-5).

It may be asked how Paul would have replied to the argument that, provided faith and obedience be forthcoming, baptism in water may be dispensed with. It may be asked, but the question cannot be answered, because there is no record of his ever having been faced with this issue. It was his responsibility to deliver to others what he himself had received. The response of faith was made inwardly but it was to be expressed outwardly, in word and action.

'If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord', said Paul, 'and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved' (Romans 10:9). There is no express word of baptism here, but baptism normally provided the occasion on which the confession 'Jesus is Lord' was first made publicly.

But, accepting baptism into the name of Jesus as something that was 'given', Paul related it to his distinctive teaching about the community of believers as being the body of Christ. 'In one Spirit we were all baptized into one body', he tells the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 12:13); to be baptized into the name of Christ is to be baptized into Christ himself (Romans 6:3; Galatians 3:27), to become members of Christ corporate.

Similarly, Paul accepted the holy communion as something that was 'given' - given by Christ himself, from whose institution and by whose authority it had been handed down. Not only did the sacred meal serve as the focus of Christian fellowship, but the bread and the cup were, for Paul, the believers' participation (koinōnia) in the body and blood of Christ. Their conduct therefore should be in keeping with the significance of their communal eating and drinking. It was absurd to think that the same persons could at one time have fellowship with idols by sharing meals in pagan temples and at another time have fellowship with Christ by sharing the holy communion with his people (1 Corinthians 10:21); it was equally absurd to think that they could have fellowship with Christ while their actions denied the reality of fellowship with his people (1 Corinthians 11:20-22, 27-29). What, above everything else, constituted unworthy participation was eating and drinking without charity in heart and conduct towards one's fellows. Here, as elsewhere, it was human beings and their welfare that mattered for Paul; here again he displayed the mind of Christ.

**Fulfilling the law**

If Jesus sums up the whole law in the twin commandments of love to God and love to one's neighbour (Mark 12:29–31, and parallels, quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), Paul sums up the commandments setting forth one's duty to a neighbour in the second of these: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself' (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14). Such 'love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans 3:10).

It is of some interest, incidentally, that Paul does not quote the first of the two great commandments; indeed, as Buber points out, Paul (unlike Jesus) has little to say about our love for God. He does say in 1 Corinthians 8:3, 'if one loves God, one is known by him.' ('God' is omitted in $p^{46}$, but that reading cannot stand against the otherwise universal testimony of manuscripts and versions). But in general Buber may be right in pointing to A Nygren's explanation: love, for Paul, is predominantly 'made known through the cross of Christ' and human love is, at best, the response to, or indeed the reflexion of, that divine love, of which God cannot well be the object.[33]

That aside, it may be said that when Paul speaks of fulfilling 'the law of Christ' (Galatians 6:2), it is Christ's promulgation of love as the summary of the whole law that he has in mind. Bearing one another's burden is one aspect of loving a neighbour as oneself. But there is a spontaneity about love which consorts uneasily with legalism. We can do many things to order, but love is not one of them. 'You shall love . . .' may be couched in the same imperative terms as the other commandments, but the structural identity covers an inward diversity.

What can be said of Paul's statement in Romans 10:4 that 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every believer'? The noun translated 'end' (telos) is ambiguous: it may mean 'goal' or it may mean 'termination'. In two major works on Romans to have been published in recent years, the meaning 'goal' has been advocated by C E B Cranfield; the meaning 'termination' by Ernst Kasemann. When two such able exegetes espouse contrary interpretations, and do so in such a way that each excludes the alternative, decision between the two is not likely to be easy.

There is no doubt that telos is the natural word to use for the goal at which one aims. There is equally no doubt that Paul did consider recourse to law as a means of justification before God to be a dead-end. Across the path of law-keeping, it might be said, was erected a barrier (which Paul would not have been unwilling to identify with the cross of Christ)[34], bearing the notice: 'No Road This Way'.

But what if Christ puts an end to the law as a basis for justification precisely because he is the goal of the law? Could one correlate this interpretation of Paul's words with the logion of Matthew 5:17, 'I have not come to destroy, but to fulfil'? While that logion is peculiar to Matthew among the Evangelists, something like it is ascribed to Jesus in rabbinical tradition: 'I have not come to take away from the law of Moses, neither have I come to add to the law of Moses.'[35] The rabbinical tradition probably preserves an echo of a genuine saying of Jesus, but reflects a

misunderstanding of it.

While the logion of Matthew 5:17 is followed by further logia characteristic of the stricter attachment of the special Matthaean material to the law, it is worthy of closer attention in its own right.

With the two verbs 'destroy' (katalyō) and 'fulfil' (plēroō) may be compared the two which Paul uses in Romans 3:31, after his uncompromising affirmation that God's way of righteousness is based not on works but on faith: 'Do we then annul the law by faith? Far from it; on the contrary, we establish the law.' The two verbs used by Paul, katargeō and histanō, are commonly recognized as reflecting the rabbinical battēl and qayyēm. It is at least possible that the same two Mishnaic Hebrew words underlie katalyō and plēroō in Matthew 5:17.

If Christ came to fulfil the law, and his people by faith in him establish the law, light may be thrown on the meaning of Romans 10:4. The key to this text, according to C K Barrett, is to be found in the words eis dikaiosynēn, which he paraphrases 'by realizing righteousness'. Thus, he says, 'Christ is the end of the law, with a view not to anarchy but to righteousness. He puts an end to the law, not by destroying all that the law stood for but by realizing it. The law never was an effective means of attaining righteousness, but, since it was righteous (vii.12), it did always bear witness to God's righteousness. This however, has now actually been manifested in Christ (i.16 f.; iii.21).'[36]

Profesor Barrett adds that in the clause 'Christ is the end of the law' the term 'Christ' may be taken as equivalent to 'God's act in history'[37] – that is to say, the saving event which ushers in the new creation. If this comment is well founded (as I believe it to be), then what Paul affirms here can be taken along with his earlier statement in Romans 8:4 that the purpose of God's saving act in Christ was 'that the righteous requirement of the law should be fulfilled in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit'. Here again the note of fulfilment is struck: in the gospel the law is not abrogated; it is fulfilled. What is abrogated is the conception of law 'according to the flesh', as an external standard or code, conformity to which is necessary for salvation. But Paul would argue that it was never God's intention that the law should be treated in that way. What is fulfilled, in those 'who walk according to the Spirit', is the will of God declared in the law; the will of God, comprising 'what is good and acceptable and perfect' (Romans 12:2), is accomplished by the inward power of the Spirit as it could never be accomplished by conformity to an external code. This is made explicit in 2 Corinthians 3, where the fulfilling of the will of God by grace of the life-giving Spirit is described in terms probably derived from Jeremiah's oracle of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31–34), in which the law of God is implanted within his people and inscribed on their hearts, instead of being engraved on stone tablets as it was under the earlier covenant.

It is in 2 Corinthians and Romans that we find the mature and relatively dispassionate presentation of Paul's understanding of the place of the law in the purpose of God. What he says on this subject in Galatians takes its

character from the urgent sense of concern which he felt when his Galatian converts were disposed to listen to the visiting agitators and take some element of legalism into their scheme of things. In this very controversial situation Paul emphasizes those features in the argument which support his case against the judaizers. It is not that 2 Corinthians and Romans contradict Galatians; they do, however, make room for other aspects of the subject which were not immediately relevant to the purpose for which Galatians was written.

But, for all the negative emphasis of Paul's treatment of law in Galatians, the note of fulfilment is not absent. 'The whole law is fulfilled in one commandment, namely this: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself"' (Galatians 5:14). And the faith which works through such love is the faith by which men and women are justified before God.

## 4. GOOD NEW FOR OUTSIDERS

At the end of a study of Paul's allegory of Hagar and Sarah and their two sons (Galatians 4:21-31), first contributed to the Festschrift for Ernst Kasemann in 1976, C J Barrett concludes that 'the disputed interpretation of the story in Genesis becomes the root of the argument ... of Romans 9 - 11, and a profound, though obscure, statement of the paradoxical predestinating grace that determines the ungodly to righteousness and life. Paul's insight is at once moral (in that his sympathy is engaged by the unprivileged) and theological (in that he holds fast the freedom of God in grace). If space permitted this dual insight could be traced back to Jesus, and onward to its more elaborate exposition in Romans.'[38]

**Sympathy with the unprivileged**

The theological aspect of this dual Pauline insight - the maintaining of God's freedom in grace - and its fidelity to the teaching and practice of Jesus have already engaged our attention. We turn now to the moral aspect - sympathy with the unprivileged - and shall have no difficulty in seeing how this too can be traced back to Jesus.

Jesus' live sympathy with the unprivileged members of Palestinian society in his time is well attested in the gospel tradition. It was not otherwise with Paul in the wider society of the Roman Empire.

When Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians that they are not very distinguished by secular standards, he comments that this is consistent with God's regular procedure, for he 'has chosen the things that are foolish by secular standards to confound the wise, weak things to confound the strong, ignoble and despised things and things of no account to bring to nought the things which are' (1 Corinthians 1:27, 28). Paul would not have needed to use such language to people who belonged to the submerged tenth of society; he hopes to deflate the self-esteem of people who have quite a high opinion of their status and achievements. But the terms he uses do not suggest that God has made do, faute de mieux, with such unpromising materials as he describes; he insists that God has deliberately chosen them, chosen them by preference, to accomplish his purpose, so as to remove all occasion for human boasting.

Nor is Paul the only New Testament author to emphasize this. The same point is made by James when he says that 'God has chosen those who are poor by this world's standards as rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which he has promised to those who love him' (James 2:5).

It goes without saying that this perpetuates a central emphasis of Jesus' teaching and practice. The proclamation of good news to the poor, foretold in Isaiah 61:1 as one of the features of the new age, was something on which Jesus insisted as fulfilled in his ministry. His reply to John the Baptist's messengers, when they were sent to ask him, 'Are you the Coming One, or must we look for someone else?' implied that this element in his ministry was more important than all the miracles of healing (Matt. 11:2-6

par. Luke 7:18-23). Nor did he insist on it in word only; he carried it into practice. He associated by preference with humble people and with those who would not be tempted to trust in any righteousness of their own to win the divine approval. The ninety-nine righteous persons who had nothing to repent of felt no need of his pardoning assurance, and should have had no cause of complaint if he gave his time and attention to those who did feel such need. They might have conceded this but would have argued that that was no excuse for his so obviously enjoying the company of such people.

But the situation was worse than that. The people with whom Jesus associated were not merely 'ammē hā'āreṣ, 'the people of the land' who were unfamiliar with the finer points of the law and so could not be trusted to preserve all desirable ritual purity, whether with regard to food and drink or in other respects. He associated with outright sinners, those who were Jewish by birth but might as well have been pagans for all the difference it made to their way of life. His table-fellowship with such persons gave special offence to the respectable people of his environment. A teacher of righteousness, they reckoned, ought to be more particular about the company he kept. 'A glutton and wine-bibber, a boon-companion of tax-gatherers and sinners' was how some of them summed him up (Matthew 11:19 par. Luke 7:34). This was his own account of their assessment of him, and although it was an unfriendly disparagement of his way of life, he agreed that his way of life was very different from John the Baptist's asceticism.

Jesus readily accepted invitations to eat with people. At one stage he appears to have been in demand as an after-dinner (or during-dinner) speaker, who could always be relied on to say something original and pointed. But he really seems to have preferred table-fellowship with the less reputable members of society, indeed with the 'rejects' of society.[39] When respectable people invited him to a meal, they could depend on hearing some home-truths directed towards themselves; but there is no record of similar criticism from him for those who were no better than they should be. He could relax in their company, for he knew that none of them was waiting to catch him out in something he might say; and they could relax in his, for there was nothing 'judgmental' in his attitude to them. This was something that religious people then found it difficult to take, just like their counterparts today.

A religious teacher might be affable, compassionate, even uncensorious towards such people, but to sit at table with them implied a degree of fellowship which exceeded the limits of propriety.

**Table fellowship with Gentiles**

Even so, pious Jews would sooner sit at table with fellow-Jews who were not particular about ceremonial minutiae than with Gentiles. There is no record of Jesus' ever eating with Gentiles, even if he did look forward to the time when some trueborn Jews would be displaced by Gentiles at the banquet of the new age, where Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would recline at the top table (Matthew 8:11, 12 par. Luke 13:28-30).

Perhaps there is more to this prediction than appears on the surface. Jesus' table-fellowship has been recognized by several students as designed (on some occasions at least) to anticipate the banquet of the age to come, when certain selected persons would be invited to 'eat bread in the kingdom of God' (Luke 14:15). This significance is probably present also in the parable of the great supper, where Tom, Dick and Harry are brought in from the streets and lanes, from the highways and hedges, to take the place of others who were invited earlier but chose not to come. The Evangelists no doubt had the ingathering of Gentiles in mind when they recorded this parable, but it cannot be argued that the ingathering of Gentiles conflicts with Jesus' intention when first he told the parable. True, he did not speak explicitly of Gentiles in this connection, but if those who were swept in to fill the vacant seats were 'the poor and maimed and blind and lame' (Luke 14:21), Gentiles would have a pre-eminent claim to be included among them.[40]

But even if table-fellowship with Gentiles was implicit in principle in Jesus' teaching and action, he provided no express precedent for such a practice. Had he provided one, Peter might not have required such exceptional persuasion to overcome his scruples about accepting the invitation to visit Cornelius at Caesarea. Yet he did accept the invitation, and evidently from then on he had no misgivings about the principle of eating with Gentiles, at least with those who were God-fearers or believers. But his action shocked his stricter colleagues back in Jerusalem, who heard of it before Peter himself returned, and greeted him with the reproach: 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?' (Acts 11:3). In their eyes Gentiles were sinners by definition. If Peter or someone else had reminded them of their Master's table-fellowship with sinners, what would their response have been? Probably they were none too happy about the precedent he set - a precedent which they were in no hurry to follow - but they might have said that at least the sinners with whom he sat at table were Jewish sinners,and not those 'lesser breeds without the law'.

We can view with sympathy the dismay they felt at Peter's action. The news was bound to get around, and it would not help their witness to fellow-Jews in Jerusalem and its surroundings; worse than that, it might expose them to considerable danger. So indeed it did: it was not long after that that the elder Agrippa launched an attack on members of the Twelve, and 'saw that it pleased the Jews' (Acts 12:3). In the persecution that broke out on the morrow of Stephen's death the Twelve were immune from attack or banishment; now they are the principal targets for the king's assault. Why? Because their leader had fraternized with Gentiles, and the rest of them acquiesced in his doing so.

In spite of Peter's initiative, however, there came a day when expediency, in his judgment, required him to abstain from table-fellowship with Gentiles. This was the occasion at Antioch on the Orontes described by Paul in Galatians 2:11-14. Peter's reasons for withdrawing from table-fellowship with Gentile Christians at that time were by no means frivolous.[41] But in Paul's eyes those Gentile Christians were the socially despised parties in the current dispute and were therefore entitled to

chief consideration. 'Sinners of the Gentiles' such uncircumcised people might be in terms of Jewish tradition, but Christ had received them, as he used to receive other sinners during his Galilaean ministry. He had purified their hearts by faith, he had caused his Spirit to dwell within them, and their entitlement to a place at his table alongside their brethren of Jewish descent was not to be questioned. It is noteworthy that the principle of the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers as fellow-members of Christ's new society should find such concrete expression in the context of table-fellowship, since it was in such a context that Jesus' own procedure was subjected to specially acute criticism.

To Paul (and no doubt to others) fellowship at table was the most natural and acceptable outward expression of fellowship at heart. That is why he dealt so devastatingly with the uncharitable and inconsiderate behaviour shown by some Christians to others at the supper-table at Corinth. Such behaviour showed that its perpetrators had no heart-appreciation of the unity that binds believers together in Christ, no 'discernment of the Body'; it rendered them 'guilty of the body and blood of the Lord' (1 Corinthians 11: 27, 29). Similarly at Antioch (as Paul saw it) it was useless for Peter and other Jewish Christians, including 'even Barnabas', to talk about the new unity of Jews and Gentiles in Christ if, for whatever reason, they withdrew from table-fellowship with their Gentile brethren; that one action spoke more eloquently than ten thousand words, and what it said was this: 'Gentile believers are second-class citizens in God's new community.'

**Friendship with outcasts**

To return to Jesus' positive attitude to various unprivileged groups: despite the ban on entering any Samaritan town in the Matthaean account of the commissioning of the Twelve (Matthew 10:5), Luke and John insist that Jesus by no means regarded Samaritans as excluded from divine grace. Within the Jewish fold he extended a ready sympathy to women, who were in a number of respects less privileged than men; he treated them as persons in their own right and (as we have seen) he interpreted the law of marriage and divorce so as to protect their interests. And nothing is more striking in the record of his ministry than his friendly and welcoming attitude to moral and social outcasts. He did not patronize 'tax-gatherers and other bad characters' (as they are called in the New English Bible rendering of Luke 15:1); he did not treat them with condescension, but gave the impression that he genuinely appreciated their company and felt more at home with them than with respectable practitioners of religion. To be sure, if Luke's picture of the reception given him in the house of Simon the Pharisee (Luke 7:36-50) is at all typical, it is not surprising that he preferred to be entertained by those who made him more welcome, even if his accepting their hospitality earned him the reproach of being an associate of sinners (Luke 15:2).

In all these respects Paul was Jesus' faithful follower. For Paul, social and religious privileges became irrelevant - indeed, they ceased to exist - within the family of faith. Slaves and free persons, women and men had an equal status within the new fellowship, and so, according to Paul, had

Gentiles and Jews. It will readily be agreed that Jesus had no time for religious discrimination between slave and free person or between male and female. But did not Paul's abolition of any religious distinction between Jew and Gentile go beyond the teaching and example of Jesus? Not, I think, in principle.

Luke's witness is here consistent with Paul's. Luke was as devoted to the Gentile mission as Paul was, but he saw the Gentile mission adumbrated already in Jesus' ministry. In his programmatic report of Jesus' preaching at Nazareth, he quotes Jesus as stating the purpose of his recent 'anointing' to be that he should 'bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed and announce the acceptable year of the Lord' (quoting freely from Isaiah 61:1,2). Then he adds, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing' (Luke 4:21) – fulfilled, that is to say, by his reading these words as the programme of his newly inaugurated ministry. But, as Luke reports him, Jesus goes on to illustrate this message of grace for the unprivileged with examples drawn from Old Testament history – the sending of Elijah to a Phoenician widow with unimaginable blessing for her home at a time when no widows in Israel (so far as the record goes) were blessed in this way, and the healing of Naaman the Syrian at the word of Elisha when no Israelite lepers (so far as the record goes) were similarly healed.

It may be said that this is redactional, and that over against it should be placed the words of Matthew 18:17, where the person who refuses to pay heed to the authority of the believing congregation must be treated 'as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer'. Are these words redactional, or do they reproduce an authentic utterance of Jesus? (In either case, they can be classed with other 'M' material which belongs to the stricter tradition of Judaean Christianity.) If they do reproduce an authentic utterance of Jesus, they must mean that his followers should adopt the same attitude to tax-gatherers as he himself was known to adopt. Tax-gatherers were social outcasts who had to be wooed and won; they must be shown that they were not excluded from the circle of God's love. So, if the recalcitrant brother refuses to respond to the community's overtures, acting as one who does not belong to it, then he must be wooed back into it just as if he were a tax-gatherer. And since the Gentile is so closely linked with the tax-gatherer in this logion, the same welcome must be extended to him. This may be dismissed as very forced exegesis, but for those who believe that we have to do here with a genuine saying of the historical Jesus, whose association with tax-gatherers won him notoriety in his day, is any other exegesis possible?

While the Nazareth sermon is peculiar to Luke, the text on which it is an expansion forms the core of the 'Q' record of Jesus' reply to John the Baptist's messengers.

While Luke omits from his Gospel the Markan incident of the Syrophoenician woman, whose persistent faith and ready repartee were rewarded by Jesus with the healing of her daughter (Mark 7:25–30), it is noteworthy that he makes mention in his report of the Nazareth sermon of Naaman the Syrian and the Phoenician widow. (If he had included the incident of the

Syrophoenician, one may wonder how he would have handled it.) He does, however, include the 'Q' incident of the centurion of Capernaum, with Jesus' amazed reaction to the man's confidence in his ability to cure his sick servant: 'I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith' (Luke 7:9). He does not append to this incident, as Matthew does, the logion about many coming from east and west to sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of God (Matthew 8:11); he reproduces a similar logion at the end of the short parable of the closed door, rounding it off with the words: 'some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last' (Luke 13: 28–30). These last words would indeed be applicable to the ingathering of Gentiles, especially if they displaced some who believed themselves to have a birthright entitlement to a place at the banquet – although they do not have this particular significance either here or in the other places where they appear in the synoptic record (Mark 10:31; par. Matthew 19:30; Matthew 20:16).

It is plain that only exceptionally, and not by deliberate policy, did Jesus make contact with Gentiles during his ministry. It is equally plain that he looked forward to the day when Gentiles would be brought into the kingdom of God.

This distinction between present policy and future purpose, I believe, provides the answer to Dr Geza Vermes's question about Jesus' words: 'It is not right to take the children's bread and give it to the dogs' (Mark 7:27) and 'Go nowhere among the Gentiles' (Matt. 10:5). 'However', he asks, 'did the evangelists manage to record such sayings as these, and at the same time attribute to Jesus the view that the Gentiles were soon to displace "the sons of the Kingdom", the Jews, as the elect of God?'[42] His own answer is that the 'exclusive' sayings are attitudes belonging to the historical Jesus, and that those which breathe a more comprehensive spirit reflect a 'radical transformation' which deflected 'the original bias of Jesus' ministry' in consequence of Paul's acknowledged apostleship and Gentile mission. But Paul's apostleship and Gentile mission were acknowledged only with reservations by the mother-church, and they were not sufficiently early to influence the collection of the Q material. The Q collection is indeed bound up with the evangelization of Gentiles, but with the evangelization of Gentiles which followed the first dispersal of believers from Jerusalem and Judaea rather than with the Pauline mission. It was natural that such a collection should make room for those sayings of Jesus which prefigured the ingathering of Gentiles, just as the 'M' material (as usually envisaged) featured those sayings which emphasized that restriction of the blessings of the kingdom to Jews which, in point of fact, expressed Jesus' policy throughout his ministry.

**The Greeks in the Fourth Gospel**

The same distinction between present and future appears in another form in the Fourth Gospel, in the incident of the Greeks who were in Jerusalem at Passovertide and sought an interview with Jesus. It is not plain from the narrative whether their request was granted or not. What is plain, however, is that Jesus spoke of a day when current limitations on the free outflow of his grace would be removed: 'The hour has come for the Son of

man to be glorified . . . and when I have been lifted up from the earth I will draw all to myself' - all without distinction, Gentiles as well as Jews (John 12:20-32).

Those Greeks may have been attracted to him by hearing about his cleansing of the temple (if it was at the same Passovertide that its cleansing took place). For the area which Jesus cleansed was the 'court of the Gentiles', the only part of the temple precincts where God-fearing Gentiles were permitted to approach the God of Israel. Jesus' action could thus be regarded by such God-fearers as a blow struck on their behalf, a conclusion which could be confirmed by his quotation of Isaiah 56:7, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations' (Mark 11:17). Here it is possible to recognize an 'undesigned coincidence' between the Markan and Johannine records.

**Breaking down barriers**

An earlier writer than Dr. Vermes, who also insisted on the Jewishness of Jesus, was Joseph Klausner, whose work Jesus of Nazareth (first published at Jerusalem in Hebrew in 1922) appeared in an English translation in 1929. This was an epoch-making work, because it was one of the first positive assessments of Jesus made by an orthodox Jewish nationalist. Klausner appraised Jesus as a nationalist Jew by instinct, 'and even an extreme nationalist' - as 'a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable', whose ethical code displays 'a sublimity, distinctiveness and originality in form unparalleled in any other Hebrew ethical code' and who is equally unparalleled in 'the remarkable art of his parables'.[43] Yet he detects in Jesus (in the light of the sequel to his career), 'something out of which arose "non-Judaism"'.[44] For, by ignoring 'the requirements of the national life' of Israel and setting up in their place 'nothing but an ethico-religious system 'bound up with his conception of the Godhead', he simultaneously 'both annulled Judaism as the life-force of the Jewish nation, and also the nation itself as a nation'[45]. For, Klausner adds, 'a religion which possesses only a certain conception of God and a morality acceptable to all mankind, does not belong to any special nation, and, consciously or unconsciously breaks down the barriers of nationality.'[46] If this insight is just (as I believe it is), then Paul in his day came to appreciate the inward tendency of Jesus' teaching and could have invoked his precedent for his affirmation that in the new order of the gospel 'there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free person; but Christ is all, and in all' (Colossians 3:11).

**Justifying the ungodly**

No statement of Paul's is more paradoxical, especially in the religious environment to which he originally belonged, than his description of God as the one who 'justifies the ungodly' (ton dikaiounta ton asebē, Romans 4:5). How paradoxical it is can be appreciated in the light of Exodus 23:7 where the God of Israel, presenting himself as the model of impartiality for human judges to follow, says, 'I will not acquit the wicked' (Heb. lō' aṣdîq rāšā'). The Septuagint, replacing the first person singular by

the second, makes him say, 'you shall not acquit the wicked' or 'you shall not justify the ungodly', the same verb and noun being used as Paul uses in Romans 4:5 (ou dikaiōseis ton asebē).[47] So, according to Paul, God in the gospel does the very thing which, in the law, he says he will not do, or forbids others to do.

Yet God's justifying the ungodly is the essence of the good news, as proclaimed not only by Paul but by Jesus himself. When Jesus was criticized by godly people - by the 'moral majority', to use today's jargon - for consorting with disreputable persons, his defence was: 'It is sick people that need the doctor, not those who are well; it is sinners, not righteous people, that I came to call' (Mark 2:17). Mark's wording is followed by Matthew (9:12); Luke, in his rendition of the saying, adds the phrase 'to repentance' (Luke 5:32). The point is that God accepts sinners, justifies the ungodly, without requiring from them any prior amendment of life or undertakings with regard to the future. Even if he required such undertakings, and sinners were prepared to give them, what security could they offer that their undertakings would be kept? On this point J A Findlay aptly quotes the eighteenth-century London hymn-writer Joseph Hart:

> Let not conscience make you linger,
> Nor of fitness fondly dream;
> All the fitness he requireth
> Is to feel your need of him:
> This he gives you;
> 'Tis the Spirit's rising beam.[48]

'This he gives you': the undertaking is on God's side. Luke is not far astray in his epexegetic addition of 'to repentance'.

> 'The follies and crimes of men are the signs and symptoms of the morbid condition of men's souls. This is the fudamental point and the explanation why, in the ministry of Jesus, so much stress is laid on repentance (metanoia, change of character) rather than on reformation of behaviour. The attempt by rules and regulations to mend the manners of mankind is to treat symptoms instead of disease.'[49]

A change of character is necessary: 'this he gives you.' And there is all the difference in the world between doing the right thing for fear of the consequences of doing otherwise or because it is what law or convention demands, and doing it as the spontaneous act of a redeemed, transformed and grateful personality.

It is not, I think, necessary to conclude from Romans 4:5 that Abraham, whose faith is the subject of the context, is actually counted as 'ungodly'[50]. On the contrary: if justification before God was ever obtainable by works, then (as Paul points out) Abraham had a better chance of securing it than most; but in that case he could have boasted of it as an achievement. Abraham, on God's own testimony, 'obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws' (Genesis 26:5). Even so, it was not on this account, according to the biblical record, that Abraham

was justified before God: rather, 'he believed in Yahweh, and he counted it to him as righteousness' (Genesis 15:6). Abraham's good deeds, substantial and numerous as they were, played no part in his justification: he was justified by divine grace, on the same ground as sinners who are devoid of any good works, when he took God at his word and believed in him.

Abraham acknowledges his creaturely nothingness in the presence of God's majesty - 'I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes' (Genesis 18:27) - but he nowhere confesses his sin in the presence of God's holiness. Unlike the author of Psalm 32, quoted by Paul in the same context, he does not speak from experience of the blessedness of 'those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered', but the faith which is reckoned to him as righteousness is no different from the faith of one 'against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin' (Romans 4:7,8). Where faith like this meets the grace of God, it does not matter whether the believer is the chief of sinners or a righteous person (although the man who is called the chief of sinners in the New Testament was at the same time a righteous person), any more than it matters whether the believer is a Jew or a Gentile - which was Abraham at the time of his justification? What does matter is that one believes in God - the God who justifies the ungodly.

One of the most pungent contemporary exponents of Paul's teaching on the justification of the ungodly is Ernst Käsemann. A number of years ago he published a lecture on 'The Faith of Abraham in Romans 4'[51] and since then he has returned to the subject in the course of his commentary on Romans.[52] Käsemann's horror of pietism is as great as his horror of legalism (are they perhaps two sides of one coin?) and he insists on God's free act in justifying the ungodly to the point where some have complained that he does not make it clear enough that the justified sinner does not remain ungodly. (But Käsemann might reply that he does so remain - simul justus et peccator).

What Käsemann does make clear is that the removal of ungodliness is the creative act of God. On this he insists:

> 'That God has spoken to us, and does not cease to speak to us, is our only salvation; that we allow this Word to be spoken to us and dare to live by it is our sanctification and justification. No achievement of our own annuls our ungodliness, which can always only be ended through the divine promise given to us, hence only in faith as the state of being coram deo. We do not transcend ourselves. God comes to us in his promise and makes us righteous - righteous in that we, as the receivers, allow him to come to us.'

Käsemann may be thought to play down the ethical implications of being justified by faith. But he does bring out Paul's emphasis: God is the God who alone does great wonders; he is the God of the impossible - he creates out of nothing, he brings the dead to life, and (most 'impossible' of all) he justifies the ungodly.

The actions of Jesus, as well his parables, come into view here. We have seen how his parables underline the special welcome that God reserves for

the rejects of society, the wholesale sinners, the utterly disreputable. And Jesus brought home this attitude of God by himself extending just such a special welcome to characters like these:

> Outcasts of men, on you I call,
> Harlots and publicans and thieves!
> His arms are stretched to embrace you all;
> Sinners alone his grace receives.

For this he incurred the reproach of the respectable and the orthodox, just as Paul did when he extended the blessings of the kingdom of God, the assurance of God's pardoning grace and all that accompanies that, to Gentiles, and to such Gentiles: the untutored idolators of Lycaonia, the outrageous libertines of Corinth - in a word, to the ungodly par excellence. It was for the ungodly, Paul insisted, that Christ died (Romans 5:6). And in Christ's dying for the ungodly lies the solution to the problem how God himself remains just and at the same time justifies the ungodly.

In Käsemann's judgement, Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, apart from legal works, is ultimately his interpretation of the person of Christ.

> 'The Pauline doctrine of justification is entirely and solely Christology, a Christology, indeed, won from Jesus' cross and hence an offensive Christology. Its point is the ecce homo presented so that we, confronted with the Nazarene, learn how little our illusions about ourselves and the world can stand up to his reality. But it is this which is the break through to the new creation.'[53]

Käsemann perhaps overstates his case by emphasizing that it is the ungodly, in distinction from 'the Pharisees, the Zealots or the men of Qumran', who are the recipients of God's creation.[54] Paul's 'polemical doctrine', as Wrede called the doctrine of justification by faith alone,[55] becomes in Käsemann's hands a polemical doctrine in a slightly different sense; and indeed, if polemics are called for, it is an incomparable weapon. But if the Pharisees and other righteous people are excluded from God's salvation, it is because they are self-excluded, as the elder brother was self-excluded from the prodigal's welcome home party. Käsemann no doubt has in mind the modern counterparts of 'the Pharisees, the Zealots or the men of Qumran', and what he says is completely in line with Jesus' insistence that there is no spiritual peril so great as theirs 'who trust in themselves that they are righteous, and despise others' (Luke 18:9).

Paul, like Jesus, shocked the guardians of Israel's law by his insistence on treating the law as a means to an end and not as an end in itself, by his refusal to let pious and moral people seek security before God in their own piety and morality, by his breaking down of barriers in the name of the God who justifies the ungodly, by his proclamation of a message of good news for the outsider. In this Paul saw more clearly than most of his Christian contemporaries into the essence of Jesus' life mission.

FOOTNOTES TO: PAUL AND THE MIND OF CHRIST

1 F F Bruce, **Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit** (1977), p.474

2 P S Minear, 'The Influences of Ecumenical Developments on New Testament Teachings', **Journal of Ecumenical Studies** 8 (1971), p.287

3 T W Manson **Studies in the Gospels and Epistles** (1962), p.6.

4 See pp. 11ff.

5 W Temple, **Readings in St. John's Gospel** (1939), p. xxxii.

6 G Vermes, **Jesus and the World of Judaism** (1983), p.56.

7 B B Warfield, 'Imitating the Incarnation', **The Person and Work of Christ**, ed. S G Craig (1950), pp. 561-575

8 C F D Moule, 'Further Reflexions on Philippians 2:5-11', in **Apostolic History and the Gospel**, ed. W W Gasque and R P Martin (1970), p. 265

9 John Knox has some pertinent observations on the importance of 'the person (of Jesus) himself as remembered in the church' (**Criticism and Faith**, 1953, pp. 36-40).

10 W Wrede, **Paul**, E T (1907), pp 147-154

11 C H Dodd, **The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments** (1944), p 16.

12 R H Lightfoot, **History and Interpretation in the Gospels** (1935), p 225.

13 R H Lightfoot, **The Gospel Message of St Mark** (1950), p 103

14 R H Lightfoot, **History and Interpretation**, p 225.

15 M Buber, **Two Types of Faith**, E T (1951), pp 99-101.

16 **Two Types of Faith**, pp 7-12, 96-99 et passim

17 G S Duncan, **The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians** (1934), p 157.

18 M Luther, **A Commentary on St Paul's Epistle to the Galatians** (1535), 'Middleton' edition, ed P S Watson (1953), ad loc.

19 T W Manson, **On Paul and John** (1963), p 63.

20 E Jüngel, **Paulus und Jesus** (1962), pp 196, 266 et passim.

21 Cf C C Torrey, **Our Translated Gospels** (1936), pp 98, 100 f.

22 J Moffatt, 'Paul and Jesus', **Biblical World** 32 (1908), p 173. (The peremptoriness is modified by the context)

23 J Jeremias, 'Paul and James', **Expository Times** 66 (1954-55), p 369

24 M Buber, **Two Types of Faith**, p 92.

25 Cf Matthew 12:5; John 7:22 f.

26 Mark 2:23 f.

27 John 5:10; 9:6, 14.

28 Palestinian Talmud, **Berakot** 9:7.

29 Romans 14:5 f.

30 D S Bailey, **The Man-Woman Relation in Christian Thought** (1959), p 10.

31 See M Hengel, **Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity**, E T (1979), p 64.

32 His baptism is reported as a historical fact in Acts 9:18; 22:16.

33 M Buber, **Two Types of Faith**, p 135; cf A Nygren, **Agape and Eros** E T I (1932), p 92.

34 Especially as stauros can mean both 'cross' and 'fence' (cf the verb stauroō in Galatians 6:14).

35 b Shabb 116a. There is no good reason for trying to emend 'neither' (welā') to 'but' ('ellā').

36 **The Epistle to the Romans** (1957), pp 197 f. Cf C T Rhyne: 'Whenever someone receives righteousness by faith in Christ, the law's goal of righteousness is realized in this act of faith in the work of the resurrected and exalted Christ. Thus, the equation Christ is the goal of the law for righteousness, represents the apex of Paul's understanding of the continuity between Judaism and Christianity' (**Faith Establishes the Law**), 1981, p 120).

37 **The Epistle to the Romans**, p 197.

38 'The Allegory of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar in the Argument of Galatians', in **Rechtfertigung**, ed J Friedrich, W Pöhlmann, P Stuhlmacher (1976), pp 1-16, reprinted in **Essays on Paul** (1982), pp 154-170.

39 Cf O Hofius, **Jesu Tischgemeinschaft mit den Sündern** (1967).

40 The word 'first' in 'Let the children first be filled' (Mark 7:27) may imply that there will be a place for Gentiles later (cf J Jeremias, **Jesus' Promise to the Nations**, E T 1958, p 28).

41 Possible reasons for Peter's action have been suggested by me in **Paul: Apostle of the Free Spirit** (1977), pp 175-178; **Men and Movements in the Primitive Church** (1979), pp 34-37; **The Epistle to the Galatians** (1982), pp 128-134.

42 G Vermes, **The Gospel of Jesus the Jew** (1981), p 45, reprinted in **Jesus and the World of Judaism** (1983) pp 54 f.

43 J Klausner, **Jesus of Nazareth**, E T (1929), p 414.

44 **Jesus of Nazareth** p 413.

45 **Jesus of Nazareth** p 390.

46 **Ibid.**

47 LXX departs from MT by adding heneken dōrōn 'for gifts' (ie for bribes).

48 J A Findlay, **Jesus and His Parables** (1950), pp 74 f.

49 T W Manson, **The Teaching of Jesus** (1931), p 308 (also p 299).

50 **Pace** A T Hanson, **Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology** (1974), pp 52-66 ('Abraham the Justified Sinner').

51 E T in **Perspectives on Paul** (1969), pp 79-101.

52 **Commentary on Romans**, E T (1980), pp 105-129.

53 **Perspectives on Paul**, p 73.

54 **Ibid.**

55 W Wrede, **Paul**, E T (1907), p 125.