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Divine Sovereignty and Missionary Strategy in Romans 9–11

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I

FOR THIS EXAMINATION of the meaning and modern relevance of Romans 9–11 I beg to set aside at the outset three views of these classic chapters:

1. The Calvinist, which finds in them the basis for a theology of determinism. (I admit that some solid material is provided!)

2. The view that we have here a philosophy of history. This view is typical of Liberalism and is represented in Dodd's commentary, but it is not confined to scholars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, because it can be traced back at least as far as Augustine.

3. The view, advocated recently and at length by J. Munck, and in my opinion incredible, that Romans 9–11 are the justification of an evangelistic strategy which envisaged the completion of the Gentile mission and also the final ingathering of Israel (i.e., the culmination of God's purpose for mankind), within measurable time from the date of Paul's writing.

Our understanding of this passage must begin with the recognition that Paul is wrestling with the fact of Jewish opposition to the Church. This, however, was not simply a practical matter, affecting ecclesiastical strategy. It inevitably raised questions concerning the divine purpose, and it thus carried Paul into the consideration of the ultimate destiny of both Jew and Gentile, and also—though this is disputed (it turns on the interpretation of *pantas* in 11:32)—of the ultimate salvation or rejection of individuals.

To venture a parallel, let us consider the position of negroes in the United States. This is not simply a question of segregation (the practical arrangement that has obtained until now). It is really a question of the meaning of the Constitution and citizenship, of human rights, and—in Christian judgment—of the will of God for man.

What we are dealing with in this section of Romans is the baffling experience of the rejection of revelation by a people whose religious dimension was inexplicable apart from revelation. This experience is baffling in proportion to the faith of the reader and his concern that divine revelation be known and heeded.

Who has not felt, on first reading Romans 9–11, what many of Paul's Gentile readers in the early Church must have felt—that it is arid rabbinical stuff, digestible only by those who start from Jewish presuppositions and are

used to having Old Testament passages torn from their context and linked with other passages similarly uprooted? This strikes most reasonable people as illogical in method and illegitimate as exegesis. Why does Paul not state his views about overcoming Jewish scruples (as he does in chapter 14, for example, in another connection) without dragging in so many quotations? We moderns find it difficult to admit that this method was necessary for the refutation of Jewish objections, and that, as Michel points out, the quotations are the heart of Paul's argument.

I suggest that, though our own exegesis of these chapters cannot but take account of our antipathy, we have to set in relief this underlying theme of lack of response to revelation, which is the Church's continual problem. God is revealed in Christ; Christ is the truth. This the Church exists to proclaim. But so far is it from being acknowledged by all who are concerned to know the truth—so far is revelation from being progressive—that this proclamation runs up against resistance even in the minds of those who might have been expected to welcome it most eagerly. There is regress as well as progress in the matter of man's confrontation with divine revelation. Revelation does not fit in with earlier accepted truth and tradition; the new is regarded as the enemy of the old, instead of its complement or culmination.

This, in relation to divine omnipotence, is the underlying issue. Generalized as above, it lacks the intense personal tone of Paul's discussion, and the zeal which he attributes to his fellow-Jews and exemplifies in himself. Yet it was such zeal that largely constituted the problem as Paul faced it. Is there any problem like it on the modern horizon? Our analogues to the Judaism which provided the challenge in the first century are the challenge of the non-Christian religions, Communism and "scientism." But the underlying parallel is man's preference for his own systems or nihilisms to what is offered as divine revelation.

II

Paul starts—it has been on his mind since Romans 3:1-8—with Jewish failure to respond to the gospel. The contrast between this failure and their original response to God's call, in the persons of Abraham and Moses, is most baffling. That original response is implied in the honorific attributes of chapter 9:4-5: sonship, glory, covenants, law, temple, promises, patriarchs, and the Messianic hope, which in Paul's affirmation as a Christian has been realized. In chapter 10:2 he refers to their "zeal for God." This has been a notable feature of their life all down the centuries in the wilderness and in Canaan, in freedom and persecution, and the Christian centuries bear their own testimony of this. But zeal for God must be directed towards a worthy goal.

Before we proceed with Paul's argument we may connect it with our modern responsibility as Christians in the "post-Christian" era by identifying the factor of Jewish recalcitrance which Paul was up against. It was a

special form of *the problem of the rejection of Christ*, the scandal of unbelief (Mark 4:1-12; 6:1-6). To generalize further: it focuses *the opposition of secularism to the idea of revelation*.

To come back from generalization and modern parallels to the problem as it pressed on Paul, his personal references in Romans 9:2 and 10:1-3 express more than perplexity; this is a kind of shame. He is writing out of long and intense reflection; he is not writing objectively, as in 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16. Still less is he viewing the problem with the objectivity of the Gentile Luke (see Acts 6-7, and 13, especially 13:46). Luke's apparent assumption that the newness of the gospel could only be appreciated by "progressive" Gentiles, the Jews being too conservative (if this is a fair comment on Luke's editorial expansion of the parable of the new wine and the old bottles; cf. Luke 5:39), is no doubt the kind of Gentile attitude which Paul rebukes in Romans 11:17-21.

Israel's sin is incomparably worse than human failure generally. There can be no parallel to it because Israel's privilege as a recipient of divine revelation was without parallel. The oddness of God in choosing the Jews should have been matched by enough sense of that oddness in the Jews to make them aware of what was happening when the divine choice was operating again in history, in the coming of the Messiah and the extension of revelation to new recipients.

The intensesness of Paul's perplexity is due to the fact that this obtuseness of the Jews does not merely reflect discreditably on them, but causes the critical to doubt the veracity of God, and his ability to achieve his purposes with mankind. Paul can conceive this responsibility (or maybe, as Michel thinks, Romans 9-11 reflect actual debates with Jews), and its blasphemy prompts the firm denial in 9:6 and 11:1, and the confident assertion of 11:29. This is the second, and main, premise: *the sole supremacy and righteous control of God* (9:6, 13-18, 21).

The divine will is sovereign in human affairs, however inscrutable; it is above human criticism. This claim is difficult for the modern man and even for the modern Christian; you have to be a Calvinist, perhaps even a sixteenth-century Calvinist, to accept this argument, as stated by Paul.¹ But we must be willing to be faced by the challenge of it. It is helpful to concentrate on 9:16 and 11:6. God is in charge all the time. His chief characteristic is mercy, and the goal he is aiming at is salvation for all (11:32). Man's opposition cannot ultimately obstruct or defeat God. The "hardening" which Paul also attributes to God is not his final mode of dealing with refractory humanity. Mercy has the last word. But that is to anticipate; we must not rush our fences.²

1. Even Barth admits that a doctrine of bare sovereignty makes God no more than a tyrannical demon. Cf. K. Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1959), pp. 116, 119.

2. Notice my exegetical method here. I am assuming that the precise exegesis is clear enough but partly (in places) incredible—though few commentators admit that. I nevertheless urge that our modern weak, individualistic faith needs to grapple with it.

Paul's assertion of God's sovereign control and his repudiation of man's right to question it does not commend his argument to modern individualism. The analogy of the potter (vv. 19-21) is not very illuminating in a century which does not believe in the right of absolute rulers and has had too much experience of totalitarian ruthlessness. To the ancient world the analogy was more convincing. This is not to say that the *point* of the analogy is no longer true. But it does remind us that the modern man has more barriers to climb before he can get close to the thought of the Apostle, and the value of a commentary may be measured by the extent to which the commentator helps his reader to surmount these barriers (or is frank enough to say so if he regards them as insurmountable).

If questioned, Paul would presumably see the point about free will—the difference between a human being and a pot. But he seems unaware of the great moral issue opened up by his reasoning in the middle of chapter 9; he does not consider whether divine control leaves room for human freedom or for the attribution of guilt to man. Nevertheless, in reply to the perplexities his argument causes to us men of greater logic and lesser faith, he might call our attention to three points in the total context of these three chapters:

1. He is not dealing with *individuals* primarily, as we unconsciously assume. (This must be borne in mind at 11:32.)

2. The problem of determinism versus freedom is not soluble in logic or philosophy, but it is soluble in the Christian experience of the relationship between man and God. This relationship is inaugurated by God's *eleos* (9:16-18) when responded to by faith on the human side (10:5-17).

3. "Consider the latter end." For Paul this counsel of the Psalmist means: take account of *the total plan of God*, not merely of its temporary interruption. God is cognizant of Israel's obtuseness (*katanuxis*, stupor,) and has in some sense caused it (11:8); but the final working out of the divine *eleos* must be the gathering in of the recalcitrant (11:32) T. W. Manson calls this "Paul's deepest eschatological conviction."

I return to his emphatic denial that Israel's disobedience means a failure of God's *purpose*. (This must be the meaning of "the word of God" in 9:6; the verb is *ekpeptōken*.) The problem stimulates him to offer two corollaries.

1. There are *distinctions within Israel* (9:7-13). God's principle of selection continues to operate even after Israel has been separated from the mass of nations. It operates *within* Israel, working through Isaac rather than Ishmael, and Jacob rather than Esau. The principle is clear enough and is not only a matter of rabbinic citation of texts, but reveals Paul's true insight into the meaning of the Old Testament. (On the level of citation of texts, verses 23ff.—the invitation to Gentiles—could be taken as equivalent to preference of Esau over Jacob, and thus a contradiction of verse 13.) This insight comes through again in what he says about the Remnant in 9:27 and 11:1-6; and the principle of faith in 9:30-33 and 10:10ff.

The reference of these statements is much broader than verse 13 alone would suggest. The operation of divine mercy is not confined to distinctions

within Israel. God is not the God of Jews only. This is an observable fact of history (v. 24) and its recognition brings out a meaning latent in Hosea of which Hosea was not conscious (vv. 25-6).

2. It is *God's will to elect Gentiles*—to bring them within his saving purpose (v. 23, "vessels of mercy"). For Paul this was no theologoumenon, a dream of the future, but a fact of his own, and the Church's, experience. It was as observable as the defection and obstinacy of Israel. The Gentiles, in spite of their uncircumcision and alleged "abominations," were there, as baptized believers, in Antioch and Corinth and Rome. This incontrovertible fact necessitated a widening of the concept of divine *eklogē*, election. It was not enough to infer that the Gentiles had got their chance because the Jews had thrown theirs away (Acts 13:46; Luke 14:21-24); it must be part of God's plan, and nothing less. There are no contingencies in Paul's conception of history. This assumption, that the response of the Gentiles had not taken God unawares, must be supported by evidence from Scripture, and Paul proceeds to do this; in rabbinic fashion he finds a proof in Hosea (verse 25, in spite of the apparent contrast with verse 13). He does even more; he relates it to his own main theme, viz., righteousness, divine and human, in this Epistle. He goes so far as to describe the new standing of the formerly godless Gentiles in terms of achieving righteousness. We recall, of course, that this term means primarily right relationship with God, experience of his saving power—not righteousness in the sense of moral attainment.

The problem was intensified for Paul by the fact that for many Jews election was not simply the Old Testament conception of election to responsibility and the ultimate inclusion of Gentiles (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 66:18; Jonah), but a more rigid conception which limited even God's freedom in controlling it. Yahweh, in fact, as well as Israel, was bound by it.

This new status of the Gentiles is due on their part to faith, not to desert or superior attainment, either intellectual or moral. We already know from chapter 4 what Paul means by faith in contrast to works, but faith is so essential to his argument here that he devotes part of chapter 10 to the demonstration that it is primary because implied repeatedly by the Law itself. (This is the point of 10:6-11, quoting Deuteronomy and Isaiah.) Faith means readiness to respond to God's invitation and to fit into his plan, rather than to persist in a traditional way of life, even when, as in the case of the Jews, that way of life is orientated towards the will of God and generates great moral seriousness.

In chapter 9:31 the verb *diōkōn* is a strong word, not adequately rendered by "follow after" (KJV), or even "pursue" (RSV). NEB is better with "made great efforts after." The term is connected with the Jews' zeal for God (10:2). But zeal is not enough; there must be an adequate *concept* of God (10:3; cf. John 4:22). Without such a concept even a theonomous ethic degenerates into an ethic of self-regard.

On this understanding of faith we can see that:

(a) God has not been unfair in including Gentiles among his elect; his purpose is beyond the reproach of human logic; it has not "fallen to the ground" (9:6), nor is God chargeable with injustice (9:14).

(b) Christ is the awakener of faith (10:4, 9; cf. Heb. 12:2). I take the view that *telos* in 10:4 means "end" in the sense of "termination," not of "climax" or "fulfilment." No other sense fits Paul's argument in Romans and Galatians about Christ's significance in relation to the Law. If he had meant "fulfilment" in 10:4, he would have said *plērōma* as in 13:10.

Curiously, the positive implications of this concept of Christ's work are not drawn out. Israel's lack of faith becomes the centre of the argument again at chapter 10:16, and the beginning of chapter 11 makes use of the Remnant idea to show that God's grace is at work even when men see no signs of it. A nucleus of elect men is always visible to God, and they may be said to obtain what God has to offer (11:7). But the argument does not proceed in terms of divine grace any more than in terms of the activity of Christ. Instead, the theme of Israel's jealousy being aroused is introduced at chapter 11:11, 14. The sharing by Gentiles in the privileges of election is envisaged as awakening the "zeal" of the former elect people, which was inoperative when the Messiah appeared, and needed to be directed with new stimulus to that highest of privileges, viz., that of functioning as the true society, now at last constituted under the lead of God's vicegerent. We should not attach too much importance to these verses, even though Paul becomes lyrical (vv. 12 and 15). As reasoning, his thinking is not impressive on the great theme of how the final response of Israel is to be achieved ("all Israel," verse 26, as contrasted with the elect remnant, verses 5-7). In fact, it is not reasoning at all, but a fancy, and we need not waste time paying lip-service to it or pretending that it still has to happen. In our modern responsibility for the gospel we have no time for that kind of literalism. Nevertheless, we must not dispense with some considerations that were present to the Apostle in this passage:

1. The zeal of the Jew, even the obdurate Jew, was a fact. Basically it means concern for the things of God. Thus there is strength in Paul's argument, in so far as it implies that while this feature of Judaism persists the Jew cannot remain insensitive to the acceptance—by Gentiles—of Jesus as the Messiah, and the development of this acceptance as faith, institution, and missionary crusade. If this development is of God the Jews will in the end voluntarily join in, and so "all Israel will be saved" (v. 26). There is ultimately only one people of God, not two. The practical difficulty for Christians today is that the life of the Church is not able to challenge Judaism—or any other religion, apparently—or stir it to emulation. The ancient Jewish obduracy is now paralleled by a Christian obduracy. The question whether the purpose of God has failed (9:6) still presses itself on our attention.

2. We must face this question in its relevance to our situation, but learn from Paul to do so in the framework of what we know, through Christ,

about God's purpose and word, and their ultimate realization. Our temptation is to consider the problem too anthropologically, in terms of existential involvement. Paul is writing in the strict sense *theologically*. We are tempted to criticize him for it, but it is here precisely that we should learn from him, even though he is not addressing our situation. We tend to forget God; Paul never does. We are justified in pointing to the deficiency of his thought on human free will. But we must hold on to his "God has the power" (11:23; cf. 9:16).

Paul's main answer to the problem of Jewish opposition to the gospel is not verses 11-16 or 17-24 of chapter 11, but verses 25-32. When we have registered our dissatisfaction with the jealousy argument (vv. 11-16), we are left wondering how God is to be understood as carrying out his will. The analysis that Paul has given in verses 7-8 is too serious a diagnosis to be dealt with by the jealousy theory, or by the analogy of the engrafting (vv. 17-24). The terms "hardening" and "stupor" have been used of the plight of Judaism, and Paul even affirms that these are of divine causation, not simply the effects of persistence on man's part in wrong acts and choices. Let us give Paul credit here for refusing to make the problem out to be simpler than it is. Those who follow Sanday and Headlam interpret the hardening as the *result* of human sin, but this does not dig down as deeply as Paul does, to the roots of the problem in an interweaving of divine and human factors. Consider the following sample of exegetical opinion. Calvin writes:

Not those were blinded who so deserved by their wickedness, but who were rejected by God before the foundation of the world. . . . The cause of eternal reprobation is so hidden from us, that nothing remains but to wonder at the incomprehensible purpose of God. . . . They reason absurdly who, whenever a word is said of the proximate causes, strive by bringing forward these to cover the first, which is hid from our view, as though God had not, before the fall of Adam, freely determined to do what seemed good to him with respect to the whole human race.³

Leenhardt takes the "hardening" to mean divine judgment, in which God is active, not passive (cf. *edōken* in verse 8, and the triple *paredōken* in 1:24ff).⁴ Barrett writes: "It is impossible here to distinguish between 'hardened because disobedient' and 'disobedient because hardened'; the two processes are concurrent."⁵ F. W. Beare asserts: "Israel's rejection of the Gospel must, in the last analysis, be attributed to the will of God."⁶ Michel sees the divine and the human as interrelated, and speaks of "ein Unheilsweg in der Geschichte," the reverse side, as it were, of *Heilsgeschichte*.⁷

3. John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844), on Rom. 11:7.

4. F. J. Leenhardt, *L'épître de saint Paul aux Romains* (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1957), *ad loc.*

5. G. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: A. & C. Black, 1957), p. 210.

6. F. W. Beare, in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, IV, 119.

7. O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1955), *ad loc.*

Paul is bold enough to affirm that Israel's hardening was foreordained as much as the hardening of Pharaoh, the oppressor of Israel (9:20). But he goes on to make this hardening part of a total scheme in which the temporary hardening ("partial," 11:25, in a temporal sense) is transformed into an ultimate response to divine grace (11:32) after non-Israelites have been included. The illogicalities and new starts in the Apostle's thought are not weakness; he has a conception of divine control which does not depend on the accidents of history or the element of human opposition. And this divine control is also beneficent. It means that man is never beyond God's concern, however far he goes in his defiance and however much he may become depersonalized in—shall we add?—modern involvements such as atheism, secularism, or the tyranny of the machine. If it were not profanation to attempt to improve on the end of Romans 8, we might say that nothing can separate the *unbeliever* from the love of Christ!

But what of the *Heilsgeschichte*? This is still operative because God is still God, however many of his chosen on earth prove insensitive to his call. We want to know what Paul has to teach about this after his unsparing reference to Israel's plight in verses 7-8. How is the remnant (v. 5) to become coextensive with "all Israel" (v. 26), and "all Israel" to be united with "the fulness of the Gentiles" (v. 25)? How will the divine mercy transform the "hardening"? How can the "reconciliation of the world" (v. 15) become reality, and a more inclusive goal than the reconciliation of present believers referred to in chapter 5:10-11—in fact, a fulfilment of Jeremiah's vision of a new covenant (v. 27)?

The main statement, in verses 25-32, is not as full as we could wish. Paul is as conscious as anyone that the "How?" in the questions just posed must remain unanswered this side of eternity. But they are proper questions to pose and ponder, as are also the assertions which he feels able to make, out of his own insight into God's will, to lessen our ignorance of this great "mystery" (v. 25). In spite of the compression of his thought and the peremptoriness of his language here, it is clearly his considered judgment which is conveyed, and verse 32 makes a moving climax.

He conceives of the final reordering in two consecutive stages: the entry (into the Kingdom, or final salvation) of the "full number (*plērōma*) of the Gentiles" (v. 25b), and then the salvation of "all Israel" (v. 26). The precise meaning of this terminology is still uncertain. "All Israel" must presumably mean every individual Israelite. *Sanhedrin* 10:1 may be quoted as a rabbinic parallel: "All Israel has a share in the Age to Come."⁸ The Age to Come refers to a point after the general resurrection and presupposes, according to Billerbeck, purification in the fire of Gehenna in the period between death and resurrection. We need not wrap up our interpretation in a nice phrase like "Israel in its eschatological fulness" (Michel), which leaves the question of the individual unanswered. On the other hand, we

8. Cf. H. Danby (ed.), *The Mishnah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 397.

have seen reason to believe that Paul is here thinking mainly in terms of large entities: Israel, Gentiles. We can hardly accept the interpretation of "all Israel" as equivalent to "the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:16), which includes Gentiles (so Barth affirms following Calvin).

For the "pleroma of the Gentiles" we have no rabbinic parallel to help us, but behind the phrase is the apocalyptic notion that God in his sovereign control has everything planned in detail: the precise number of the saved and the damned, the exact date of the end of history, the correct measurement of the eternal city, and so on. The martyrs crying for vengeance in the New Testament Apocalypse are told to be patient until the full tally of martyrs is made up (Rev. 6:11) and the number is later given as 144,000 (Rev. 7:4-8, 13-14). This particular Christian author has limited the number of the "elect" to Christian martyrs, but the concept itself was originally without such limitation, and it is that concept which Paul is using.⁹

There could be a variety of speculations about what determined the duration of the present age and the beginning of the Age to Come. Did the latter depend on a certain number of men being born first, or a certain number of righteous men? The less optimistic (e.g., the author of 4 Ezra) might doubt whether a single righteous man had been, or would ever be, born (cf. Rom. 3:19-20). The thought behind Revelation 6-7 is of pre-ordained martyrdoms. The number of the elect is as limited as that! At some point the notion crept in that it was the precise equivalent of the number of the fallen angels. Augustine had this notion and argued that it was a mark of God's grace. It is not injustice on God's part so to limit the elect, because mankind, being *massa perditionis*, deserves utter rejection. If God then "elects" some to a better destiny, that is free grace on his part.¹⁰

Paul does not go so far. His point is that Gentiles as well as Jews are to make a contribution to the redeemed society which God purposes. The surprising feature, which he feels he has to argue for the sake of Jewish readers, is that the Gentiles are to precede the Jews. This was a necessary inference from the response of Gentiles to the preaching of the gospel. Man must not be surprised if God in his mercy invents new methods.

The Jews not only had no monopoly of God's saving acts, but were unaware of what was really happening in the process of salvation as it had been revealed through Christ in the Church (Rom. 1:14-17; Gal. 1:11-16; Eph. 3:3-11). When the Messiah appeared as Jesus of Nazareth and the Kingdom began to take shape in his words and deeds, and so the end-events were inaugurated, there were too few among God's elect people who were alert to the significance of what was happening in their midst (*entos*

9. The commentaries of Charles and Lohmeyer on the Apocalypse refer to the parallels in Jewish apocalyptic, e.g., 4 Ezra 4:36f.; 2 Baruch 23:5. Cf. also Bousset-Gressman, *Die Religion des Judentums*, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1926), p. 248.

10. Cf. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London, A. & C. Black, 1960), p. 368. Calvin shows no trace of this line of thought. He explains the fulness of the Gentiles as the majority of the Church.

humōn, Luke 17:21). Hardening gripped the heart of Israel (Mark 3:5; cf. 6:5-6). Paul exposes this in his charge of ignorance (*agnoia*; Rom. 10:2-3). Zeal alone is not enough. Paul himself, in his stage of extreme zeal for Jewish traditions (Gal. 1:14), had been in the same ignorance. But the true understanding about what God was doing had been revealed to him (Gal. 1:16). Jesus of Nazareth was not an impostor whose movement had to be stamped out, but the Son of God who must be proclaimed among the Gentiles—i.e., not to Israel only—as Saviour of all mankind who makes righteousness possible for the unrighteous of all races. This Paul sensed from the first to be his own special task (Rom. 11:13). So far from the Gentiles having no part in the final redeemed society, as some Jews thought, they were to provide their *plērōma* in it, side by side with that of Judaism (Rom. 11:12b, 25b). Moreover, the Gentile *plērōma* was being gathered in now, by Paul's mission, even before the place allotted to Israel had been occupied. The time-sequence had been altered. The Gentile dogs are not to pick up the crumbs after the Jewish children have first been fed (Mark 7:27). Gentiles are preceding Israel into the Kingdom.

The climax of the argument (11:32) would seem to be an affirmation that ultimately all will be saved, and that the mysterious operation of divine mercy will dissolve human obduracy. Paul knows better than to speculate on how this can come to pass. Such speculation belongs to a realm above human logic. Paul's mind takes wings in chapter 11:33-36; praise in such a context is more fitting than argument or quotation.

I favour the universalist interpretation of "all" in verse 32; i.e., I take it to mean every individual, not simply Gentiles and Jews in a general sense, allowing for individual exceptions, still less the Gentiles and Jews of the generation to which Paul belonged—assuming that he regarded them as the *last* generation. The full universalist conclusion is the only one which does justice to the biblical *Kerygma* of God's redemptive purpose. It is mercy in its total and ultimate implications.¹¹

Romans 9-11 may be regarded as a philosophy of history, in so far as it proceeds from the axiom of God's control of history and takes history more seriously than Greek and Eastern thought. For Paul, as for the whole Bible, history is the sphere of divine action, choosing and refusing, setting up and throwing down the actions of men and nations. When he speaks of God loving Jacob or hardening Pharaoh, or of an "election of grace," Paul has in mind historical events, actual deeds and policies and consequences, which figure in the history books. The divine action interwoven with human factors is not arbitrary, but logical and purposive. For history

11. This exegesis follows Dodd, Barth, Beare, and T. W. Manson. The more cautious commentators are Sanday-Headlam, Anderson Scott, Michel, and Althaus. Among the most subtle in the category of the cautious are Barrett and Leenhardt. There is a proper scholarly caution which refuses to make sentences mean more than they can mean, and sometimes a passage may contain deliberate ambivalence which must be exposed. But caution has become mere fence-sitting if it is content with the original meaning of a passage, when there is an implicit meaning which is part of its relevance for later readers.

is moving towards the attainment of a goal set by God, whether with or without human understanding and co-operation. This is the biblical dynamism, and its anthropomorphic expression must not be allowed to obscure its proper logic and seriousness. It sustains the conviction that the ultimate power behind phenomena is not chance or fate or wave mechanics or nuclear energy.

Paul's ignoring of secondary causes, his failure to distinguish cause and effect, and his minimizing of free will leave question marks (or exclamation marks) in our minds as we read, and exegesis such as Calvin's on chapter 11:7 (quoted above) will strike us as uncritical. But the way in which Paul keeps the divine mastery in the centre of the argument is something our faith needs to follow.

Why does he not develop his thought more definitely with reference to Christ? Christ is "the end of law" indeed; but why is this not positively emphasized? Christ is the communicator of the divine righteousness, and the means of sin's expiation (Rom. 1:17; 3:24). Should he not also be presented in chapters 9-11 as the gatherer of the new Gentile section of the people of God, and also as the shepherd of Old Israel still, both the ninety-nine safely in the fold (even though reduced to the remnant, 11:5) and the minority lost in the wilds? It is curious that the Apostle is content to refer to the restoration of Israel in terms of revived zeal (11:11), re-grafting (11:24), rather than in terms of Christ's claim and compassion, or in any of the strong metaphors of chapters 5-8.

In conclusion, we may distinguish the following stages in the outworking of the incursion of divine energy into history in Christ, as Paul in Romans 9-11 appears to have conceived it: (a) the arrival of the Messiah, or the incarnation of God's Son (Gal. 4:4); his Resurrection (Rom. 1:4; Eph. 1:20);¹² (b) the constitution of the New Israel, or Messianic community (Rom. 1:5; 6:3-4; 8:26-30; Gal. 3:26-29); (c) the Old Israel temporarily in opposition (Rom. 9:31; 10:21; 11:7-8, 25; Mark 6:1-6; Acts 13:46); (d) non-Israel gathered in (Rom. 9:23-30; 10:12-13; Matt. 8:11-12; 28:15-20; John 4:26-42); (e) the regathering of the Old Israel (Rom. 11:24-26); (f) mercy for all (Rom. 10:12; 11:32). We can hardly fall in with Paul's view that (d) is consequent on (c). We must regard the inclusion of the Gentiles as part of God's plan from the beginning (as Paul really believes himself). For Christ is not simply the new Abraham or Moses, but the new Adam.

12. What Jesus called the coming of the Kingdom, Paul speaks of as the revelation of righteousness (Rom. 1:17).