F. F. Bruce, "Some Thoughts on Paul and Paulinism," *Vox Evangelica* 7 (1971): 5-16.

Some Thoughts on Paul and Paulinism[*]

F. F. Bruce

[p.5]

For most theological occasions James Denney has a word in season, and he has one particularly seasonable word for any one who undertakes to speak or write on Paul. Here it is: 'The unintelligent and inexperienced books about Paul are dreadful—all done by just men who need no repentance and therefore have no glimmerings of what was vital to the apostle. It is always a marvel to me that the street preacher goes straight to the point in Paul, and finds all his answers where the ninety-and-nine just men find all their difficulties.'[1] With due attention to this sobering observation, let us proceed to consider the theme of this first Annual Laing Lecture of London Bible College: 'Some Thoughts on Paul and Paulinism'—only some thoughts, and random ones at that: who would attempt to sum up the apostle or expound his message in a single lecture?

I

In the light of his later experiences Paul acknowledged in mid-career as apostle to the Gentiles that he had been divinely set apart for this ministry from his birth, if not indeed earlier. But there was little in the circumstances of his birth, heritage and upbringing that would have led one to expect such a career for him. Born an Israelite, he tells us, of the tribe of Benjamin, Hebrew son of Hebrew parents[2]—which means probably that they attended a synagogue where the service was conducted in Hebrew and spoke Aramaic at home-he was circumcised the eighth day as a matter of course and later joined the party of the Pharisees, manifesting in exceptional measure the Pharisaic zeal for the law (Phil. 3. 5f; cf Gal. 1. 13f).

On the question posed in the title of a book by Professor van Unnik—*Tarsus or Jerusalem*?'[3]—Paul's letters do not throw much light. The question, let me remind you, concerns the city of Paul's boyhood: was he brought up in his native Tarsus or in Jerusalem? Let me say simply that I agree with Professor van Unnik's punctuation of Acts 22. 3, which agrees with that of the British and Foreign Bible Society's Greek text: 'I am a Jew,

> (*a*) born at Tarsus in Cilicia,
> (*b*) but brought up in this city [Jerusalem],
> (*c*) educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers,

---

[*] This article consists of the first of a series of Annual Lectures to be given at the London Bible College and to be known as the Laing Lectures. Professor F. F. Bruce, M.A., D.D., the visiting Lecturer for 1971, is Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester.

[1] From a letter written in 1914 to Alexander Whyte, quoted in G. F. Barbour, *Life of Alexander Whyte* (London, [8]1925), pp. 508f.

[2] Phil. 3. 5; cf 2 Cor. 11. 22. The studies of W. D. Davies (*Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* [London, [2]1955]) and others have confirmed the justice of Paul's claim in this regard, as against contrary views expressed at one time, such as P. Schubert's conclusion that Paul was 'not just a Jew who was "exposed" to Hellenistic "influences", but that he was an indigenous Hellenist... ''Ἑλληνιστὴς ἐξ Ἑλληνιστῶν' (*Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* = *BZNW* 20 [Berlin, 1939], p. 184).

[3] W. C. van Unnik, *Tarsus or Jerusalem: The City of Paul's Youth*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1962).

being zealous for God as you all are this day.'[4] That is to say, although he was born in Tarsus, it was not in Tarsus but in Jerusalem that he grew up to adolescence. The implication is that he was not first sent from Tarsus to Jerusalem when he was of age to enter Gamaliel's academy, but had already spent the years of his earlier boyhood there. If influences of Tarsus are rightly recognised in his

[p.6]

language and outlook, they may be due to a later and possibly longer residence in and around Tarsus, after he became a Christian.

It is of some interest that, whereas only in Paul's letters are we told that he belonged to the tribe of Benjamin,[5] only in Acts are we told that his Jewish name was Saul.[6] We can readily understand that devout parents of the tribe of Benjamin should give their promising son the name of the most illustrious member of their tribe in sacred history, Israel's first king. Another 'undesigned coincidence' between Acts and the Pauline letters is that between his self-description as a 'Hebrew' in the letters and the statement in Acts 26. 14 that the heavenly voice on the Damascus road addressed him 'in the Hebrew speech'—which is probably to be understood as Aramaic—presumably because that was Paul's own mother-tongue rather than because it was the habitual speech of the historical Jesus.

Paul's devotion to the law of Israel was early shown by his eager emulation to outstrip his contemporaries—'being more exceedingly zealous for my ancestral traditions', he says (Gal. 1. 14). But he subsequently looked back on his persecution of the church as the high-water mark of his zeal: 'as far as zeal is concerned', he says, 'I was a persecutor of the church' (Phil. 3. 6); 'beyond all measure I persecuted the church of God and laid it waste' (Gal. 1. 13).

Why did his zeal find a congenial outlet in this attempt to stamp out the incipient Nazarene movement? It is possible that some light is cast on this question by his argument in Gal. 3. 10-14. The followers of Jesus proclaimed as the Messiah, the elect one of God, a man who had been crucified. This proclamation, by Paul's own testimony, was a stumbling-block, a *skandalon*, to Jews (1 Cor. 1. 23), and there is little doubt that to Paul himself it bad been a *skandalon* of the first magnitude. Practically by definition, the Messiah was one on whom the favour of God rested in unique degree. But on one who had been crucified, as Jesus had been, the curse of God specifically rested, in the words of Deut. 21. 23, 'a hanged man is accursed by God'. Whether Jesus had been justly or unjustly executed was a minor issue; the crucial issue was the manner of his execution, and a crucified Messiah was a contradiction in terms, a manifest absurdity. But it was worse than absurdity; it was blasphemy, constructive if not explicit; and those who made such an assertion deserved to suffer the extreme penalty which the sacred law decreed against blasphemers.[7] Did they support their assertion by claiming that they had seen the crucified one alive again after his death and burial? No matter: a claim of this kind could not outweigh the plain sentence of the law. Since the words of the law were incontrovertible, the Nazarenes' claim had to be dismissed as false; they were deceivers as well as blasphemers: false witnesses against God.

[4] Cf NEB: "'I am a true-born Jew," he said, "a native of Tarsus in Cilicia. I was brought up in this city, and as a pupil of Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in every point of our ancestral law...".'
[5] Rom. 11. 1; Phil. 3.
[6] Acts 7. 58 *et passim*.
[7] Lev. 24. 16.

If this was the line of Paul's reasoning, then he could not have been brought to acknowledge that Jesus was, after all, the Messiah by anything less than insuperable evidence that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead. When such insuperable evidence at last compelled him to abandon his former hostility to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, he was bound to reconcile his new faith in the crucified Jesus with the law's invocation of a curse upon one who suffered thus. The argument of Gal. 3. 13, where Jesus assumes the curse involved in 'hanging on a gibbet' in order to neutralise the curse which his people had incurred by breaking the divine law, is one which must have commended itself to Paul's mind sooner rather than later in his Christian life.

[p.7]

II

Nowhere is it suggested that during his career as persecutor of the church Paul entertained any misgivings about the rightness of his course. If his conversion was preceded by a period of 'subconscious incubation', it has left no trace to speak of in his letters. If the risen Lord told him on the Damascus road that he would find it painful 'to kick against the goads' (Acts 26. 14), the goads were not the previous prickings of an uneasy conscience but the combination of forces which now, by their 'sweet constraint', were impelling him in a direction contrary to that which he had hitherto pursued. Paul's statement before the high priest Ananias in Acts 23. 1, 'I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day', is corroborated by the consistent witness of his letters.[8] He knew what the law required, and fulfilled its requirements to the best of his knowledge. 'As to righteousness under the law' he was 'blameless' (Phil. 3. 6): this was his assessment of his pre-Christian achievement from the perspective of a Christian of between twenty and thirty years' standing. After his conversion, indeed, his persecuting activity was viewed by him as his sin of sins: 'I am the least of the apostles', he could say, 'unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God' (1 Cor. 15. 9). No matter whose choice of words may be discerned in the autobiographical paragraph in 1 Tim. 1. 12-17, its sentiments are those of Paul the Christian: 'Christ Jesus our Lord... appointed me to his service, though I formerly blasphemed and persecuted and insulted him; but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief'. What he says of the unbelieving Jews in Rom. 10. 2f had been equally true of himself: 'they have a zeal for God, but it is an unenlightened zeal; for in their ignorance of God's way of righteousness they seek to establish a righteousness of their own'. The ambition of Paul the Christian, on the other hand, was that he might 'gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ' (Phil. 3. 8f).

So long, however, as he endeavoured to establish his righteousness before God on the basis of the law, his conscience was clear and robust, even—or rather especially—in his persecuting activity. The words addressed to the disciples in the upper room in John 16. 2, 'the hour is coming when whoever kills[9] you will think he is offering service to God', might almost have been spoken with special reference to Paul.

[8] Cf Acts 24. 16 for his similar affirmation before Felix.

[9] That the application of this verb to Paul's activity is no exaggeration is indicated by Acts 22. 4 and especially 26. 10. If it be asked how capital punishment could be inflicted by the Jewish authorities under the Roman administration, the answer probably is that a special concession was granted to them in respect of the violation of the sanctity of the temple. It was on such a charge that Stephen was convicted and executed and his fellow-Christians who suffered in the ensuing persecution were probably implicated in the same charge.

Many of Paul's greatest interpreters—Augustine and Luther outstandingly—were characterised by what a modern exegete has called 'the introspective conscience of the west'[10] and have tended to project this conscience on to Paul. They found Paul speaking so truly to their condition that they felt that in his unconverted days he must have been a prey to inward agonies like theirs, and ascribed to him the penetrating self-analysis that has become part of the traditional piety of western Christianity. Paul's conscience, more probably, was as serene and untroubled up to his Damascus road experience as it was in his apostolic maturity.

But what is the bearing in this connection of the much debated passage in Rom. 7. 7-25? Let me observe, first, that the change of tense from past to present from verse 14 of this chapter onwards is more than a merely stylistic variation: in so far as this passage relates to Paul's own career, it relates to two different phases of his career, and only the section from verse 7 to verse 13 is relevant to our

[p.8]

present question. The section is autobiographical in form,[11] but it is Paul's *Christian interpretation* of his first awareness of the law of God and his responsibility to keep it. Moreover, Paul relates this autobiographical phase in terms of the record of Adam in Genesis 2 and 3 and in terms of the religious experience of mankind which he has already outlined in Rom. 5.12-21. As Adam lived a carefree life before the ban was imposed on eating of the tree of knowledge, as sin was not counted against mankind before the law was given, even although its presence in the world was all too certain, so Paul was 'alive' before the reality of the law came home to him. As the ban on the forbidden fruit was the instrument of Adam's fall, as the introduction of law into the human situation not only caused latent sin to take the concrete form of specific acts of law-breaking but multiplied those acts by stimulating the very things that it forbade, so, says Paul, when the commandment against covetousness was brought to my attention, it quickened into life the sin which had formerly lain dormant and 'the very commandment which promised life proved to be death to me' (Rom. 7. 10).

Paul would not have related the story of the fall of man in the first person singular had he not recognised in it an authentic description of his own story. 'Paul's autobiography is the biography of Everyman,' as T. W. Manson put it[12]—not only Everyman individually but also of the human race-but it is none the less Paul's autobiography, the autobiography of a man who knew himself beguiled into covetousness by Sin, which used as its weapon of assault upon his soul the very law which forbade covetousness.[13] But this is Paul's later, Christian interpretation of something that happened to him in early life: at the time he came to terms with the law and kept it without blame, with a clear conscience. 'The true meaning of sin,' says E. K. Lee, 'was not discovered at the feet of Gamaliel but at the foot of the Cross.'[14]

---

[10] Cf K. Stendahl, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West', *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963), pp. 199ff.

[11] Since W. G. Kümmel published his study Rdmer 7 and die Bekehrung des Paulus (Leipzig, 1929), the autobiographical interpretation, at least in its most popular form, has in the eyes of many theologians (especially in Germany) been 'relegated to the museum of exegetical absurdities' (P. Demann, 'Moïse et la loi dans la pensée de saint Paul', in *Moïse, l'homme de l'alliance* [Paris, 1954], p. 229, quoted in F. J. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans* [London, 1961], p. 181). Cf also R. Bultmann, 'Romans 7 and the Anthropology of Paul', Eng.Tr., in *Existence and Faith* (London, 1961), pp. 147ff.

[12] *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. H. H. Rowley and M. Black (London, ^{2}1962), p. 945.

[13] Cf C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London, 1932), p. 107, on Rom. 7. 24 ('O wretched man...!'): 'A man is not moved like that by an ideal construction'.

[14] *A Study in Romans* (London, 1962). p. 27.

What can be said, then, of Paul's inner life after the true meaning of sin was discovered at the foot of the cross? Not much, perhaps; except that he still made it his aim to preserve a clear conscience in God's sight. Yet his epistles from time to time contain hints of an inward struggle. The man who disciplined his body and subdued it, lest he might be disqualified himself after performing the herald's part for others (1 Cor. 9. 27), plainly had no undue confidence in himself. When he reminds the Galatians that 'the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would' (Gal. 5. 17), he is expressing an experience which was his own as well as theirs. Similarly, the poignant description in Rom. 7. 14-25 of someone who loves the law of God and longs to do it, but is forced by a stronger power than his own to do things which he detests, is (in Maurice Goguel's words) no 'abstract argument but the echo of the personal experience of an anguished soul'.[15] Goguel may well be right in assigning the experience so poignantly described here to the years immediately following Paul's conversion. We can readily believe that a man of his imperious zeal found it no easy matter to 'crucify the flesh'—to win the victory over a hasty tongue, a premature judgment, a resentment at any encroachment on the sphere of his apostolic service. Paul can entreat his friends 'by the meekness and gentleness of Christ' (2 Cor. 10. 1), but this meekness and gentleness were qualities which did not come to him naturally. The man who pressed on to the goal of God's upward call in Christ Jesus knew that 'that immortal garland' was to be run for 'not without dust

[p.9]

and heat'. He is too fond of portraying the way of holiness as a race to be run, a battle to be fought, for anyone to think that victory came to him 'sudden, in a minute'. But come it did, as he learned that his frustration persisted only so long as 'I myself'—'I in my own strength'—fight the battle. 'I,' as a man in Christ, he discovered, am not left to myself; the Spirit's law of life in Christ Jesus has taken up residence within me, and his presence and power make an almighty difference.[16]

The tension which Paul portrays and experiences in Rom. 7. 14-25 is the tension which is inevitably set up when one lives in two worlds, two aeons, simultaneously.[17] How can those who have not been completely extricated from 'this age', nevertheless live the life of the 'age to come'? By the aid of the Spirit, who not only makes effective in the believer the benefits of Christ's finished work, but at the same time enables him to enjoy in, advance the benefits of the age to come.

III

What precisely Paul's eschatological expectation had been before his conversion cannot be determined with certainty. Possibly he expected that the 'present age' would be separated from the 'age to come' by the 'days of the Messiah'. If so, this framework required to be modified after his conversion in a material particular, for since the Messiah had come in the person of Jesus, the days of the Messiah had already begun, having been inaugurated by his

[15] *The Birth of Christianity*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1953), pp. 213f.
[16] Cf C. L. Mitton, 'Romans VII reconsidered', *Expository Times* 65 (1953-54), pp. 78ff, 99ff, 132ff.
[17] Cf A. Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1952), pp. 292ff.

death and resurrection.[18] Jesus was now enthroned in glory, exercising his messianic rule until all his enemies were subdued at the final resurrection.

The period of Jesus' messianic reign both begins and ends with resurrection: it begins with Jesus' own resurrection as the firstfruits and ends with his people's resurrection as the harvest; but firstfruits and harvest are stages in one process. The resurrection of the people of Christ will introduce them into the full heritage of glory which lies in store for them in the age to come. This glory will be a sharing in Christ's own glory; and as his glory was the sequel to his sufferings, so their sharing in his glory will be the sequel to their sharing in his sufferings here and now: 'provided we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him' (Rom. 8. 17).

For the present, on earth, they live in hope, but this hope is a living hope because it rests in the living Christ, whose presence is made real to them by his indwelling Spirit. The Spirit keeps alive the hope of glory; he is the guarantee of resurrection, since he is the Spirit of life, 'the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead' (Rom. 8. 11); he aids their prayers; he co-operates in all things for good with those who love God;[19] he supplies power to live as befits the people of Christ, liberating them from the law of sin and death which dominates the children of 'this age'. Moreover, he unites them to Christ; 'in one Spirit' they have all been 'baptised into one body' (1 Cor. 12. 13), so that Christ's risen life is imparted to them. Each of them is thus 'in Christ', and each of them can say with Paul himself, 'it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me' (Gal. 2. 20).

IV

For Jesus, resurrection had already taken place and glory had already begun. For

[p.10]

his people, resurrection and glory lay in the future. Yet for his people there was a sense in which resurrection and glory were theirs already—theirs by faith-union with him who, having died, had been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. To them the life and glory of the age to come were made real here and now by the Spirit, himself the pledge and firstfruits of the coming glory.

Not only so, but they had the assurance here and now of a favourable verdict in the final judgment. Paul speaks of 'that day when... God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus' as an essential part of his gospel (Rom. 2. 16), and reminds his readers repeatedly that they must all appear, as he himself must appear, before the divine tribunal on the day of Christ to 'receive the things done in the body', whether good or evil.[20] Yet, as regards the fundamental question of acceptance or condemnation by God, no doubt remained for those who were 'in Christ Jesus'. They were already justified by faith in him, not as a reward for their keeping the law but as the gift of God's grace. What had been promised for the end-time by prophets and psalmists had come true through the passion and triumph of Christ: 'The Lord has made

[18] Cf A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1931), p. 186; L. Baeck, 'The Faith of Paul', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 (1952), pp. 93ff; H. J. Schoeps, *Paul*, Eng. Tr. (London, 1961), pp. 42, 168ff; W. D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 180ff, 446ff.
[19] Cf M. Black, 'The Interpretation of Romans viii. 28' in *Neotestamentica et Patristica* (Cullmann *Festschrift*), = *Suppl. Nov.T.* 6 (Leiden, 1962), pp. 166ff.
[20] 2 Cor. 5. 10; cf Rom. 14. 10-12.

known his victory; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations' (Ps. 98. 2).[21] The age of law had been superseded by the age of the Messiah: 'Christ is the end of the law, so that all who believe maybe justified' (Rom. 10. 4). (Hence the severity of Paul's anathema on anyone who would replace the gospel of free grace by a message of righteousness through law-keeping: such a message, implying that the age of law was still current, implied that the Messiah had not yet come, and thus denied that Jesus was the Messiah.[22]) Since Jews and Gentiles alike had come short of God's standard, neither could hope to be justified before him on the ground of personal or racial merit; but where human effort failed, heavenly grace triumphed, and freely put all believers 'in the clear' with God, 'through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus' (Rom. 3. 24).[23]

A man continuously seeking to win a favourable judgment from God by his own endeavours might hope, but could never have assurance, that he would succeed. But if God in sheer grace assures him of his acceptance at the beginning of the course instead of at its end, and that assurance is gladly and gratefully embraced, that man can go on to do God's will from the heart without always worrying whether he will make the grade or not. Indeed he knows that to the end of the chapter he will be an unprofitable servant, but he knows whom he has believed: the righteousness in which he glories is no achievement of his own, but that which is 'bestowed by God on the ground of faith' (Phil. 3. 9). And a man who has had dealings of this kind with God, who has humbled himself in the dust before God because of his moral bankruptcy and has then been raised to his feet by God and assured of God's acceptance for Christ's sake-that man can look the whole world in the face, as Paul himself did, and echo the challenge once issued by the Servant of Yahweh: 'Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies; who is to condemn?' (Rom. 8. 33f; cf Isa. 50. 7-9). Justification by faith was no doubt for Paul, as it was later for Luther, a 'fighting doctrine', but the Christian who knows the nature of the conflict in which he is engaged may well be glad to have such a doctrine with which to fight.[24]

[p.11]

V

Another aspect of Paul's eschatological outlook is bound up with his conception of his apostleship to the Gentiles.

That his commission to be the Gentiles' apostle coincided with his conversion is the natural conclusion to be drawn from his own account of his call. This is so particularly in Gal. l. 15: 'When God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his

[21] Cf E. Schweizer, *Jesus*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1971), pp. 97ff.

[22] Cf L. Baeck: 'If the "Days of the Messiah" have commenced, those of the Torah came to their close. On the other hand, if the Law, the Torah, still retained its validity, it was proclaimed thereby that the Messiah still had not appeared' ('The Faith of Paul', *Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 [1952], p. 106).

[23] It is in Paul's doctrine of justification by faith that E. Jüngel finds his closest point of contact with the message of Jesus (*Paulus und Jesus* [Tübingen, 1962], pp. 263ff).

[24] Cf E. Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1971), pp. 70f; while he recognises that it was a 'fighting doctrine' for Paul, he dissents vigorously from the view that its polemical occasion implies its merely subsidiary importance in Paul's general understanding of the gospel, put forth by W. Wrede, *Paul*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1907), pp. 122ff, and A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1931), pp. 220f.

Son in me, that I might proclaim his good news among the Gentiles, immediately,[25] without consulting any human being, I went off to Arabia, and then returned to Damascus'—Arabia and Damascus being Gentile territory.[26] That his visit to Arabia (i.e. the Nabataean kingdom, which reached north from the Gulf of Aqaba to the very walls of Damascus, if indeed it did not for a time include the city itself) was not undertaken purely for a spell of quiet reflection may be inferred from the hostile interest taken in him by the Nabataean king Aretas IV-or at least by his representative in Damascus.[27] 'In Damascus,' says Paul, 'the ethnarch of King Aretas was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me, but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall, and thus escaped him' (2 Cor. 11. 32f). If, on the other hand, Paul had engaged in apostolic activity among the Nabataeans, that might explain his attracting the unfriendly attention of the authorities of that kingdom.

Elsewhere (for example, in 1 Cor. 9. 1) he links his apostleship closely with his having 'seen Jesus our Lord'. He runs the straight race in order to grasp the purpose for which he himself was once 'grasped' by Christ (Phil. 3. 12-14). He had no option in the matter of preaching the gospel. In some things he could exercise his freedom of choice, but not in this: 'Compulsion is laid upon me; it will be the worse for me if I do not preach the gospel' (1 Cor. 9. 16).

It might be asked how the evidence of Paul's letters, pointing to the earliest possible moment for his call as apostle to the Gentiles, is to be related to the evidence of Acts. According to Paul's speech to the crowd in the temple court in Acts 22. 1-21, his visit to Jerusalem after his conversion was marked by a vision in the temple, in which the risen Christ told him to think no more of preach ing to the Jews of Jerusalem but to go 'far hence to the Gentiles'. This command must be viewed as a reiteration of the commission which, even in Acts itself, is elsewhere associated with the Damascus road experience (Acts 9. 15; 26. 17f).

After his fortnight's stay in Jerusalem in the third year after his conversion (Gal. 1. 18f) he returned to his native province of Syria-Cilicia, and from there (more precisely from Antioch, according to Acts 11. 30) he paid his second post-conversion visit to Jerusalem (Gal. 2. 1-10). By this time, he says, it was plain to the Jerusalem leaders that he had been entrusted with 'the gospel to the uncircumcised' as Peter had been entrusted with 'the gospel to the circumcised'-the difference lay in the two constituencies, not in the substance of the message (1 Cor. 15. 11)—'for', he adds, 'he who had worked in Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised had worked in me also for the Gentiles'. It could be that this refers to the year or so that he had spent in Antioch as Barnabas's colleague (Acts 11. 26), but the natural conclusion to be drawn from his language in Galatians is that it refers to the whole period of at least eleven years that he had spent 'in the regions of Syria and Cilicia' (Gal. 1. 21).

The terms in which he speaks of his call and commission are reminiscent of

[p.12]

[25] Jerome argued that 'immediately' should be construed with the preceding words: 'that I should proclaim him among the Gentiles immediately' (*Comm. in Gal*., *ad loc*., Migne, *Patrologia Latina* xxvi 352 A). Cf also E. Barnikol, *Die vorchristliche and frühchristliche Zeit des Paulus* (Kiel, 1929), pp. 26ff.

[26] I do not stay to discuss the possibility that his time in Arabia included a visit to Qumran; cf R. E. Osborne, 'Did Paul go to Qumran?' *Canadian Journal of Theology* 10 (1964), pp. 15ff.

[27] That Damascus was for a time part of the Nabataean kingdom has been inferred from the absence of Roman money from its coin record between A.D. 34 and 62, but it is a precarious inference; cf E. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus* Christ, Eng.Tr. (Edinburgh, 1886-90), II. i, p. 98.

Old Testament records of the call of one and another to the prophetic office.[28] Jeremiah, for example, was called by God in these words (Jer. 1. 5): 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet *to the nations* (εἰς τὰ ἔθνη).' More impressive still is the parallel in the second Servant Song, where the Servant of Yahweh summons the coastlands and the distant peoples to hear him as he proclaims:

> Yahweh called me from the womb,
> from the body of my mother he named my name...
> And now says Yahweh,
> who formed me from the womb to be his servant...
> 'It is too light a thing that you should be my servant
> to raise up the tribes of Jacob
> and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations
> that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.'

It is no accident that in Acts 13. 47 Paul and Barnabas at Pisidian Antioch quote these last words as their authority for turning to the Gentiles with the gospel.

Let others undertake that part of the Servant's task which concerns itself with Israel; Paul would fulfil that part of it which involved carrying the light of God's salvation among the Gentiles to the end of the earth.

It was a high calling; Paul might well 'magnify his office' as he contemplated it. How effectively he carried it out may be appreciated if we consider two facts of history: (i) Christianity, although it originated within the community of Israel, has been since the latter part of the first century A,D. a predominantly Gentile faith; (ii) Christianity, although it took birth in Asia, has come to be regarded (not nowadays to its advantage) as a predominantly European religion. It is thanks in the first instance to Paul's activity that Christianity was planted so firmly on Gentile soil, especially in the Aegean world, that in due course it became a dominant element in the cultural legacy of the Roman Empire, in east and west alike.

Latecomer though he was to the faith in comparison with those who were in Christ before him, he made up for lost time and 'worked harder than any of them'—to quote his own claim which he immediately qualifies: 'though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me' (1 Cor. 15. 10). With or without qualification, his claim was justified. At the beginning Of A.D. 47, there were no Christian churches in the provinces of Galatia and Asia east of the Aegean, or in those of Macedonia and Achaia west of the Aegean. At the beginning of A.D. 57, so thoroughly had Paul preached the gospel, so well had he founded churches along the main roads and in the chief cities of those provinces that he could speak of his apostolic task there as completed;[29] now he looked west to Spain as virgin soil for the planting of the gospel seed which had already taken root and began to produce fruit in his eastern missionfield.

Quite evidently he had no thought of resting on his laurels: no time could be lost if he was to fulfil his commission as he ought and preach the gospel 'that all the Gentiles might hear it'.[30]

---

[28] Cf J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1959), pp. 25ff.
[29] Cf R. Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (London, 21927), pp. 3ff.
[30] 2 Tim. 4. 17. The hearing of Paul's appeal before the supreme court in Rome would provide an unparalleled opportunity for witness, and it is probably with this in view that he so earnestly bespeaks his readers' prayers in Col. 4. 3f (cf Eph. 6. 19f).

Johannes Munck's emphasis on the representative character of Paul's universalism is well known and well founded, as is also his emphasis on Paul's estimate of the eschatological significance of his apostleship.[31] It was not simply that by diligent prosecution of his apostolic ministry to the

[p.13]

Gentiles Paul saw himself speeding the day of Christ; there was another consideration that lay close to his heart-the conversion of his own people.

He himself had not been called to evangelise Jews, but indirectly he hoped and believed that his ministry to Gentiles would promote the salvation of Israel. Indeed, he says plainly that a prime reason for his magnifying his office was that he hoped that the Gentiles' enjoyment of the blessings of the gospel would make his fellow-Israelites envious. So far as the presentation of the gospel was concerned, the order was 'to the Jew first and also to the Greek'; so far as the acceptance of the gospel was concerned, the order was 'by the Gentile first and also by the Jew'—by the Jew through the kindling of a desire to have a proper share in those blessings which were the heritage of Abraham's children. From Paul's perspective, the large-scale turning of Israel to Christ would apparently be the consummating stage in the divine programme for human history. When the sum-total of Gentile believers had been gathered into the fellowship of God's people, this would be the means by which all Israel would enter into salvation, its temporary blindness removed.[32]

Paul's own work, then, both in its direct effect upon Gentiles and in its indirect implication for Jews, was, as he saw it, an instrument in God's hands for the accomplishment of his final purpose in Christ. The parousia could not come until Paul's task was finished.[33]

VI

We need not feel ourselves bound to sum up the essence of Paul's teaching in one word. But if we were pressed to do so, perhaps 'redemption' might be as apposite a word as any-more apposite, even, than Anderson Scott's 'salvation'.[34] But it would be necessary to insist that in 'redemption' thus used 'reconciliation' must occupy an important place.

---

[31] Munck, *op. cit*., pp. 47ff, 300f.

[32] Cf F. F. Bruce, 'Paul and Jerusalem', *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968), pp. 3ff, especially pp. 22ff.

[33] This does not imply that Paul and his apostolic ministry should be seen in the words about 'the restrainer' in 2 Thess. 2. 6f, as has been suggested by O. Cullmann ('Le caractère eschatologique du devoir missionnaire et de la conscience apostolique de S. Paul', *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses* 16 [1936], pp. 210ff) and J. Munck (*op. cit*., pp. 36ff). There is no obvious reason why a reference to himself or his ministry should be so cryptic; there is every reason why a reference to the removal of the restraint exercised by the imperial order should be as cryptic as possible. In Paul's eyes, imperial order and civil law in general played their proper part in the divine administration of the world. So long as civil rulers acted within the confines of their allotted authority, they were God's servants, and it was therefore a Christian duty to obey them. One day their functions will end; one day 'the saints will judge the world' (1 Cor. 6. 2, drawing upon Dan. 7. 22 and Ps. 149. 9); but meanwhile 'the powers that be' rule by divine ordination (Rom. 13. 1ff). It is most improbable that these 'powers that be' are, or include, the supernatural world-rulers (cf O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, Eng.Tr. [London, 1951], pp. 191ff; *The State in the New Testament*, Eng.Tr. [London, 1955], pp. 95ff); Paul never enjoins Christians to be subject to them.

[34] C. A. A. Scott, *Christianity according to St. Paul* (Cambridge, 1927), pp. 16ff; cf A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting Paul's Gospel* (London, 1954), pp. 21ff.

What requires to be redeemed is the whole creation. At present it is estranged from God, subjected to frustration and futility, dominated by malignant forces. But God's purpose is to bring all creation effectively under the beneficent rule of Christ; only so can it be liberated from the bondage of decay and enabled to fulfil its Creator's design. The agent in its redemption is Christ himself; the means of the redemption is his death on the cross, by which he mastered the hostile principalities and powers.

When he appeared on earth, those principalities and powers sensed that his advent portended their doom and tried to thwart the divine plan by bringing about his death on the cross. But in fact, so limited was their wisdom and power, their doing so provided the very means by which the divine plan was accomplished and their own doom sealed. Had those 'world-rulers' understood anything of the heavenly wisdom by which God decreed his people's glory before all ages, 'they would not have crucified the Lord of glory' (1 Cor. 2. 8). But when they assaulted him they found the tables turned on themselves: in his death he conquered them and stripped them of their power, and liberates from their tyranny all who by faith are united to him. Sharing in his risen life, his people share his victory over all hostile forces.[35]

There are various ways in which these forces bind their fetters on the souls of men-and one of them (paradoxically as it may appear) is the law, more par-

[p.14]

ticularly the broken law, which they use as a blackmailing weapon over the heads of lawbreakers to compel them to do their bidding. How far in this role the principalities and powers are consciously identified by Paul with the angels by whose administration the law was promulgated, or even with the lords of the planetary spheres which regulated the calendar with its sequence of sacred 'days and months and seasons and years' (Gal. 4. 8), need not be discussed here.[36] But it must be noted that it is Paul's paradoxical account of the law as an instrument of spiritual bondage, and indeed a means of stimulating sin, that makes it so difficult for even the most sympathetic Jewish students of his writings to appreciate him,[37] and constitutes such a stumbling-block also to many who profess and call themselves Christians—or would do so, if it were not tacitly robbed of its plain meaning and assimilated to the very view of the law which Paul had found to be invalid and against which he polemicised so uncompromisingly when it raised its head among his churches.

Even if the principalities and powers of which Paul spoke still exert control over the lives of those who have not found the way of release, they no longer have any independent existence outside of the minds of those who believe in them and render them bondservice. Thanks to the cross of Christ, they have lost whatever authority they once wielded over those who share the victory won there; for them they have been deposed, exploded, demythologised, reduced to the status of 'weak and beggarly elemental spirits' (Gal. 4. 7). The decisive victory of the cross, Paul affirms, is followed by the inevitable putting down of all these hostile forces, one

[35] Cf Col. 2. 15ff.
[36] Cf F. F. Bruce, 'Galatian Problems: 3. The "Other" Gospel', *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 53 (1970-71), pp. 253ff, especially pp. 266ff.
[37] Cf M. Buber, *Two Types of Faith*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1951), pp. 51ff, and H. J. Schoeps, *Paul*, Eng.Tr. (London, 1961), pp. 213ff, with comments on this situation by G. Bornkamm, *Paul*, Eng.Tr. (New York, 1971), p. 128.

after another, until death, the last of all, is abolished.[38] With the abolition of death, Christ's messianic sovereignty attains its consummation, and he 'delivers the kingdom to God the Father' (1 Cor. 15. 24).

This consummation is marked by the extension of divine blessing throughout the universe on an unprecedented scale. For God's reconciling work in his people during the present age is presented as a pilot scheme for the realisation of his saving purpose. If Israel's present disobedience to the gospel, Paul argues, means the large-scale salvation of Gentiles, their eventual obedience to the gospel will usher in an age of much greater blessing—'life from the dead', a regenerated race (Rom. 11. 12ff). If the sin and selfishness of man has involved the rest of creation in ruin-an idea not unfamiliar to us today with our belated awakening to the peril of a polluted environment-the emancipating day for which it eagerly waits will give it its proper share in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God' (Rom. 8. 19-21).

As for the human race, its old solidarity 'in Adam'-a solidarity of sin and death-has been broken up by the passion and triumph of the last Adam, to give way to a new solidarity 'in Christ'—a solidarity of justification and life. While Christ reigns in glory and his Spirit is active on earth, the old solidarity is progressively diminished and the new is progressively enlarged until it wholly displaces the old and, in accordance with God's eternal purpose, the universe is united in Christ (Eph. 1. 9f). So, in that 'quintessence of Paulinism' which we call the Epistle to the Ephesians, the community of Christ is not only God's masterpiece of reconciliation in the present age but is also his means for the bringing into being of that cosmic fellowship of reconciliation which he has decreed to establish in 'the fulness of time', and for the inauguration of that new and eternal order when God will be 'all in all'. Paul's gospel is no restrictive one, but his vision of

[p.15]

the final consummation is kept in touch with present reality by his consciousness that the unfolding of God's plan for the universe is bound up with his own commission 'to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ' (Eph. 3. 8ff).

© 1971 *London School of Theology* (http://www.lst.ac.uk/). Reproduced by permission.

Prepared for the Web in March 2007 by Robert I. Bradshaw

http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/

[38] Whereas in 1 Cor. 15. 26 death is yet to be abolished, in 2 Tim. 1. 10 Christ is said to have abolished it already (the same verb καταργέω is used in both places), because the death and resurrection of Christ constitute the decisive battle in the warfare which ends with the resurrection of his people. It is interesting that an undisputed Pauline letter should use the future tense while an *antilegomenon* uses the language of realised eschatology.