

# ROMANS AND THE THEOLOGY OF PAUL

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N.T. Wright  
Lichfield Cathedral

## I. ON READING ROMANS THEOLOGICALLY

A JEWISH THEOLOGY for the Gentile world, and a welcome for Gentiles designed to take the Jewish world jealous. That, I suggest, is what Paul offered his Roman readers, and I suspect it puzzled them as much as it puzzles us, though perhaps in different ways. This paper addresses these puzzles by means of a theological reading of the letter; that is, a reading of the letter drawing out its main theological line of thought, and a summary of the theology that thus emerges, showing how, and perhaps why, it was deployed in this fashion. This, I take it, is my assigned topic; I have not forgotten rhetorical analysis, narrative criticism, historical setting, and so on, but I cannot give them full measure here.

Since this essay is part of an extended conversation, I shall use most of my space for exposition, not for annotation, which could of course proliferate *ad infinitum*. History of research is important in this subject, but must here be assumed, not elaborated.<sup>1</sup> Suffice it to say that different ways of reading Romans usually reflect different understandings of Paul's whole theology and his place within a history-of-religions scheme, and the ways in which those two interact. The weight of the letter is deemed to fall where the interpreter's theology finds its *locus classicus*: for Albert Schweitzer, this was chaps. 5-8; for F. C. Baur, chaps. 9-11; for various Lutherans, chaps. 1-4; for Minear and others, chaps. 12-16. Sometimes a fresh reading of Romans has itself generated a new "way of reading Paul as a whole; or, at least, the reading of Romans has played a vital role, interacting of course with other factors, in producing a totally new understanding. Ernst Käsemann, I think, provides an example of this. Ultimately, the best argument for any exegesis ought to be the overall and detailed sense it makes of the letter, the coherence it achieves. Solutions that leave the letter in bits all over the exegetical floor do not have the same compelling force, as hypotheses, as does a solution that offers a clear line of thought all through, without squashing or stifling the unique and distinctive contribution of the various parts.

But what do we mean by *theology* itself, in this context? Our many previous discussions have set a context in which I have developed the following broad scheme.<sup>2</sup> All societies, and subgroups within societies, have what may loosely be called a worldview, a set of assumptions about the way things are, which can be studied in terms of its four constituent elements: symbols, praxis, stories, and assumed questions and answers (the latter may be itemized: Who are we? Where are we? What's wrong? What's the solution?). These form the grid through which reality is perceived and experienced; they themselves, like the foundations of a house, normally remain unexamined and indeed unnoticed. They generate ways of being in the world that emerge into the public gaze: on the one hand, *aims and intentions*; on the other hand, closely related to the first, sets of *basic and consequent beliefs*. These can be, and often are, discussed. Serious

debate usually takes place at this level, not at the level of worldview, since then there would be no fixed point on which debaters could agree to stand. “Theology,” as a topic to be studied or an activity to be engaged in, normally operates at this level of explicit discourse about basic and consequent beliefs. It concerns beliefs relating to a god, or gods, and the world. It is organically and dynamically related to the worldview. This is where so many of our problems of method have arisen. Explicit “theology” is out in the open, but if studied piecemeal it remains unintegrated. Some like it like that, preferring atomistic exegesis to question-begging a priori theological schemes. I can see why I take it, nevertheless, that the present exercise must involve the tricky attempt to make inferences about Paul’s worldview, and about the large-scale belief system he held; in other words, not simply to study Romans as a rag-bag of loci or topoi within Paul’s hypothetical *Compendia* or *Summa*, but to show how the letter belongs within, and indeed acts as a window upon, Paul’s symbolic world, his nonreflective praxis, his assumed narrative framework, and his fundamental answers to the key questions. In what follows I shall regularly distinguish between the actual argument of the letter, which has its own rhetorical force, and the wider worldview and belief system on which Paul draws. I shall refer to these two hypothetical entities, in Norman Petersen’s terms, as the “poetic sequence” and the “narrative sequence” respectively.<sup>3</sup>

As an example of this abstract model, and as the necessary historical and theological background to Paul and Romans, we may take a broad description of Second Temple Judaism. I have elsewhere argued in detail both for the propriety of this exercise (alongside more atomistic treatments) and for the detail of the following rough sketch.<sup>4</sup>

The symbolic world of Judaism focused on temple, Torah, land, and racial identity. The assumed praxis brought these symbols to life in festivals and fasts, cult and sacrifice, domestic taboos and customs. The narrative framework which sustained symbol and praxis, and which can be seen in virtually all the writings we possess from the Second Temple period, had to do with the history of Israel; more specifically, with its state of continuing “exile” (though it had returned from Babylon, it remained under Gentile lordship, and the great promises of Isaiah and others remained unfulfilled) and the way(s) in which its god would intervene to deliver it as had happened in one of its foundation stories, that of the exodus.<sup>5</sup> Its fundamental answers to the worldview questions might have been: We are Israel, the true people of the creator god; we are in our land (and/or dispersed away from our land); our god has not yet fully restored us as one day he will; we therefore look for restoration, which will include the justice of our god being exercised over the pagan nations.

This worldview, which (I stress) concentrates on that which was assumed by a majority of Jews in the period, and which of course could be modified within different branches, generated a wide variety of aims and intentions on the one hand, and on the other a more or less settled-core of theology. Many Jews aimed to keep their heads down and remain faithful to their god as best they could, in some cases by intensification of Torah. Others aimed to hasten the coming of restoration by political, and sometimes by military, action. As for theology, belief in the one true god remained basic (the creator god, hence the god of the whole world), as did belief in Israel’s election by this one god

(who can therefore be given a capital letter, “God”; the fact that scholarship uses this form unthinkingly has not been healthy for discussion of ancient theology). The *purpose* of this election is not so often noticed, but is, I suggest, vital. Israel’s controlling stories sometimes ended simply with its own vindication, but more often than not they included the idea that its god, in vindicating it, would *thereby* act in relation to the whole world, whether in blessing or in judgment or both (e.g., Tobit 13-14). Israel’s vocation had to do, in other words, with the creator’s plan for the whole creation. God called Abraham to deal with the problem of Adam. This theme, marginalized in many contemporary discussions and some ancient ones, is central to (e.g.) Isaiah 40-55, and is visible also in the final redaction of the Pentateuch. Both, clearly, are passages on which Paul drew heavily.

Both, in particular, focus attention on the *righteousness of god*. Here I think the main thrust of Käsemann’s point is established, that in Jewish literature the phrase refers to the creator god’s own righteousness, not “a righteousness which comes from/avails with god.” But Käsemann’s subsidiary point (that the phrase formed a technical *and noncovenantal* term within Second Temple Judaism) is misleading. This divine righteousness always was, and remained throughout the relevant Jewish literature, the *covenant faithfulness* of god. The fact that, as Käsemann observed, this “righteousness” includes the idea of the justice of the creator being put into effect vis-a-vis the whole cosmos does not mean that the covenantal idea has been left behind. It should remind us that the covenantal idea itself always included in principle the belief that when the creator/covenant god acted on behalf of Israel, this would have a direct relation to the fate of the whole world, to the rooting out of evil and injustice from the whole creation.

Paul’s Christian theological reflection begins, I suggest, from within exactly this matrix of thought, with the realization that *what the creator/covenant god was supposed to do for Israel at the end of history, this god had done for Jesus in the middle of history*. Jesus as an individual, instead of Israel as a whole, had been vindicated, raised from the dead, after suffering at the hands of the pagans; and this had happened in the middle of ongoing “exilic” history, not at its end. This by itself would have been enough, I think, to propel a Jewish thinker to the conclusion that Jesus had somehow borne Israel’s destiny by himself, was somehow its representative. When we add to this the early Christian belief in Jesus’ messiahship, and Paul’s own exposition of this theme, there is every reason to suppose that Paul made exactly this connection, and indeed made it central to his whole theology. The creator/covenant god has brought his covenant purpose for Israel to fruition *in Israel’s representative, the Messiah, Jesus*.<sup>6</sup> The task I see before us now is to show how the actual argument of Romans, the “poetic sequence” of the letter, relates to this underlying “narrative sequence,” that is, the theological story of the creator’s dealings with Israel and the world, now retold so as to focus on Christ and the Spirit.

## II. THE POETIC SEQUENCE OF ROMANS: INTRODUCTION

Resisting (of course) the temptation to treat Romans as Paul’s systematic theology, it is vital that we consider the question of what Paul was actually arguing for.

After going round and round this question for two decades, I find myself in the following position, each element of which is of course controversial but which, I think, makes sense in itself and in its exegetical outworkings.<sup>7</sup> The Roman church, initially consisting most likely of converted Jews and proselytes within the capital, had been heavily affected by Claudius's banishment of Jews in 49. Many of the Christians who were left would undoubtedly have been erstwhile godfearers or proselytes. Unlike the Galatian church, these Gentile Christians were not eager to keep the Jewish law, but would be inclined, not least from social pressures within pagan Rome, to distance themselves from it, and to use the opportunity of Claudius's decree to articulate their identity in non-Jewish terms. When the Jews returned to Rome in 54 upon Claudius's death, we may properly assume that the (Gentile) church leadership would not exactly be delirious with excitement. Even though, as we must stress, not all Jewish Christians were ardent Torah observers, and even though the church was most likely scattered in different small groups around the large city, internal tensions, reflecting at least in part a Jew-Gentile split, were inevitable.

But such internal tensions alone do not explain the letter that Paul actually wrote, any more than it is explained when treated as an abstract book of systematics. All the inventive mirror reading in the world has not yet produced a convincing account of Romans in terms purely of the internal problems of the church, except of course for chaps. 14-15. I suggest that the far more plausible setting for the bulk of the letter, and its theological thrust, is the tension that Paul can see as at least a possibility in relation to his *missionary strategy*. He intended to use Rome as his base of operations in the western Mediterranean, as he had used Antioch for the eastern Mediterranean. Antioch had, certainly on one occasion and possibly thereafter, virtually stabbed him in the back, undermining the theological foundation of his mission by insisting on the continuing separation of Jews and Gentiles within the Christian fellowship. The so-called Antioch incident of Galatians 2 reflects Paul's opposition to any sense that Jewish Christians are superior to Gentile Christians.

What Paul faced as a serious possibility in Rome was the mirror image of the problem he had met in Antioch. In making Rome his new base, there was always the danger, as the rise and popularity of Marcion in the next century was later to show, that local anti-Jewish sentiment would lead Gentile Christians not only to isolate Jews within the Christian fellowship but also to marginalize a mission that included Jews. Paul, therefore, wanted to insist that the gospel was "for the Jew first and also, equally, for the Greek."<sup>8</sup> How to do this without (a) reinstating exactly that Jewish superiority which he had resisted in Galatians, and (b) giving any opportunity for proto-Marcionism: that, I suggest, was the problem that called forth the letter we now have and explains the outline and the detail of its argument. The strategy that Paul adopted was that of expounding his own fresh understanding of the terms of the covenant, the original divine answer to the problem of Adam. What did the promises to Abraham and his family actually say and mean? How were they intended to work out in practice? The technical term for this whole theme is, of course, that which he announces programmatically in 1:17: in the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, is revealed the *covenant faithfulness of god*, the *δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ*. What Paul needed, in order to address the problem of his new home church failing to understand his missionary strategy, was a large-scale map of the righteousness of god, on

which he could locate the Romans' particular situation, and in the light of which he could address other issues, not least those tensions within the church itself which were, so to speak, the internal reflection of the tensions Paul saw within the church's external attitude.

The poetic sequence of Romans, therefore, consists of a major argument, as is now regularly recognized, running not just as far as chap. 8 but all the way to chap. 11. A good deal of this argument, like a good deal of this paper thus far, is a matter of setting up the terms of the discussion so that they can then be used quite directly when the real issue is confronted head on. Once the great argument is complete, Paul can turn to other matters in chaps. 12-16. These are not to be marginalized: 15:7-13, for instance, has a good claim to be considered the real summing-up of the entire letter, not merely of 14:1—15:6. But the division between chaps. 1-11 and 12-16 is clear enough to allow us to treat the two sections separately for our present purposes.

### III. ROMANS 1-4

The sequence of thought in chaps. 1-11 follows a line that is thoroughly comprehensible within a Jewish covenantal scheme of thought, granted that the latter has been rethought in the light of the belief that its future hope has already in principle come true in the Messiah, Jesus, and is now being implemented by the Spirit.

The full force of the introduction (1:1-17) can best be seen when all else is clear, and will therefore be left until near the end. This introduction, though reaching a climax in 1:16—17, merges in fact directly into the first main section (note the repeated γάρ ["for"] in 1:16-18, continuing, with the occasional διότι ["since"] to v. 21). Paul's reason for coming to Rome, which grows out of his self-introduction (1:1-5) in terms of the divine plan, is that he is in the service of the divine covenant faithfulness; but, since the divine covenant with Israel always envisaged, and indeed was the intended solution to, the dark backdrop of human sin, Paul's own exposition of it must restate (and in doing so reshape) the problem that the covenant itself addresses. The standard Jewish critique of paganism (idolatry and immorality) is repeated, intensified, and turned back on to Israel itself (1:18-2:16; 2:17-29). This was pretty much standard practice in Jewish sectarianism, as is clear from the Dead Sea Scrolls. At this point Paul's worldview question, What's wrong? seems to require the answer: Not only are pagans idolatrous and immoral, but the people who were supposed to put the world to rights have themselves gone astray. In 2:17-24 Paul is not trying to prove that every individual Jew is immoral etc., but simply that, in view of the existence of some immorality within Israel, the *national* or racial boast cannot be sustained. Nor does Paul deny that Israel is called to be a light to those in darkness, and so forth; only that the present parlous state of Israel means that it is incapable of fulfilling that role.

In Israel's regular tellings of the world's story, such an expose of paganism (and renegade Judaism) would of course be followed, logically and perhaps textually (i.e., in both the narrative sequence and the poetic sequence), by an account of the true people of the covenant god in and through whom the evil of the rest of the world would be undone.

For Paul, whose critique of Israel is more biting still than that of the Essenes, a second-order problem has been raised. If the covenant was put in place to deal with evil in the world (this is the presupposition Paul shares with his imaginary opponent in 2:17-24), then the failure of the covenant people to be the light of the world means that the covenant itself seems to be under threat. This explains the questions of 3:1-8, which thus anticipate directly those of 9:6, 14, 17, and 11:1, 11. Israel was *entrusted* with the oracles of the creator god (3:2); that is, it was to be the messenger through whom the creator's saving purpose would be carried to the whole world. What is the covenant god to do about the failure of his covenant people (3:2) to be faithful, on their part, to this covenant? Somehow, this god must be faithful nonetheless; and, unless the covenant itself is to be dissolved (which would evoke a strong  $\mu\grave{\eta}$   $\gamma\acute{\epsilon}\nu\omicron\iota\tau\omicron$  ["may it never happen"] from Paul) this means, logically, that there must somehow, after all, be an Israel that is faithful to the covenant, so that through this Israel the creator/covenant god can deal with the evil of the world, and with its consequences (i.e., wrath, as in 1:18ff). What is provided in 3:21-31 is just such a solution. "The works of Torah," that is, those practices which mark Israel out from among the nations, cannot be the means of demarcating the true covenant people; they merely point up the fact of sin (3:20, looking back to 2:17-24 and on to 5:20 and 7:7-25). Instead, the covenant faithfulness of the creator of the world is revealed *through the faithfulness of Jesus*, the Messiah, for the benefit of all, Jew and Gentile alike, who believe.<sup>9</sup>

Rom 3:21-31 then expounds this revelation of the divine covenant faithfulness. The central emphasis of this passage, I suggest, lies not on the human faith/faithfulness, which, in place of works-of-Torah, becomes the badge of covenant membership, but on the faithfulness of the Messiah, Jesus, as the means through which the covenant faithfulness of the creator is enacted.

The means of expounding this double theme is thoroughly Jewish. The supreme moment when the covenant god acted to deliver his people, because of the covenant promises, was the exodus. Paul alludes directly to this by saying that people are justified (that is, are reckoned to be within the people of god) "through the *redemption* that is in Christ Jesus." "Redemption," of course, evokes the slave-market metaphor, but this lies at the surface of the word's meaning. More fundamental by far, for a Jew, was the historical slave market of Egypt, from which Israel's god had liberated it. Now, Paul declares, there has been a new exodus, in which the same god has revealed the full depth of covenant faithfulness. The covenant was put into place to deal with evil, and that has been accomplished in Christ the  $\acute{\iota}\lambda\alpha\sigma\tau\acute{\eta}\rho\iota\omicron\nu$  ("propitiation"). Just as regular Jewish discussions of the divine righteousness included the theme of the divine forbearance, so Paul's exposition here envisages the covenant god as waiting patiently, not punishing sin as it deserved (cf. 2:1-6). Alongside the fundamental covenantal meaning of the whole  $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\omicron\sigma\upsilon\nu\eta$   $\theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  complex, there is, of course, the second-order lawcourt metaphor, derived not least from the Hebrew Scriptures' image of the righteous judge: the judge must decide the case according to the law, must be impartial, must punish sin, and must vindicate the helpless. Rom 1:18-3:8 made it look as though the creator was faced with an impossible task: these various requirements are apparently mutually exclusive. Rom 3:24-26 claims that in Christ the apparently impossible has been achieved.

Two important results, one exegetical and one theological, follow from this. First, although I think it quite possible that in this passage Paul is drawing on earlier traditions, the main reason why that suggestion has been made in modern scholarship is to be ruled out. If there was a pre-Pauline Jewish-Christian topos about the covenant coming true in Christ, Paul is not opposing it. He is affirming it. The compressed nature of the passage owes more, I suggest, to the fact that Paul has imposed a self-denying ordinance at this point. The main thrust of the letter is not, in this sense, an exposition of the meaning of Jesus' death, of what we would call atonement theology. Paul is content to refer briefly to the achievement of the cross, and pass on.

Second, the divine "righteousness" (covenant faithfulness) is emphatically not the same as the "righteousness" that humans have when they are declared to be covenant members. That idea, despite its often invoking the "forensic" setting of the language, fails to understand what that forensic setting means. In the Hebrew lawcourt the judge does not give, bestow, impute, or impart *his own* "righteousness" to the defendant. That would imply that the *defendant* was deemed to have conducted the case impartially, in accordance with the law, to have punished sin and upheld the defenseless innocent ones. "Justification," of course, means nothing like that. "Righteousness" is not a quality or substance that can thus be passed or transferred from the judge to the defendant. The righteousness of the judge is the judge's own character, status, and activity, demonstrated in doing these various things. The "righteousness" of the defendants is the status they possess when the court has found in their favor. Nothing more, nothing less. When we translate these forensic categories back into their theological context, that of the covenant, the point remains fundamental: the divine covenant faithfulness is not the same as human covenant membership. The fact that the same word (δικαιοσύνη) is used for both ideas indicates their close reciprocal relationship, not their identity.<sup>10</sup>

The paragraph concludes (3:27—31) with a similarly brief account of the immediate result of the divine covenant faithfulness being revealed in this way. Specifically, it rules out a revelation according to the model expected within Judaism, that is, national vindication. The ethnic "boasting," of which Paul had spoken in 2:17-24, is eliminated, in a fashion that leaves two main pillars of Judaism undamaged. Monotheism and Torah, Paul claims, are enhanced, not undermined, in this paradoxical fulfillment of the divine righteousness. Rom 3:30 shows that the *Shema*, the basic Deuteronomic confession of faith which serves as a summary of Torah, is emphatically upheld when the one true god declares Jew and Gentile alike to be within his covenant family on the same terms.

Seen from this perspective, the place of Romans 4 in the argument is natural and completely coherent. It is not an "Old Testament proof" of "justification by faith," a mere proof-texting exercise resulting from Paul's ransacking of his mental concordance to produce occurrences of the roots δικαιοσύνη and πίστις ("faith") side by side. Within the poetic sequence of the letter, Paul moves on from the specific claims of 3:21—31 to the wider claim: all this has taken place precisely *in fulfillment of the covenant*. Genesis 15 was the chapter in which the creator god entered into covenant with Abram and

promised him not only a large family but also that this family would be delivered in the exodus (Gen 15:13f.). If Paul's claim is to be made good, that in Jesus Christ the covenant has been fulfilled, it is vital that he should return to the fundamental covenantal passage and argue in detail for a meaning to the promises that has now come true in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In this case the focus is clear: Abraham is indeed the "father" of the covenant people of the creator god, but he is not the father "according to the flesh." He is the father of all, Gentile and Jew alike, who believe in the god who raised Jesus.

I therefore follow Richard Hays in reading 4:1: "What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather according to the flesh?" (Implied answer: No.)<sup>11</sup> But I diverge from his reading in terms of what this question *means*. Hays suggests that the "we" refers to Jews: "Do you think that we Jews have considered Abraham our forefather only according to the flesh?" I suggest, rather, that the whole of Romans 4 hinges on the question: Does this (i.e., 3:21-31) mean that we Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike, now discover that we are to be members of the fleshly family of Abraham? It is the question, in other words, of Galatians, which explains why there are so many echoes of that letter just here. Paul imagines that some Roman Christians will want to say: if you are right, and the covenant faithfulness and promises of Israel's god—yes, and the Torah itself—are fulfilled in Jesus, then you must be saying that Christians belong to the *physical*, fleshly family of Abraham. Romans 4 gains a new coherence, I think, when read as the answer to precisely this question. Verses 2-8: no, since "works of Torah" are clearly not involved as demarcating Abraham (or, for that matter, David) as god's covenant people. Verses 9-15: no, for Abraham was declared to be in the covenant when uncircumcised; after all, Torah was not involved in the process, and could not have been, since it would nullify the promises by calling down wrath. Verses 16-22, whose thesis, the real thrust of the chapter, is stated emphatically and cryptically in v. 16: "therefore by faith, so that according to grace, so that the promise might be valid for *all the family*, not only 'those of the Torah' but also those by the faith of Abraham, *who is the father of us all*." We have not found Abraham to be our father "according to the flesh," but rather "according to grace"; the *κατὰ χάριν* ("according to grace") of 4:16 is the direct answer to the *κατὰ σάρκα* ("according to the flesh") of 4.1. Abraham's faith was in the life-giving god; 4:18-21 echoes 1:18-25, showing by implication how Abraham's faith is the genuinely human position, over against the Adamic refusal to give glory to the creator. This clears the way for the QED (*quod erat demonstrandum*) in 4:23-25: since "we," that is, Christians of all racial backgrounds, share this same faith, we will all, like Abraham, be reckoned as covenant members, on the basis of what the creator/covenant god has done in Jesus. Looking back to 3:21-31 (i.e., not merely echoing a randomly chosen pre-Pauline formula), Paul states that Jesus was given up "for our sins" and raised "for our justification." Sin has been dealt with on the cross (3:24-26); the resurrection of Jesus is the vindication for which Israel, the people of Abraham, had been waiting on the basis of the covenant promises; and now all those who belong to Jesus' people, who are characterized by faith in the god who raised him from the dead, are assured that the same divine verdict is pronounced over them, too.



This reading of Romans 4 suggests that the discussion of “works,” “reward,” “debt,” and so forth in w. 3-4 functions as a metaphor within the wider categories of “works of Torah” (i.e., badges of Jewish ethnic covenant membership). Rom 4:3-8 is sometimes cited as evidence that Paul did after all occasionally write as though he agreed with Martin Luther, as though (that is) the real issue he faced was the possibility of people trying to “earn” justification by “good works,” by successful moral effort. The γάρ (“for”) at the start of v. 2 suggests otherwise. The “justification by works” of which v. 2 speaks is clearly an explanation of something in v. 1; and v. 1, as we saw, raised the question not whether or not Abraham was a good moralist but whether those who are in Christ have become Abraham’s family according to the flesh. I suggest, therefore, that the metaphor of “earning” by “working,” which Paul exploits in w. 3-8, is secondary, occurring to Paul’s mind not because he is thinking about the propriety or otherwise of moral effort, but because he has been speaking of “works” in connection with “works of Torah” in the sense already outlined, and now sees a way of ramming the point home.

From this perspective we can see how, in Romans 1-4, Paul has set out the three tenses of justification. Justification is the *future* verdict in 2:1-16: there will come a day when the righteous creator will put the world to rights, and on that day some will be declared to be in the right, even though at the moment, within the poetic sequence of Romans, it is not exactly clear who will come into this category (2:7,10,14-16).<sup>12</sup> Justification is also the *past* verdict pronounced over Jesus in his resurrection: as the resurrection declared that Jesus was indeed god’s son (1:4), so it declares in principle that he is the true Israel, the vindicated people of the creator. The famous doctrine of “justification by faith,” as articulated in 3:27-30 and undergirded in 4:1-25, consists in the *present* justification (cf. 3:26, ἐν τῷ νῦν καιρῷ [“in the present time”]) in which the past verdict over Jesus is brought forward and applied to those who have faith in the god who raised Jesus, and in which the future verdict is brought backwards with the same application and result (cf. 8:1: there is therefore *now* no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus).

At the end of Romans 4, then, just as in principle at the end of chapter 2, Paul has argued that the covenant people now consists of a group that is demarcated not by the badges that signify Jewish ethnicity but by their faith/faithfulness/belief in Jesus, himself the faithful one. More fundamentally, he has argued that the creator god has indeed been true to his covenant with Abraham, in that in Jesus the Messiah the covenant faithfulness which Israel” should have offered, through which the dark world would have been enlightened, has now been put into effect. The “oracles of god,” entrusted to Israel, have come true in Jesus.

#### IV. ROMANS SEEN FROM THE END OF CHAPTER 4

From here we gain one of the most important vantage points from which to view the rest of the letter and its argument. It is not too difficult to see certain *theological* questions that need to be raised and that can in principle be answered, from this standpoint. They can be itemized: (a) How can this verdict properly be announced over a people that is still not in fact completely renewed and morally whole? (b) What does this

then say about the divine purpose for Israel itself? (c) What are the implications for the church's life? It is then (apparently) easy to see what happens: (a) is answered in chaps. 5-8, (b) in chaps. 9-11, (c) in chaps. 12-16.

This is all very well; but does it do justice to the letter itself? The sequence we have set out may in some respects correspond, in Petersen's terms, to the *narrative sequence* which underlies the *poetic sequence* of the letter, though this remains to be discussed. But the ease with which we draw up such lists deceives us into thinking that we have thereby solved the problem of the *rhetorical needs* of the letter, that we have automatically understood its *poetic sequence*, as though it were after all simply an abstract theological treatise. If we had lost chaps. 5-16, it is by no means clear that we would necessarily have come up with such a list of topics as the right or appropriate way to continue and complete the argument. And without a better understanding of these rhetorical needs, and the way in which Paul has addressed them with this actual letter, we are on dangerous ground in deducing a theological under-lying narrative.

Here we must put together our awareness of what Romans 5-16 actually contains with various possible hypotheses about the rhetorical needs. This could take a lot of space, which we do not have; so I shall cut the corner and suggest the hypothesis, and rhetorical strategy, of which I have gradually been convinced over the years. Paul's main purpose, I think, is to demonstrate to a largely Gentile Christian audience that (a) although it is true that the covenant promises, and the Torah itself, cannot now be read in terms of the validation of Jewish ethnic covenant membership, and that therefore (b) Jews who have not believed the gospel are therefore, for the moment at least, putting themselves outside covenant membership, (c) this does *not* mean that the Torah was a bad thing, or that the creator god has cut off Israel forever, so that the species "Jewish Christian" will shortly become extinct. Paul's strategy in arguing this, I suggest, is as follows:

(1) In chaps. 5—8 he shows that the full restoration of humankind, and of the cosmos, has in principle been achieved, and that those "in Christ" are the beneficiaries. This has come about because all the privileges of being the family of Abraham, the chosen people of the creator god, have been given to the Messiah, and to those who are "in him"; yet, at the same time, the Torah can be vindicated even in its negative task and function. This section is not an abstract exposition of "the result of justification"; if it were that, the detail of several passages, not least the crucial 7:1—8:11, would be inexplicable. Rather, it is the groundwork for the vital appeal that is to come in chaps. 9-11, which is later alluded to in the very revealing remark of 15:27: the Gentiles have come to share in the spiritual blessings of Israel, and therefore have a continuing obligation toward ethnic Jews. That this line of thought is present in chaps. 5—8 is strikingly confirmed when Paul, summing up the privileges of Israel in 9:4, produces a list of the blessings he has just ascribed to Christ and his worldwide people in chaps. 4-8: sonship (8), glory (5, 8), covenants (4, 8), lawgiving (7—8), worship (5:1—5; 8), promises (4), patriarchs (4). The Messiah himself (9:5) is the crowning blessing; and it is the Messiah himself who now belongs not merely to Israel according to the flesh, but

also, and primarily, to the community of all who believe the gospel, Jew and Gentile alike.

(2) In chaps. 9-11 Paul uses the categories developed in chaps. 5-8 in order to expound the divine covenant faithfulness, the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ. The purpose of this exposition, as suggested earlier, is to show that the divine intention was from the beginning that Israel according to the flesh should be cast away in order that the world might be redeemed. What has happened to Israel is not an accident (its god simply lost control of the situation, or changed his mind in mid-plan because of its recalcitrance), nor is it a sign that the covenant god has obliterated Jews from his purpose forever. Israel's rejection of the gospel and its "rejection" by the covenant god are to be seen, as the cross is to be seen, as the strange outworking of the divine plan to deal with the evil of the world; and, if that is so, Jews can and must be welcomed back into the covenant family at any time when they believe the gospel, and such a return must be celebrated as a sign of resurrection. Here, I suggest, is the main rhetorical thrust of the whole letter. Rom 11:11-32, focused on w. 18 and 25, states the point toward which Paul has been driving all along: you Gentile Christians in Rome will be tempted to boast over the Jews, but this temptation must be resisted. Yes, they have stumbled; yes, the Torah has been their undoing rather than their salvation; yes, the divine covenant faithfulness paradoxically involved them in being cast away so that the world might be reconciled (11:15). But all these things, so far from meaning that Gentile Christians are now the truest sort of covenant members, means rather that Gentile Christians owe the Jews an incalculable debt, cognate indeed with the debt they owe the Messiah himself, the Jew *par excellence* whose casting away meant reconciliation for the world. And that debt must be discharged in terms of a continuing mission to unbelieving Israel; indeed, the very Gentile mission itself has this as one of its sidelong purposes (11:13f.). Thus it is that the "gospel"—that is, the announcement about Jesus the Jewish Messiah and his death and resurrection—becomes the power of the creator god for the salvation of all who believe, the Jew first and also, equally, the Greek; thus it is that the covenant faithfulness of this god is revealed in this message, on the basis of, and for the benefit of, "faith" (1:16f.). This overview gives, I hope, the flavor of what is to come. We must now plunge into some details.

## V. ROMANS 5-8

### *Chapter 5*

As is often noted, 5:1-11 anticipates the conclusion of the whole section, 8:31-39. Its central thrust may be stated simply: if the creator god has acted in the death of Jesus on behalf of people who were then sinners, he will certainly act again at the last to deliver them, now that they are already his people. This draws into the center of Paul's focus the great theme of the *love* of this god. A moment's thought will reveal that this is every bit as much a *covenantal* theme as "righteousness"; indeed, it may be the case that Paul implicitly recognizes that δικαιοσύνη does not carry all the overtones of **הַקְּדוּשָׁה** ("righteousness"), and now moves into the realm **אַהֲבָה** ("love") in order to redress the balance. Not, I hasten to add, that he is simply working in the abstract; again, it is rather that the rhetorical needs of his argument demand that this aspect of the divine covenant faithfulness be brought out more strongly, without leaving the other behind.

If 5:1-11 gives a foretaste of the conclusion to the present argument in the end of chap. 8, so 5:1-5 contains the sum of chaps. 5-8 in a pair of tight packed sentences. Indeed, 5:1-2 says it all even more compactly: being justified by faith (chaps. 1-4 summed up), we have peace with this god through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to the grace in which we presently stand (the cultic blessing previously associated with Israel's temple worship), and we rejoice in the hope of the divine glory (which Adam lost, 3:23; which is to be restored in Christ, 8:17-30). Already the great transfer has begun—the transfer according to which Israel's hope is made over to the Messiah and thence to his people. It was a characteristic claim of sectarian Jews that the glory of Adam would belong to them at the last.<sup>13</sup> Paul fastens on this hope as the ultimate restoration of genuine humanity which, anticipated in the resurrection of Jesus, will be given to all the Messiah's people. The Jew-plus-Gentile church has now inherited this supposedly Jewish privilege; Paul's stressing of it throughout this section is aimed both at showing Gentile Christians where their roots lie and, though perhaps not by means of this letter itself, "making my fellow Jews jealous and so saving some of them" (11:15).

The same is true, paradoxically, of 5:3-5, in which suffering itself is claimed as a sign of hope. The present suffering of the people of the true god, as they await their divine vindication, is also a Jewish theme now transferred, via the Messiah, to all his people. The hope that arises out of suffering is certain, because the love of god has been poured out in our hearts by the Spirit (5:5); not here, I think, the divine love for his people (Paul comes on to that in 5:6-10), but the love of the people for their god, as in 8:28, within the same sequence of thought (compare 1 Cor 2:9; 8:3). The *Shema* is at last fulfilled: in Christ and by the Spirit the creator/covenant god has created a people that, in return for redemption, will love him from the heart. The people defined as god's people by faith are the true covenant people, inheriting all the covenant blessings.

Chapter 5 thus unfolds, in characteristic Pauline fashion, from its tight initial statement of this *result* of justification (5:1-2), through a broader development (5:3-5), into a full statement of the position reached now in the epistle as a whole (5:6-11). This last draws out, in particular, the correlation between present justification, based on the death of Jesus, and the future verdict in which the justified people will be rescued from final wrath. The echoes awakened here include 2 Macc 7:37f.; 4 Macc 17:20-22: the death of Jesus has achieved what the martyrs (within those retellings of the story) had hoped to achieve, namely, the turning away of divine wrath from the people of god. The difference, of course, is that the community thereby rescued is not now the nation of Israel, but the Jew-plus-Gentile family as set out in 3:21-4:25. And the result is that the boast that was disallowed to the nation of Israel (2:17-24) is restored to the people thus created: "we boast in god through our Lord Jesus Christ" (5:11). At every point in these eleven verses, that which is predicated of the true family of Abraham, those who are "justified by faith," is that which would have been seen as the privilege of Israel. The great second paragraph of chap. 5 (w. 12-21) can therefore at last tell the story of the world at its widest level. In Jewish retellings, Israel, or some subset of Israel, emerged as the people through whom the sin of Adam would finally be defeated. In Paul's retelling,

as we might have anticipated on the basis of 3:21-4:25, it is in Christ, not in national Israel, that Adam's trespass is finally undone.

Two key modifications in the normal tellings of the story result from this. First, there is actually an imbalance between Adam and Christ: before Paul can move into the direct comparison (5:18-21), he must spell out the ways in which Christ does *more* than Adam (5:15-17). This is one of Paul's most complex passages, grammatically as well as theologically, but I think the right way through it is as follows. Israel's obedience/faithfulness should have been the means of undoing the problem of Adam, of humanity as a whole (2:17-24; 3:2f.); as we saw, the death of Christ (which is clearly the subject throughout this paragraph) functions as the true obedience/faithfulness of Israel through which this purpose is achieved. Rom 5:12-21 thus restates, in multiple and overlapping ways, what had been argued in 3:21-26. Christ has offered not merely Adam's obedience, but Israel's, the "obedience" that was to begin where the "many trespasses" of Adam left off (5:16). Christ, in other words, did not start where Adam started, but where Adam (and Israel) finished. Coming into the reign of death, he reinstated the divinely intended reign of human beings (5:17).

Second, the place of the Torah in the scheme is radically modified. Israel's normal tellings of the story would have included Torah as part of the means whereby Israel, defined as the people of the creator god, were enabled to escape the entail of Adam's sin and find themselves constituted as the true humanity. In Paul's summary, completely in line with 2:25-29; 3:20 and 4:14f, the law functions to *intensify the sin of Adam*: νόμος δὲ παρεισηλθεν ἵνα πλεονάσῃ τὸ παράπτωμα ("the law came in on the side in order that the trespass might increase," 5:20). The story is now complete in Christ "apart from Torah" (3:21); the Torah functions *within* the critique of humanity as a whole, just as it had done in 2:17ff. within 1:18-3:20. This point is vital for understanding chap. 7 when we come to it in due course. Torah, instead of lifting up Israel to a level above the rest of the human race, simply throws a bright spotlight on the fact that Israel, too, is "in Adam," is "fleshly," is "sold under sin."

Is the Torah, then, to be cast off as useless, as a bad thing now happily got rid of? Μὴ γένοιτο ("May it never happen!"). "In the very place where sin abounded, grace also abounded." Here is the rhetorical argument of the letter in a nutshell. Yes, the Torah simply intensifies the sin of Adam in the people of Israel. No, this does not lead to Marcionism. How this is so is yet to be explained; it will take all of 7:1-8:11, and chaps. 9-11 as a whole, to do so. Paul, as ever, states cryptically that which he will later elaborate.

It seems to me that 5:12-21 thus functions *both* as the place where the "poetic sequence" of the letter is summed up *and* as the place where the underlying "narrative sequence" of Paul's theology finds its most fundamental statement. Taking the latter first, and looking forward to our later summary: the story of the creator and the creation, of the covenant purpose of salvation, of the strange twist that this purpose has apparently included, and of how that twist is finally resolved, are all here summed up. Taking the former (the "poetic" or rhetorical intention of this specific letter), it seems that Paul has

deliberately summed up chaps. 5-8 in 5:1-11 in order that, by thus assuming for a moment the conclusion he will reach by the end of chap. 8, he can now offer this bird's eye view of the whole story. This will then enable him to develop specific aspects of the story in chaps. 6-8. His design at this stage is to give the (predominantly Gentile) Roman Christians exactly this perspective on the story of salvation, so that they may understand the positive purpose hidden within the apparently negative purpose of Torah and so may come to understand the positive divine purposes for the Jews at present hidden under the negative purpose of which the Roman Christians are at the moment somewhat too enthusiastically aware.

We should notice, most particularly, what Paul has achieved rhetorically and theologically at this point. Adam's story is the pagan story (1:18-32); and paganism, seen from the Jewish/Christian perspective, is the attempt to grasp at a form of human fulfillment, at a form of exploitation of the riches of the created world, without seeking to do so in the context of gratitude to the creator god, and so without proper responsibility. As a result, the end of the story is death; those who do not worship the life-giving god in whose image they are made come to share the corruption and decay of the present created order that they have worshiped instead. Paul's retelling of Adam's story, implicitly throughout Romans 1-4 and explicitly in 5:12-21, is therefore, as well as everything else, a way of saying: the true fulfillment you seek, the true human life, is to be found in Jesus Christ. He is the creator's means of rescuing and restoring, not simply of condemning, the world of humans and the wider creation. He is the way to recapture the lost glory (3:23). And he is this because he is the climax of the Jewish story. The glory is regained by the Jewish *route*, though not by the Jewish *means*. Adam's race, like Israel itself, has been in exile; Jesus has drawn that exile on to himself. In offering to the covenant god the obedience that should have characterized Israel (3:22; 5:15-17), he has become the means of Adam's rescue. Thus, to look ahead to the rest of chaps. 5-8, Jesus is the means of Adam's exodus (chap. 6); he is the means of Adam's Sinai, Pentecost (8:1-11); he is the means of Adam's entering at last upon his promised land (8:17ff). All through, Paul is telling the Jewish story as the true-Adam story, in such a way as to undercut the stories both of paganism and of non-Christian Judaism. All that paganism itself had to offer, or sought to grasp, is relativized by the Jewish story, so that no pagan can boast; and all that non-Christian Judaism had to offer, or sought to grasp, is relativized by what Paul now tells as the true-Jewish story, so that no Jew can boast. The consonance of this conclusion with Rom 11:28-32 provides initial confirmation that it may be a thoroughly Pauline way of reading the text.

### Chapter 6

From this perspective, we can see that chapter 6 is not a detached treatment of "the basis of Christian ethics," nor indeed simply a warding-off of the standard response that was made to Luther's gospel ("if we are justified by faith, not good deeds, shall we therefore not do good deeds?"). Rather, it is in effect the opposite question-and-answer to 4:1. If 3:21-31 could have been taken to imply that Christians were to be regarded as physical members of Abraham's family, 5:12-21 could be taken to imply that Christians were simply a new variety of pagans. If the Torah-defined people of god had been shown

to be as Adamic as everybody else, does this not mean that one is simply left in the category of “sinners,” confidently expecting that grace will come and find one there? Of course not, replies Paul: the people of God in Christ are marked out not by Torah but by the death and resurrection of Christ, which can be summarized, in the light of 3:21-5:21, as “righteousness” (6:16, 18, 19, 20) or, in the light of 5:12-21, as “obedience” (6:16). Resurrection, the great Jewish hope, has already happened; in other words, the entail of Adam’s sin has already been broken, and those who are baptized have entered into the community of those for whom this was true, and can be “reckoned” as true, not by a supreme effort of moral will but by calculating what is in fact the case (that is the meaning of “reckon” in 6:11).

This has, of course, the force of a general moral appeal: no longer live like pagans, since you are no longer “in Adam.” But the overall rhetorical purpose of the passage is much wider. The “sanctification” or holiness which Israel had thought was its in virtue of its election is now to be found in the risen Christ and in his people (6:19, 22). There can be no slide back into paganism, but it is not Torah that checks such a slide. It is the fact and meaning of baptism itself. Baptism has accomplished, graphically, the statement of present justification: the death and resurrection of Christ are brought forward into the present, and the verdict of the last day is truly anticipated. The “old human” (6:6), which seems to mean “the old Adamic identity,” has been put to death. A new identity is given in Christ. Those who are thus “in Christ” (which I take to mean “belonging to the people of the Messiah”) are to be regarded as those who have already died and been raised. In the context of first-century Judaism, this means that they are the eschatological people of the covenant God.

Torah has had nothing to do with their being defined in this way. Rom 6:14b (“Sin will not have dominion over you, *since you are not under Torah but under grace*”) appears intrusive in the argument—until it is realized that the whole of chap. 6 stands under the rubric of 5:20—21. Paul is simply locating the church on the outline map of the divine purpose which he had sketched at that point. Torah, it there appeared, had been the divine instrument in confirming Israel under sin. Here, since (as the Roman church would have readily agreed) Christians are not under Torah, the rule of sin need have no dominion over them. Paul, in allowing this to stand, is of course letting the argument build up to the moment when he will need to mount his major defense of Torah, that is, in 7:7ff. At this stage he is stressing the general point that coming out from under Torah does *not* mean that one is therefore simply a pagan all over again, a “sinner” without the law (6:1f., 15; cf. Gal 2:17). This is the fundamental point from which he will argue, in chap. 11, his much more sharp-edged case, that one specific variety of pagan attitude, namely, anti-Judaism, has no place within the church.

#### *Romans 7:1-8:11*

If the material of chap. 6 is drawn from 5:12-21, the same is even more obviously true of 7:1-8:11. The way through the complex little argument of 7:1-4 is found by reading 5:20 in the light of 6:6 and 6:14f.: Torah binds “you” to Adam; Adam, the “old you,” dies in baptism; “you” are therefore free to belong to another—namely, Christ—

without Torah having anything to say about the matter. The problem, of course, is that the word “you” is made to do double duty; there is a “you” that is bound to Adam by means of Torah, so that this “you” cannot but bear fruit for death, and there is a “you” that is now set free from this bondage. For the full import of this to come out, we must remind ourselves again of how Israel would normally have told its own story. Adam’s sin has infected the whole world; but (so Saul the Pharisee would have said) the creator god has given his Torah to Israel, so that Israel, married to this god—with the Torah as her marriage covenant—may be his people his redeemed humanity. Putting this story beside Paul’s, we see the following picture. Israel embraces the Torah as the divinely given covenant charter; but it also, in doing so, is embracing its covenant with Adam, and hence with sin and death.

This, to be sure, is complex. But such complexity cannot count as an argument against the exegesis *for we meet the identical complexity in the rest of the chapter*. In 7:13-20 we find the double “you,” only now in the first person instead of the second. And in 7:21-25 we find the double Torah: Torah, on the one hand, recognized as the god-given law; Torah, on the other hand, recognized as the bond with sin and death. The picture is the same as in 7:1-4.

What, then, is Paul saying by means of this highly rhetorical picture of Israel Adam, and Torah? Seven things seem to me to emerge, all of immense importance for Pauline theology in general and that of Romans in particular.

First, as to the purpose and internal division of the passage. The chapter is a defense of Torah against any suggestion that it is identical with “sin” (7:7-12) or that by itself it was the ultimate cause of death (7:13-20). These are the most appropriate paragraph divisions (despite Nestle-Aland, and some other texts which insert a paragraph break after v. 13), because of the clear question-and-answer format of 7:7, 12, 13, 20. One should translate 7:21a: “this, then, is what I find about Torah”: v. 21-25 are the conclusion to the argument, in which it becomes apparent that the Torah *bifurcates*, exactly as, by implication, in 7:1-4. The result is that Torah, the thing after which “I” strive when wanting to do what is right, *also* brings evil “close at hand” (7:21b). We should stress that νόμος means “Torah” throughout. Nothing is gained, and everything lost, by flattening it out into a general “principle”—as though Paul were not discussing Torah itself in every line of the passage. The same is true as we move into 8:1-7, where it becomes clear that the Torah is vindicated in and through the action of god in Christ and the Spirit.

Second, the flow of the argument from 7:7 on may be grasped by seeing it, in its two main sections, as the demonstration of what happens to Israel as a result of Torah. Rom 7:7-12 deals with the *arrival* of Torah as a one-time event; hence the aorist tenses. Rom 7:13-20 deals with the *continuing state* of Israel ‘living under Torah; hence the present tenses. In each case what actually happens could be deduced from 5:20. In the first case, Israel, upon Torah’s arrival, acts out the fall of Adam; hence the clear echoes of Genesis 3 in v. 11. In the second case, Israel, continuing to live with Torah, acts out the death of Adam. Whether or not it is true, as I have cautiously suggested elsewhere,



that in 7:13-20 there are hints of the story of Cain,<sup>14</sup> it is clearly the case that the Israel that lives under Torah continues to carry about the mark of sin and death that results from being the child of Adam.

Third, the rhetorical “I” is best explained as an advance hint of the position Paul will take up in chaps. 9-11. It might have seemed all too easy for Paul to speak of “Israel” as though he himself were not personally involved, as though he had not himself lived in the position of which he here speaks. That would have been to play into the hands of the Roman church, ready to pick up any direct anti-Israel or anti-Torah argument and build their own construct upon it. Rather, he identifies himself with the Israel thus spoken of; this is his story, the sad tale of the αὐτὸς ἐγώ (“I myself”; compare 9:3). This does *not*, however, mean that it is what we would call “autobiography.” As is often pointed out, Phil 3:6 pretty certainly rules out any suggestion that Romans 7 describes “what it felt like at the time.” Rather, the passage is (as its derivation from chaps. 5 and 6 should make clear) a specifically *Christian* analysis of the plight of Israel under Torah.

Fourth, the frequently remarked parallel between 7:13-20 and passages in various pagan writers, describing the puzzle whereby virtuous persons find themselves unable to accomplish the moral good that they approve with their minds (e.g., Epictetus, *Discourses* 2.26<sup>15</sup>), is perhaps best explained as follows. Paul’s argument all along has been that Torah, in paradoxical contrast to its apparent intention, binds Israel to Adam, that is, to ordinary “sinful” pagan humanity. I suggest that in this passage, as a rhetorical flourish designed to appeal not least to a Roman audience that would have known this topos within pagan literature, Paul says, in effect: those who live under Torah have as their crowning achievement just this, that they come up to the level of—the puzzled pagan moralists. If this is the correct reading, it is actually not just a matter of a clever bit of rhetorical flourish, designed to put Torah adherents firmly in their place by showing that they do not in fact get beyond Epictetus, Ovid, or Aristotle himself. Rather, it also makes the point to the Roman ex-pagans, the point that prepares the way for 11:18, 25: Do not imagine that your pagan tradition makes you any more special than these noble Jews, who rightly embrace the Torah only to find that it becomes the unwitting vehicle of death. If they fail, the level to which they fall *back* is the level that, outside of the divine grace revealed in Christ, you yourselves would be proud to *attain* as the summit of your moral progress.

Fifth, Paul has so analyzed the failure of Israel and/or Torah that the solution to the problem lies close at hand. I have elsewhere shown that the reference to the sin-offering in 8:3 is exactly suited to the plight outlined in 7:13-20.<sup>16</sup> The sin-offering was designed to deal with sins that were committed either in ignorance or unwillingly; and that, Paul has said, is exactly the sort of sin of which Israel is here guilty. As in 10:3, he claims Israel’s ignorance as part of the reason why it may now be rescued. It has not sinned “with a high hand,” deliberately going against the covenant plan of its god. On the contrary, it has honestly believed that it is following it to the letter. In the same way, the failure of Torah does not lead to Marcionism. Torah remains “holy and just and good” (7:12), even though it cannot give the life it promised (7:10). When the creator god

achieves, in Christ and by the Spirit, what Torah by itself could not do, this functions as an affirmation, not a denial, of Torah and its validity (8:1-11).<sup>17</sup>

Sixth, the underlying purpose of Torah, the reason why the covenant god gave it in the first place, knowing that it would have these negative consequences, is here at last made clear, in a way that, like so much else in chap. 7, points on directly to chaps. 9-11. This is what I have sometimes called “the good side of the bad side of the law”: instead of dividing the functions of Torah up into negative and positive, as is sometimes done, it seems to me that, *within* what is regarded as the “negative” side of Torah’s work, Paul sees the most positive role of all. This sixth point needs to be elaborated in a sequence of moves, as follows:

(a) The covenant, we must remind ourselves, was put in place to deal with the sin of the world. If Torah is the initial seal of the covenant, this must be its ultimate purpose.

(b) Torah, Paul said in 5:20, came in *in order that* sin might abound. That is, the divine purpose in the giving of Torah was in order to draw Adam’s trespass to its full height precisely in Israel.

(c) This puzzling, “in order that” is repeated and amplified in 7:13. Sin, *in order that it might appear as sin*, worked death through the Torah, *in order that sin might become exceedingly sinful*.

(d) I suggest that in all of this Paul sees the hidden divine purpose, in a manner not unlike that hinted at in 1 Cor 2:8, where the “rulers of this world” did not realize what they were doing in crucifying the Lord of glory. God’s covenant purpose, it seems, is to draw the sin of all the world on to Israel, *in order that it may be passed on to the Messiah and there dealt with once and for all*. “Sin” is lured into doing its worst in Israel, in order that it may exhaust itself in the killing of the representative Messiah, after which there is nothing more that it can do. Rom 8:3f. is the great conclusion to this line of thought, providing one of the most thoroughgoing statements of the achievements of Jesus’ death anywhere in Paul. Torah could not of itself condemn sin in the flesh in such a way that it (sin) was fully dealt with. It could only heap up sin in the one place. Nor could Torah of itself give the life which, tantalizingly, it held out. In Christ the covenant god has done the former; in the Spirit this god has done the latter. The death of Jesus, according to 8:3, was the means whereby sin was condemned. (It is not strictly Pauline to say that *Jesus* was condemned; rather, *sin* was condemned *in his flesh*.) The resurrection of Jesus is the guarantee that the Spirit, by whom this was accomplished, will also raise to life all those who are in Christ (8:9-11).

(e) The apparently negative purpose of Torah, therefore, takes its place within what is essentially the most positive of purposes: the divine plan to deal with sin once and for all. This line of thought depends, of course, on the nexus between the Messiah and Israel: as Israel’s representative, the Messiah takes on to himself the weight of heaped-up Adamic sin which Torah had left hanging over Israel’s head. This, I suggest (at the level of the underlying narrative sequence of the letter), is the central significance which Paul

here wishes to attach to Jesus' death. The "failure" of Israel is cognate with, and indeed designedly preparatory for, the crucifixion of the Messiah, without which, for Paul, there would be no covenant renewal (Gal 2:21).

(f) Israel's "failure," therefore, was part of the strange covenant plan of the creator god whereby this god intended to deal with the world's sin. This, I suggest (looking ahead once more to chaps. 9-11), is the theme that emerges at two crucial points: the "predestinarian" passages in 9:14-29, and the theme of Israel's casting away in 11:11-15. In the first of these, the "hardening" of ethnic Israel is seen as the strange means whereby the whole people of the creator god can be saved, just as Pharaoh's "hardening" was the necessary precondition for the exodus. In the second, Paul speaks of Israel's stumble as somehow instrumental in the salvation of the world. The two belong closely together, and both point to the eventual thrust of his argument to the Roman church: if *this* is why Israel has "stumbled"—so that you Gentiles can obtain the salvation won for you in the death of the Messiah—then you have no room to boast, and Israel has no reason to regard itself as forever cut off. Its stumble was necessary as part of the preparation for the crucifixion, both historically and theologically; now that this has been accomplished, Israel itself can once again be rescued, and indeed attain an honorable (and not a second-class) position within the renewed people of god. The gospel is "to the Jew *first*, and also equally to the Greek."

These six points about Rom 7:1-8:11 lead to a final, seventh, one. The action of the creator/covenant god in raising his people from the dead (8:11) is to be seen as the final great act of covenant renewal and vindication. Resurrection is not, as it were, merely the glad human destiny for the members of a new religion that has left Judaism and Torah thankfully behind. In declaring that Israel's god will raise all those in Christ on the last day, Paul is explicitly transferring to this Jew-plus-Gentile family one of the greatest of all Jewish expectations.

#### *Romans 8:12-39*

All of this clears the way for 8:12-30, in which the themes of the letter so far are caught up and developed within a new argument: if the creator has thus dealt with the problem of Adam, this same god will thereby deal with the problem of all creation. In many first-century Jewish retellings of Israel's story, as in many subsequent Christian ones, this dimension of the covenant purpose was often forgotten; but Paul keeps it firmly in mind.

Before he can turn (in chaps. 9-11) to the specific issue he wishes to address to the Roman church, he must in this way show them that the entire covenant purpose is thus fulfilled in Christ and by the Spirit. The Christ-people are indeed the children of this god (8:12-17), inheriting the title ("son of god") Israel was given at the exodus; as a result, they are not to "go back to Egypt," but to go on through the present sufferings to the glory that is yet to come, the renewal of all creation, which will follow as a direct consequence of the resurrection of those in Christ (8:15,17-25).<sup>18</sup> Here is the note of *hope* which has been sounded by implication so often since it was introduced in 5:2: hope

for the renewal of all creation, in a great act of liberation for which the exodus from Egypt was simply an early type. As a result, all that Israel hoped for, all that it based its hope on, is true of those who are in Christ. Those he foreknew, he predestined; those he predestined, he called; those he called, he justified; those he justified, he also glorified. Likewise, all that paganism had to offer, in its deification of the created order, is shown up as a great parody of the true Christian understanding. The creation is not god, but it is designed to be flooded with god: the Spirit will liberate the whole creation. Underneath all this, of course, remains christology: the purpose was that the Messiah “might be the firstborn among many siblings” (8:29). Paul is careful not to say, or imply, that the privileges of Israel are simply “transferred to the church,” even though, for him, the church means Jews-and-Gentiles-together-in-Christ. Rather, the destiny of Israel has devolved, entirely appropriately within the Jewish scheme, upon the Messiah. All that the new family inherit, they inherit in him.

Rom 8:31-39, like a musical coda, picks up the themes of the entire letter thus far and celebrates them in good rhetorical style. The divine love, which has been under the argument ever since 5:6—10, reemerges as the real major theme of the entire gospel message. This is covenant love, promised to Abraham and his family, a family now seen to be the worldwide people who benefit from Jesus’ death. Since this love is precisely the creator’s love, it remains sovereign even though the powers of earth and heaven may seem to be ranged against it. Since it is the love of the covenant god, it rests on his unbreakable promise. The language of the lawcourt and the language of the marriage contract thus merge (8:33-34, 35-39), with both of them now revealed as vital metaphorical aspects of the one more fundamental truth, which can be expressed both as δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (“righteousness of god”) and as ἀγάπη θεοῦ (“love of god”): the covenant faithfulness of the creator god, revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah and the gift of the Spirit.

I have stressed that much of Romans 5—8 must be understood, within the poetic/rhetorical sequence of the letter, as deliberate and explicit preparation for what is to come in chaps. 9-11. Paul is never, in this passage, simply celebrating the Christian hope (or whatever) for its own sake. The exhilaration of chap. 8, though clearly genuine and wholehearted in itself, is also at the same time a brilliant rhetorical device. The Roman readers, like any sensitive modern reader, could not but be swept up and carried along with the flow of Paul’s discourse and its magnificent conclusion. Reading this passage (or, more likely to begin with, hearing it read), there could be no thought for them of lapsing back into the old paganism of 1:18—32. The glory of the genuine humanity, created in Christ and guaranteed finally by the Spirit, is here presented with the greatest literary and theological power. This is quite deliberate and prepares the way for the next section, totally different in mood and yet so intimately connected in theme. The stark contrast has nothing to do with different sections of the letter being loosely stitched together, or with a different theme inserted after a long lapse in dictation. The shift in mood is as much a feature of rhetorical skill as the sustained drama of chap. 8. As we have already seen, the underlying force of this whole section has been to say: all these blessings that you have, you have because the creator promised them to Israel, and has now given them, in Christ, to you. Therefore . . . what are we to say about Israel itself?

It is thus no denial of this poetic/rhetorical point to suggest that, in terms of the underlying narrative sequence, or theological story, of the letter, Romans 8 stands out as one of Paul's greatest, fullest, and most mature summaries of the gospel. Almost any Pauline topic that one might wish to discuss "would lead to this chapter sooner or later. Just because we are rightly committed to reading it in context, we should not fail to notice as we do so the way in which it says, concisely, so many different things that Paul spells out in more detail elsewhere, and does so with a rhetorical force and flourish unparalleled even by Paul's own standards. We may suggest with some plausibility that we have here a sequence of argument and preaching which the apostle had used on many occasions, and which he adapted for its present purpose. If anything, it is Romans 8, not Romans 9-11, that gives us a hint of the sort of well-used sermon that Paul carried around in his head, or even (as C. H. Dodd suggested) in his knapsack.

## VI. ROMANS 9-11

If we came "cold" to Romans 9-11, one of the first things that might strike us would be its story line.<sup>19</sup> Paul begins with Abraham, continues with Isaac and Jacob, moves on to Moses and the exodus, and by the end of chap. 9 has reached the prophets and their predictions of exile and restoration. Then, in 10:6f., he expounds that passage in Deuteronomy (chap. 30) which predicts the return from exile, and in 11:1ff. develops this in terms of the "remnant" idea, before reaching, toward the end of chap. 11, the great predictions of covenant renewal from Isaiah and Jeremiah. He narrates, in other words, the covenant history of Israel, in a way that, at least in outline, is parallel to many other great retellings of this story in Jewish literature.

This is already enough to alert us to a feature often ignored by scholars: that the whole passage is about the *covenant faithfulness of Israel's god*. Discussion of this cannot be limited to the occurrences of the phrase δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ (10:3 twice); when that phrase occurs in that context, its force is to sum up the whole argument so far. Israel was "ignorant of the righteousness of god"; that is, Israel did not understand or recognize what its god was doing within its history *in fulfillment of his covenant purposes*. Since Paul has already spoken of the divine righteousness being revealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, it is therefore no surprise that this "ignorance" of Israel is directly correlated with its failure to believe the gospel, which is, of course, the material starting point of the whole section (9:1-5) as well as the focus of passages such as 9:30-33. The divine covenant purposes, it appears, are those that have been put into operation throughout the story. Israel's god has been narrowing it down to a point, choosing this son of Abraham and not that, choosing some of the wilderness generation and not others, making Israel, in fact, the vessel of his wrath even as Pharaoh himself had been (9:21-23). This raises the question of the justice of such divine action (9:14, 17), which is, of course, the question of the δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ.

This, I suggest, is where the theme of 7:1-8:11 comes most strikingly to our aid. Paul is not talking about a double predestination of the Calvinist type. He is speaking of the way in which Israel's vocation to be the people of the creator god, including

specifically its calling to be the “vessels of wrath,” was the focal point of this god’s plan to save the world. He can then sum up this theme in those often-puzzled-over phrases in chap. 11: “by their trespass, salvation has come to the Gentiles” (11:11); “their trespass means riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles” (11:12); “their casting away means the reconciliation of the world” (11:15); “you have received mercy because of their unbelief” (11:30); “they have disbelieved on account of your mercy” (11:31). This repeated emphasis is clearly a major theme of 11:11-32.

It can scarcely be a new idea introduced at that point; it seems to refer to something already spelled out, which Paul there summarizes. I suggest that it all makes sense, in itself and within Romans in particular, if we envisage Paul’s train of thought as running something like this:

(a) Israel’s vocation to be the covenant people of the creator always envisaged that it would be the means of rescuing the whole world.

(b) This vocation could be, and was, distorted into the idea of Israel’s privileged position over against the rest of the world, but in Christ this distortion has been shown up for what it is.

(c) The divine intention was, always, to deal with the evil of the world (“sin,” personified as in chap. 7) by heaping it up into one place and there passing and executing sentence of judgment upon it.

(d) This “place” was always intended to be the Messiah himself.

(e) The necessary precondition for this judging of sin in the person of the Messiah was that Israel, the people of the Messiah, should itself become the place where sin was gathered together, in order that this burden might then be passed on to the Messiah alone.

(f) Israel was thus, as part of its covenant vocation, called to be the “vessels of wrath,” the place where the wrath of the creator against the wickedness of the whole creation would be gathered together in order that it be dealt with.

(g) This was never intended to be a permanent condition. Israel was like a bomb disposal squad called to take the devastating device to a safe place to be detonated, and *then to leave it there*. If Israel clings to its status of privilege, refusing to give it up, it is like the members of a bomb squad who are so proud of their important mission that they become reluctant to leave the bomb behind.

(h) There can therefore be no covenant future for those Israelites who refuse to abandon their “own,” that is, their ethnic, status of covenant membership (10:3). Christ is the end of that road, the final goal of the covenant purpose which always intended to deal with sin and its effects (10:4, with all its deliberate ambiguities in play).

(i) But those who see, in Christ, the clue to what the creator/covenant god has righteously been doing in Israel's history, and who grasp this in faith—these Israelites can always regain their full covenant status, and when this happens it is to be a cause of great rejoicing within the community as a whole (11:11ff).

This, I suggest, is perhaps the main underlying theme of chaps. 9—11, and it shows as well as anything else the close integration of the passage with the line of thought in the earlier parts of the letter. Building on the detailed analysis of the purpose and effect of Torah in chap. 7, Paul has told the covenant history of Israel in such a way as to bring out the strange truth of Israel's being cast away so that the world might be redeemed. This, I suggest, is simply in fact the writing into larger history of the truth of the cross. Israel is the Messiah's people according to the flesh (9:5); it has acted out on a grand scale what that means, namely, that it has become the place where sin has been drawn together in order to be dealt with. Beneath 9:5 lies 1:3f.: Jesus is the Davidic Messiah "according to the flesh." What is true of him was necessarily true also of his people "according to the flesh." This, I suggest, is at the heart of 9:6-10:21, and is the theological reason for the echoes of 5:10 in 11:15 (Christ's "casting away," like Israel's, means reconciliation; his new life, like that of Israel, means new life for others) and of 5:15-19 in 11:12 (Israel acts out Adam's *παράπτωμα* ["trespass"], just as in 7:7-12; it must then follow the Messiah through the Adamic death-in-the-flesh to new life).

But Paul has not told this story "in a vacuum." He has set out his material in such a way as to make the point that *the Gentile mission grows precisely out of this strange covenant purpose*. Rom 10:14-18, anticipated already in 9:24, 30, emphasizes that the apostolic mission to the nations and the incorporation of Gentiles within the covenant people of the creator god (9:30: "they have found 'righteousness,' even though they were not looking for it"), are the positive result of Israel's being "cast away." The inclusion of Gentiles is one of the features of the "return from exile" that takes place after Israel, the servant "of the Lord, has borne the sins of the many. (Though Paul does not discuss Isaiah 52f. in these chapters, the occasional references such as 10:15 [Isa 52:7] and 10:16 [Isa 53:1] are, in my view, symptoms of a deep meditation on the whole passage as a major clue to the divine covenant purposes for Israel.) As a result, the rhetorical force of the entire exposition of the failure of Israel is not to give Gentile Christians a sense of smugness or self-satisfaction at their contrasting success, but to highlight and emphasize the fact that they owe the Israelites a huge debt of *gratitude*. This, of course, is precisely what Paul says in 15:27: the Gentiles have come to share in Israel's spiritual blessings, so it is right that they should reciprocate in terms of material blessings. It is also the theme that leads directly to the major thrust of 11:11-32, which ought now to be recognized as the rhetorical sharp edge of the whole letter. If I am right, the whole apparently negative emphasis of Romans 9 and 10 is to be read as an appeal for a sympathetic understanding, on the part of the Gentile church in Rome, of the plight of the Jews. Rom 9:1-5 and 10:1-2 are not merely personal intrusions into a devastating catalogue of Jewish failure. They are indications of the attitude Paul wishes his readers to adopt as they come to understand and appreciate the strange covenant plan whereby, for the sake of the world's salvation, Israel has stumbled over the stumbling-stone which had been placed in its path by its own covenant god (9:33). Paul, as in 7:7-25, sees "his flesh" in rebellion against the gospel

(9:3; 11:14) and understands that rebellion in terms of the strange, but ultimately positive, saving plan of the covenant god, which will deal with Israel's unwilling and ignorant sin and so bring it, too, to salvation (8:3; 10:3).

The double movement of thought which comes together in 11:11-32 is therefore as follows. On the one hand, the Jews' "stumble," in accordance with the strange covenant plan, was part of the appointed means by which the Messiah would do his strange work of dealing with sin, and hence part of the means by which the world would be saved. Thus, the Gentile church in particular cannot look down on the Jews, but must recognize, as I have just argued, a great debt of gratitude. This builds exactly on chaps. 5-8, in which, as we saw, the privileges and blessings of being in Christ were so described as to make it clear that they were *Israel's* privileges, given to the Messiah and thence to all his people. On the other hand, the very fact of this transfer of privileges from Israel according to the flesh, to the Messiah, to the Jew-plus-Gentile church, means that Israel according to the flesh ought to be *jealous*. This is a major motif of chaps. 10-11, picked up by Paul in 10:19 from his favorite section of Deuteronomy (the covenantal passage in chaps. 30-32) and then developed in 11:14ff. Indeed, this motif only makes sense within the argument if the logic of the whole letter is more or less as I have described it. Gentiles have inherited Israel's blessings: this ought to make Gentile Christians grateful, and Jewish non-Christians jealous. What is more—since Paul is not, in chap. 11, addressing Jewish non-Christians, but still aiming rhetorically at Gentile Christians, as 11:13 makes clear—the prospect of this “jealousy” on the part of Jewish non-Christians ought, in turn, to heighten the Gentile Christians' awareness of the Jews' plight and of the appropriateness of Jews leaving their present state of “unbelief” and finding themselves to be valued and celebrated members of the one Jew-plus-Gentile family of Abraham. The “olive tree” allegory is designed, I suggest, to make just this complex of points.<sup>20</sup>

What then of the “normal” reading of Romans 11, in which critical scholarship and fundamentalism have, for once, joined forces, suggesting that Paul here predicts a large-scale last-minute salvation of (more or less) all ethnic Jews? I have argued at length against this reading in *The Climax of the Covenant*,<sup>21</sup> and here wish to make two points only.

First, the rhetorical thrust of the passage seems to me clearly to have to do with Paul's missionary plans (cf. 10:14-18). His whole argument, I have suggested, is that the gospel is “for the Jew first and equally for the Greek.” He is stressing, to a potentially anti-Jewish Roman church, that there can be no lapsing back into an inverted system of national privilege. He desires above all that the Roman church should understand his mission (for which he wanted Rome as his new base) in terms of the Jew-plus-Gentile strategy he intended to adopt, through which alone there could spring up the Jew-plus-Gentile church, through which alone the new, united humanity, about which Paul cared so passionately, could be evidenced.<sup>22</sup> The Roman church must not allow the latent, and sometimes visible, anti-Jewish sentiment in the proud pagan capital to infect them as Christians. The creator has not cut off his ancient people so that now there would only be a dwindling Jewish remnant, and soon a Gentiles-only church. The remnant is emphatically not a small minority clinging successfully to ethnic privilege but a remnant



“chosen by grace” and hence not “by works [of Torah]” (1 1:5f.). If such a remnant exists, it can increase; Israel’s god longs for it to increase; Paul’s very Gentile mission is designed partly to help it increase, by the process of Israel’s “jealousy” at seeing its own privileges being enjoyed by others. Paul’s great hope, in writing Romans, is (negatively) to quash any potential Gentile-Christian arrogance against Israel, and (positively) to enlist the Roman church’s enthusiastic and comprehending support for the fully-orbed missionary program which he intends to implement both in the capital itself and also around the western Mediterranean.

Second, the salvation of “all Israel” (11:26) does not refer to an event expected to take place at the “parousia.” It has become customary to say, with E. P. Sanders, that Paul took the normal Jewish expectation and reversed it. Jewish “restoration eschatology” envisaged that Israel would be restored first, and that then the Gentiles would come to share the blessing. According to Sanders, Paul pragmatically reversed this order: now, it seemed, the Gentiles would come in first, and *then* Israel. What this reading ignores is that, for Paul, the restoration of Israel *had already happened* in the resurrection of Jesus, the representative Messiah. The texts he calls upon are the very ones that speak of Gentiles hearing the word of the Lord consequent upon the restoration of Israel. He evokes, in Rom 11:26b, not only Isa 59:20 but also, and perhaps more importantly, Isa 2:3 and/or Mic 4:2. When Zion is restored, the word of the Lord will flow from it to the nations: now, Zion has been restored in Jesus the Messiah, so that the word of salvation consists of Jesus himself, as Redeemer, coming *from* “Zion” to bless the nations. And the quotation from Jer 31:33 that appears in 11:27 is emphatically a prediction of the new covenant. Paul is not suggesting for a moment that Jews can enjoy a private covenantal blessing which still depends on a special, privileged, ethnic state. Rather, he is insisting that, within the renewed covenant now established in Christ and the Spirit, Jews are of course welcome alongside Gentiles. The καὶ οὕτως at the start of v. 26 does not mean “and *then*,” but “and *so*,” “and in this manner.” This, Paul is saying, is how the covenant god will save his (polemically redefined) “all Israel.” As a result of the Gentile mission, Israel will be brought to see “its” blessings, focused on its Messiah according to the flesh, now given freely to Gentiles; and Israel will want to come back and share in them itself.

Rhetorically, that is, in terms of the “poetic sequence” of the letter, Paul’s main point is now made. He has told the story of the creator and the world as the story of the covenant god and his people, now understood in a new way on the basis of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah. The message about this Messiah, as he said in 3:21, is the revelation-in-action of the covenant-faithfulness of this god: from this point of view, one can understand the plan according to which Abraham became the father of a worldwide covenant family, the plan according to which also Israel, after carrying out its fearful mission, can and must be invited to share in the blessings of covenant renewal. Gentile Christians, in Rome and elsewhere, cannot lapse into that anti-Judaism which refuses to see Jews as legitimate beneficiaries of the creator’s action in Christ: the only story within which their own standing as Christians makes sense is precisely the Jewish story. They do not support the root; it supports them. Paul has placed the quite proper Gentile rejection of an ethnic-based people of god, the correct repudiation of Torah as the final charter of covenant membership, on to the larger plan of the divine covenant, in

such a way as to undercut any possibility of Marcionism, of a rejection of Torah as less than god-given, of an anti-Judaism that would fit all too easily into the social pattern of pagan Rome and all too badly into a genuine covenantal understanding of the gospel. The sequence of thought of the letter so far is summed up in the “real” conclusion of its theological exposition (15:8f.):

For I say that the Messiah became a servant to the circumcised, on behalf of the truthfulness of god, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs, and that the Gentiles might glorify the true god for mercy. (My translation.)

## VII. CHAPTERS 12-16

Like many writers and lecturers on Romans, I have used up most of my space on chaps. 1-11 and have little left for the very important chapters that remain. I confidently expect, however, that, within the rhetorical setting of this paper itself, expectation and controversy will inevitably cluster around the first eleven chapters, rather than the last five, so that the imbalance, for all its risks, may correspond to the reality of our ongoing discussion. Something, nevertheless, must be said about the place of these chapters within the rhetorical design, the poetic sequence, of the letter itself.

Chapters 12-16, I think, turn from an argument that focuses on the *mission* of the church to an argument that focuses on its own internal *unity*. Having set out the covenant plan of the creator god, and having located the Roman (largely Gentile) church on that map, Paul can address both general and particular instructions to the church, the general preparing the way for the more particular. The appeal for unity-in-diversity in 12:5ff., following naturally from the appeal for the “presentation of the body” in 12:1, itself prepares the way for the more directed appeal of 14:1-15:13, where the main thrust of chaps. 12-16 undoubtedly lies. In the same way, the much-debated passage 13:1-7 makes a good deal of sense when read against the background of the Roman situation. If the Jews had been expelled from Rome within recent memory because of riots *impulsore Chresto* (“at the instigation of Chrestus”), the last thing the church needed was to live up to the bad reputation thus, implicitly earned. The contemptuous references in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny show only too well how Romans would naturally regard a cult like Christianity: a reputation for antisocial behavior was almost automatic, and the church should take care not to live up to it.<sup>23</sup> No pagan behavior was to infiltrate the church, who should live as the people of the daytime even though the night was for the moment still dark (13:8-14).

In this context, 14:1-15:13 makes its own clear point. If the riots referred to by Suetonius were indeed the result of problems within the Jewish community caused by some synagogues and/or individuals becoming Christian, and/or by Christian Jews coming from elsewhere to Rome and engaging in evangelism within the Jewish community, it was vital that the church itself should learn to live at peace along the “fault lines” that would most naturally develop. What Paul does, of course, is explicitly *not* to discuss these issues in terms of “Jewish Christians” and “Gentile Christians” but to line

them up in terms borrowed from his (somewhat different) discussion in 1 Corinthians 8, where he had spoken of the “strong” and the “weak,” both of which categories almost certainly included Gentile Christians, and both of which likewise may well have contained Jewish Christians. Paul refuses to reinforce a potential split by addressing different groups within the church in terms of their ethnic origins, but instead sorts out the issues as though they were simply a matter of private options.

This, of course, was in fact truer to life than some in the Roman church might have cared to admit. Paul himself was a “Jewish Christian” who took the “strong” viewpoint; presumably Prisca and Aquila (16:3) were too. And, underneath the whole argument specific to this particular setting, there runs constant reference to the narrative of the Messiah and his achievement, and a sense of overriding loyalty to him rather than to any other standard (14:4, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 18; 15:3-6; and above all 15:7-13). The covenant that the creator made with Abraham has been fulfilled in Christ, and a multiethnic people is the result; one must not, for the sake of human regulations, destroy this unique and climactic work of the creator god. Rom 14:1—15:13 is thus, like the rest of the letter, grounded in the basic christology of the gospel, the fundamental narrative sequence of Paul’s thought.

With this appeal, Paul’s theological task is over, and it remains to spell out the reasons for his coming to Rome (15:14-29), which we have already discussed. The request for prayer (15:30—33), the long list of greetings (16:1—16, 21-23), and the sharp extra warning (16:17—20) all make sense within this context. Even the closing greeting (16:25—27), sometimes regarded as secondary, seems to me at least a fitting conclusion. If we have grasped the subtlety and flexibility of Paul’s thought in the epistle to date, excising such a passage looks suspiciously like straining out a gnat after swallowing a camel, taking revenge for the hard work of grappling with the rest of the text by dismissing a short passage that cannot, as it were, speak up for itself. In particular, there are a few hints in 16:25-27 which suggest that it belongs quite closely with the prologue to the letter, to which we must now return in concluding our study of the poetic sequence.

## **VIII. THE PROLOGUE (1:1-17)**

With the letter as a whole now spread out before us, we may be able to understand more precisely why Paul wrote its introduction in the way that he did. He introduces himself in terms of the “gospel” by which his ministry is defined; and the “gospel” is not “justification by faith,” not simply a message about how humans get saved, but the announcement of Jesus as the Son of god in emphatically Jewish categories (1:3-4). Paul may perfectly well be quoting an earlier formula, conceivably of his own earlier devising, but we should reject any attempt to marginalize 1:3-4 within his thought, or within the flow of the letter, on the grounds that it is too Jewish. It is precisely these categories (the Davidic and representative messiahship of Jesus, and his being marked out as Son of god through the resurrection) that are to dominate so much of the letter. It is this gospel of Jesus, representing Israel “according to the flesh,” doing on its behalf and hence for the world what it had failed to do, that gives theological coherence to all that he is going to say.

The apostolic mission is the direct result of this proclamation (1:5-7). Its aim is “the obedience of faith”; “faith” is not, in Paul, starkly opposed to “moralism” in the way that, for contextual and polemical reasons, it came to be in later theological thinking. Though, of course, there is no sense of faith or obedience forming a human initiative which puts the creator under a debt; nor is there any idea that “faith” is not also, and does not lead further to, “obedience” in terms of 12:1, the glad offering of an entire human life to the service of the creator and covenant god in free response to mercy received.

Rom 1:8-15, leading naturally out of 1:6-7, then explains initially Paul’s longing to come to Rome, anticipating the fuller statement in 15:14-29. This account of Paul’s intention should not be split off from 1:16-17, even though it seems clear that those two verses form a short and pithy summary of the argument of the letter itself; in their context, they are offered as the explanation of why a visit to Rome, and by implication a mission that starts from Rome, are necessary developments of the apostolic mission.

Rom 1:16-17 then forms the statement of theme for the *poetic sequence* of the letter. Since Romans has often been seen as Paul’s *Summa Theologica*, 1:16-17 is also often seen as the thematic statement for his whole theology, but this would be a mistake. In themselves, these verses refer back to the more fundamental entity of “the gospel,” which, stated already in 1:3-4, is here presupposed. “The gospel”—that is, the Jewish message of a crucified and risen Messiah as the fulfillment of the covenant plan of the god of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—was of course multiple foolishness in the ancient world: not only a Jewish message, but such a bizarre one too! Yet, Paul declares, as in 1 Cor 1:18-2:5, it is within this strange and foolish gospel that there lies hidden the power of the creator god by which all humans, from whatever racial background, can be saved.

The reason why this gospel contains this power for these people is hidden *in the covenant faithfulness of the one god*. Here, in 1:17a, we can now see the theological dynamic of the entire letter, and with it the full meaning of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ). The term is, and remains, based firmly in the covenant which was established with Abraham and with which Israel wrestled in succeeding generations, not least in the time between the Maccabees and Bar Kochba. But it always envisaged, at least as Paul sees it, not merely the divine faithfulness to ethnic Israel, but the choice of ethnic Israel as the ones who would bear the creator’s saving purposes for the whole world. Here is the true thrust of Ernst Käsemann’s point, that the divine righteousness has to do with the divine victory over the entire rebel cosmos; but this is achieved through the means that Käsemann never grasped, namely, the fact that in Jesus the Messiah the covenant purpose of the creator for Israel was finally fulfilled.

The covenant faithfulness of Israel-in-Christ, then, results in the revelation of the covenant faithfulness of the creator god. I therefore read ἐκ πίστεως (“from faith”) in 1:17 in the light of 3:22, as referring to Christ’s faithfulness, which in turn results in blessing for all those who are characterized by “faith” of the sort which will be further defined all through the letter. Hab 2:4 is drawn in, not as a proof text wrenched from its original context, but as a key passage dealing with the radical redefinition of the people

of god through a time of turbulent crisis. In the midst of wrath and confusion about the covenant purposes of the one god, the prophet clung on to the saying that “the true covenant members would find life in their faith.” Paul, in a time of even greater wrath, and even greater confusion about the covenant purposes of the same god, grasps the same point: covenant membership now has, as its worldwide badge, not those “works” which mark out Israel according to the flesh, but the faith which was Abraham’s faith: belief in the god who justifies the ungodly, belief in the god who raises the dead.

## **IX. ROMANS AND PAULINE THEOLOGY**

There is clearly no space for even an outline of the theological points that might be drawn out after this theological exegesis of Romans. But some concluding, somewhat unsystematic, observations may be made which will, I hope, sharpen issues for our continuing discussion.

First, a case has been made for seeing Paul not just as “a covenantal theologian,” but as a very particular sort of covenantal theologian. He held on to the central Jewish doctrines of monotheism, election, and eschatology, seeing them all redefined in Christ and the Spirit. He rethought the entire worldview of ancient Judaism, not least his own former Pharisaism, without the slightest suggestion that in doing so he was selling out to, or borrowing indiscreetly from, the surrounding pagan environment. His theology and his place within the history of religions are characterized by his central belief that the creator god was also the covenant god, that the covenant with Israel was always intended as the means of setting the entire cosmos to rights, and that this intention had now in principle come true in Jesus and was being implemented by the Spirit.

Second, the reading of Paul’s critique of Judaism which has been made popular by Sanders and others, in contrast to the “normal” Lutheran reading, has in principle been upheld by the details of theological exegesis. Paul’s critique of Israel was aimed not at proto-Pelagianism or “moralism” but at ethnocentric covenantalism. What is not so often seen, though, is the way in which the theology of the cross, so dear to the hearts of Lutheran expositors as it is so close to the center of Paul, lies at the heart of this critique as much as it ever did in the old scheme. To read Paul in a post-Sanders fashion is not (as is sometimes suggested) to marginalize this central emphasis, but actually to give it its full measure.<sup>24</sup>

Third, however, Sanders’s rereading has not, in my view, gone far enough. It still seems to assume, with the old model, that “justification” is a “transfer term” describing “how people get saved,” and in consequence that Paul has actually pulled the Jewish theological language system out of shape. This is actually unnecessary, as is the continuing divide between “forensic” and “incorporative” readings of Paul’s theology. Both of these latter categories are in fact outworkings of the central covenantal emphasis: once that is put firmly in the middle, all else falls into place around it, and the different metaphorical ideas that Paul evokes from time to time can find their proper places without getting in each other’s way. “Justification” is not, for Paul, “how people enter the covenant,” but the declaration that certain people are already within the covenant. It is the

doctrine which says (cf. Gal 2:16-21 with Rom 14:1-15:13) that all those who believe the Christian gospel belong together at the same table. It is the basis for that unity of the church, across racial barriers, for which Paul fought so hard.

Fourth, we have seen all along that behind the *poetic sequence* of Romans, answering to the particular rhetorical needs of the situation Paul was addressing, there is a particular *narrative sequence* which shows, clearly enough, the overall shape of Paul's theology, and which, indeed, provides a window onto the stories that characterized his entire worldview. The implicit narrative is the story of the creator and the creation; of the covenant with Abraham as the means of restoring creation and humans; of the paradoxical failure, and yet the paradoxical success, of this covenant purpose; of its fulfillment, both in failure and in success, in the death and resurrection of Jesus; of its implementation by the Spirit and through the apostolic mission; and of its final consummation in the renewal of all things. Romans is, perhaps, as good a text as any upon which to try out this two-level (or perhaps multilevel) way of reading Paul, and through which therefore to address our ongoing methodological issues concerning what sort of a thing "Pauline Theology" is, and how we might know when we have found it. Thus, it seems to me quite clear that Romans 5-8 is not the central thrust of Romans itself; but it may turn out to be one particular telling of the story which is at the center of Paul's narrative world. Likewise, Rom 1:3-4 is not the statement of the theme of Romans, but it is one particular statement of "the gospel" which, lying at the heart of his whole belief system, generated the specific argument of this letter, summed up proleptically in 1:16—17.

The proof of all these puddings will be in the eating. If I am right, or even partially right, Romans itself ought to gain in theological and situational coherence; and light ought to be shed on all the other letters, and on our various constructs about Paul's self-understanding and mission. This latter possibility is too vast to contemplate for the moment. I hope that this paper offers at least a step toward the former: in other words, that the text of the great letter itself can now be seen to hang together and to make both theological and situational sense, expressing exactly what Paul wanted it to express, addressing one particular context with one particular message, and at the same time drawing wholeheartedly on a consistent core, on a worldview and a belief system, in the midst of which Paul knew himself to be the servant of the Messiah, Jesus, called to be an apostle, and set apart for the gospel of the creator and covenant god.

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<sup>1</sup> Dialogue throughout could be carried on with the major recent commentaries of C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975, 1979); Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980); Ulrich Wilckens, *Die Brief an die Römer* (3 vols.; EKKNT 6; Cologne: Benziger, 1982); and James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* and *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38a, 38b; Dallas: Word, 1988); the following monographs: Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1989); Glenn N. Davies, *Faith and Obedience in Romans: A Study in Romans 1-4* (JSNTSup 39; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); R. Neil Elliott, *The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul's Dialogue with Judaism* (JSNTSup 45; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation* (JSNTSup 55; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991); Bruce W. Longenecker, *Eschatology and the Covenant: A Comparison of 4 Ezra and Romans 1-11* (JSNTSup 57; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991); Douglas A. Campbell,

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*The Rhetoric of Righteousness in Romans 3.21-26* (JSNTSup 65; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); and the wider discussions of Paul in E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); and *Paul* (Past Masters; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); Heikki Raisanen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986); F. B. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Stephen Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988); James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (London: SPCK, 1990); Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1990); and of course many others. This dialogue must in most cases be inserted by the reader into the intertextual space left implicitly blank in what follows. At the same time, I shall try and achieve brevity here and there by reference to my own previous work, esp. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> See further Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, chapter 1; and *Christian Origins and the Question of God: Vol. 1, The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) chapter 5.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Norman R. Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul: Philemon and the Sociology of Paul's Narrative World* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, part 3. Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE-66 CE* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> On the idea of continuing exile, see, e.g., Baruch; Tobit 13-14; CD; 1 Enoch 85-90; and elsewhere, studied in, e.g., Odil Hannes Steck, *Israel und das gewaltsame Geschick der Propheten* (WMANT 23; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967); idem, *Überlieferung und Zeitgeschichte in den Eliaerzählung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1968); and idem, *World and Environment* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980 [1978]); and many other writers.

<sup>6</sup> On incorporative messiahship in Paul, see Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, chapters 2, 3.

<sup>7</sup> On the debates, see above all *The Romans Debate* (ed. Karl P. Donfried; rev. ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1991 [1977]).

<sup>8</sup> For this emphasis in 1:16 (τε πρώτον καί ["both first. . . and"]), see Cranfield, *Romans*, 1. 90-91.

<sup>9</sup> I here presuppose, of course, one particular answer to the now notorious question πίστις Χριστού: (faith "in" or "of" Christ). I think, actually, that the success of this way of reading this passage is the best argument in favor of the subjective genitive (faith "of Christ) in some at least of the key passages.

<sup>10</sup> The case of Phil 3:9, often cited as if it were an example of "god's righteousness" seen as a human status, is not to the point; it is the status of covenant membership that is ἐκ θεου:, "from god." 2 Cor 5:21, conversely, speaks of the apostles as being themselves the embodiment of the divine covenant faithfulness (cf. 2 Corinthians 3), not as having "god's righteousness" as their own status. On Rom 10:2-4, see below.

<sup>11</sup> Richard B. Hays, "Have We Found Abraham to Be Our Forefather According to the Flesh?" A Reconsideration of Rom. 4:1," *NovT* 27 (1985) 76-98; idem, *Echoes of Scripture*, 54f.

<sup>12</sup> I agree with Cranfield (*Romans*) that 2:14-16 indicates the same category that appears in 2:26-29, that is, Gentile Christians. But I think that in 2:14ff. Paul leaves this deliberately vague for good rhetorical reasons.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., 1QS 4.22f.; 1QH 17.14; 4QpPs37 3.1f.

<sup>14</sup> Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, chapter 12.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. also 1.20.17, where Epictetus argues against the Epicureans, who say that "the good" resides "in my flesh" (cf. Rom 7:18).

<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, chapter 11

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 10.

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Sylvia Keesmaat for drawing my attention to aspects of the exodus imagery in this passage that I had not hitherto noticed.

<sup>19</sup> I have written in detail about these chapters in *Climax of the Covenant*, chapter 13. I am deliberately not attempting to summarize what I have said there, but to take a fresh run at the passage and see what emerges in the light of this paper so far.

<sup>20</sup> Which explains some of its apparent peculiarities. Paul was not the only first-century writer to have an interesting time with horticultural metaphors; see also Epictetus, *Discourses*, 4.8.34-40. Compare too

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Ezekiel 17. Paul is not just using a “homely illustration,” which could then be criticized if it does not work properly, but stands in a long prophetic/apocalyptic tradition of varied imagery.

<sup>21</sup> *Climax of the Covenant*, 246-51.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gal 3:25-29; Eph 2:11-22; 3:8-13 (usual caveats about authorship taken for granted).

<sup>23</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Pliny, *Letters* 10.97.

<sup>24</sup> I have in mind, e.g., the polemic of Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991) 85f.