

PAUL

David G. Horrell

INTRODUCTION

Paul is a man of enormous influence, a religious genius whose capacity for creative thought and original writing has made him a mountain¹ on the landscape of Christian history. He has been hailed as ‘the real founder of Christianity’ (Nietzsche),² though whether that is a title of acclamation or condemnation depends on the standpoint of the one who labels Paul thus. For some, Paul is responsible for perverting the religion of Jesus the Jew into a Hellenistic salvation-religion which Jesus would hardly have recognised, let alone approved.³ For others, Paul is the one who most clearly perceived the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ and most energetically spread the gospel message among the non-Jewish inhabitants of the Roman empire. For some Paul is the bearer of a message of grace and liberation; for others he is at least partly responsible for a history of antisemitism and for keeping the downtrodden firmly in their place. But even if Paul was not the founder of Christianity — and there are many reasons for rejecting that tendentious claim — the enormity of his influence cannot be denied.

During his lifetime, however, Paul was not as prominent as the verdict of history might lead us to assume. Positions of greater eminence and authority were held by the ‘pillars’ of the Jerusalem church, the apostles Peter, James and John, who had been disciples of Jesus (cf. Gal. 2:2, 9; Holmberg 1978: 14-34). And in the early years of his missionary activity, Paul was almost certainly acting under the auspices and commission of the church at Antioch, possibly ‘as assistant to Barnabas’ (Murphy-O’Connor 1996: 96; cf. Taylor 1992: 87-95; Acts 11:26–15:40). Yet it is Paul, and none of these other characters, who warrants a chapter in this book. The reason for this is not hard to discern: Paul’s enduring influence is primarily due to his weighty theological letters that are preserved in the New Testament (cf. 2 Cor. 10:10). There are thirteen such letters attributed to Paul, but just one of them — his letter to the Romans — far surpasses in influence that of the New Testament epistles attributed to Peter, James and John combined.

Those epistles written by Paul are obviously the most important source for understanding him. There is a large scholarly majority in favour of the view that Paul did not

write the so-called Pastoral Epistles (1-2 Timothy, Titus), nor Ephesians; arguments for and against Paul's authorship of Colossians and 2 Thessalonians are more finely balanced, though many doubt that they are Paul's own work. That leaves us with Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians and Philemon as the primary sources for the study of Paul. The book of Acts, written by the same author as the Gospel of Luke, probably 20-30 years after Paul's death, is also an important source for the study of Paul's life and work, though its reliability is much debated. Undoubtedly the author of Acts, whom we shall call Luke, has theological tendencies which shape the picture he presents, but the historical value of his work should not be ignored. The evidence of Acts must nevertheless be used with due circumspection.

Also important for understanding Paul are the numerous and varied sources which can further our understanding of the social, cultural and religious context in which Paul lived and worked. Jewish sources are vital to understanding the varieties of Judaism that existed at the time of Paul and the particular sect of Judaism to which Paul originally belonged; other sources enable us to appreciate something of the wider political and philosophical context for Paul's Christian mission (see further chapters 30-31 above).

PAUL'S CONTEXT: RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL

Paul was first and foremost a Jew; or, in his own words, 'of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews' (Phil. 3:5; cf. Rom. 11:1; 2 Cor. 11:22). More specifically, Paul tells us that he was a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5), a member of a grouping within first-century Judaism whose members sought to practise holiness by careful adherence to both written and oral Torah (see Schürer 1979: 388-403; Saldarini 1992). This Pharisaic identity almost certainly confirms Luke's information that Paul was educated in Jerusalem, since Pharisaic training seems to have taken place only in that city (Acts 22:3; 23:6; 26:4-5; Hengel 1991: 27; Lüdemann 1989: 240). But whether Paul went to Jerusalem in his early childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood is open to debate (see Murphy-O'Connor 1996: 46-51; Hengel 1991: 2-3, 18-39). It is also uncertain whether Paul was widowed, divorced, or had always remained single (the first of these is perhaps most likely — see Jeremias 1926; 1929; Murphy-O'Connor 1996: 62-65). However, it is clear that he was 'unattached' when he wrote his letters (1 Cor. 7:7-8; 9:5).

One thing about Paul that we learn only from Acts is that he was from Tarsus, the capital city of Cilicia (Acts 9:11; 21:39; 22:3; see fig. 1), though this detail about Paul's life is

hardly ever doubted (Hengel 1991: 1). Being born and probably educated, at least initially, in Tarsus, Paul was thus a member of the Jewish diaspora, educated in Greek and specifically in the Greek version of the Hebrew scriptures, the Septuagint (LXX; see chapter 9A above), even though his Pharisaic training also ties him closely into Palestinian Judaism. Moreover, like other Jews of his day too, Paul was influenced by popular philosophical discussion from a range of sources, as well as by his specifically Jewish heritage (see e.g. Malherbe 1989; Deming 1995; Downing 1998). If Luke is right that Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-29) — again, this is not something Paul ever mentions, and it is doubted by some (e.g. Stegemann 1987; Roetzel 1998: 19-22) — this was probably inherited through his family, granted perhaps to his father or grandfather on release from slavery (see Rapske 1994: 71-112; Hengel 1991: 4-15; Riesner 1998: 147-56). The name Paul uses in his letters is his Latin cognomen, Paulus, and he does not himself mention his Jewish name ‘Saul’ (Hebrew: Sha’ul; Greek: Saoul/Saulos) which appears frequently in the first half of Acts (e.g. 7:58; 8:1; 12:25; note 13:9).

These last details remind us that Paul was a citizen, or at least an inhabitant, of the Roman empire, and the structure of empire was the dominant social and political datum for both Jews and Christians, indeed all inhabitants of the Mediterranean region, at the time. The impact of this socio-political reality can be seen in Paul’s references to imprisonments and beatings (Rom. 16:7; 2 Cor. 11:23; Phil. 1:7-17; Phlmn 1, 9, 23; he also received lashes as synagogue discipline on several occasions; see 2 Cor. 11:24), as well as in his advice to his converts on issues like slavery (1 Cor. 7:21-24) and their attitudes to the imperial authorities (Rom. 13:1-7). In the end, the cost of his work as a Christian missionary in the Roman empire was his life, since he was almost certainly executed in Rome, perhaps along with Peter, towards the end of Nero’s reign (c. 60-67CE; cf. 1 Clem. 5.2-7; Eusebius, HE 2.25.5).

FROM JESUS TO PAUL: PRE-PAULINE CHRISTIANITY

Despite his polemical insistence that he received his gospel by divine revelation and not from any human being (Gal. 1:11-12), and despite the personal nature of his encounter with the risen Christ, it is clear that Paul owed much to those who were believers in Christ before him (cf. 1 Cor 15.3-9). He himself tells us of a visit to Jerusalem to ‘get acquainted with Peter’⁴ when, we may be sure, he learnt something about the historical Jesus and about the gospel as Peter understood it. Paul also spent some time at Antioch (in Syria), operating as a missionary with Antioch as his base. He did not found the church at Antioch and must have learnt

substantially from the teaching and practice already established there. For these reasons, and to show that Paul was not ‘the founder of Christianity’, it is important very briefly to sketch the progress of Christianity in its earliest period, before Paul’s ‘conversion’ and well before his letters, although this period spans only a few years.⁵

After the death and resurrection of Jesus — and whatever ‘happened’ at the resurrection, it is clear that early Christianity is based on the belief in its occurrence — some of his disciples, including leading figures such as Peter, James and John, remained in Jerusalem, where they met regularly with fellow believers in Jesus as Messiah/Christ. At this point in time, however, such believers were all Jews and loyally continued their Jewish religious practice (Acts 2:46; 3:1). While the details of the events that followed are much debated, Luke’s account in Acts indicates that there were divisions and differences within this earliest Christian community, notably between the ‘Hebrews’ and the ‘Hellenists’ (Acts 6:1) and that, due to persecution, at least some of the believers were dispersed from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19). Many believe that it was primarily the so-called Hellenists who were persecuted and dispersed, and who held a theology more critical of Jewish law and temple than the so-called Hebrews,⁶ though the tidiness of this division has been sharply questioned by Craig Hill (1992).⁷ Whatever the details, with the scattering of Christians from Jerusalem, within a few years the gospel began to be shared with non-Jews (Acts 11:20-26).⁸ Moreover, in at least some places these Gentile converts (often already Jewish sympathisers or ‘godfearers’) were not expected to become Jewish, i.e. to adopt all the marks of Jewish identity and obedience to the Jewish law (circumcision, food laws, sabbath observance, etc.). This development was absolutely crucial for the future character of Christianity, and was the cause of heated debate (in which Paul looms large) for decades, even centuries, afterwards.⁹

Antioch was certainly one place where the gatherings of Christians included both Jews and Gentiles, without the latter being expected to become Jews, and it is not insignificant that a few years after his conversion Paul was based at Antioch for some time as a Christian missionary. How far this development had taken place prior to Paul’s joining the community at Antioch and how far Paul may have been involved in it elsewhere is difficult to say, since we know so little about the earliest church at Antioch and about Paul’s activities between his conversion and the first of his letters, a period of some years (see below). However, it is clear that the spread of the gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch and elsewhere, and the inclusion of Gentiles as well as Jews within the company of Christians, took place independently of Paul, and well before he wrote any of his letters (see further Riesner 1998: 108-24).

Nevertheless, Paul's determined commitment specifically to the task of evangelising the Gentiles and the arguments he formulated to justify their inclusion within the Christian movement without their becoming Jews were of decisive significance for the long term development and identity of Christianity. Paul and Barnabas were sent as representatives of the Antioch church to the gathering in Jerusalem to discuss precisely the issue of Gentile converts (Acts 15:1-29; Gal. 2:1-10)¹⁰, and when disagreement later flared at Antioch itself, Paul argued vigorously for the acceptance of Gentiles without their obedience to the demands of Jewish law (Gal. 2:11-21).¹¹ Although Paul may have lost the argument at Antioch, he presented it once more, at greater length and with considerable heat and passion, in his letter to the Galatians, and, indeed, at even greater length but without so much heat, in Romans.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that while Paul turned out to be a pivotal person in these crucial debates, formulating in detail the arguments on which the Gentiles' acceptance as Gentiles was based, he was not a solitary or unique figure. Paul owed much to his predecessors, from and with whom he learnt much about the nature of belief in Christ. Furthermore, though it is often forgotten, Paul operated within a wide circle of co-workers (see Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25; 4:3 etc.), some of whom are named as co-authors in some of the epistles we tend to think of solely as Paul's (see 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal 1:2; Phil. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; Phlmn 1).

PAUL'S CALL TO APOSTLESHIP AND MISSIONARY ACTIVITY

How did Paul come to be arguing about the place of Gentile converts in the church in the first place? He had not known or followed Jesus during his lifetime, nor, as far as we know, was he converted directly by hearing the message announced by early Christian preachers. In the earliest years of the Christian movement, Paul tells us, he was a zealous persecutor of the church (Gal. 1:13, 23; 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:6). Precisely how and why a Pharisee engaged in such persecution is not altogether clear,¹² but what is indisputable is that a zealous persecutor became an equally zealous proponent of the gospel of Christ. Paul never recounts in detail the nature of the experience which caused this volte-face (contrast the lengthy accounts in Acts 9:1-30; 22:3-21; 26:9-23) but he does make clear that it was a revelation, a 'seeing', of the risen Christ which was the foundation of his call to be an apostle of Christ to the Gentiles (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:12-16), and that this experience took place near Damascus, as Luke more famously reports (Gal 1:17; cf. 2 Cor. 11:32). Paul describes this call in a manner reminiscent of the calling of Jeremiah and of the 'servant' of deuterio-Isaiah (Jer. 1:5; Isa.

49:1-6; cf. Gal. 1:15-16); in this sense he is not ‘converted’ at all, but rather commissioned to a new task by the God whom he has served all his life (cf. Stendahl 1976: 7-23). On the other hand, however, although Paul certainly sees his Christian faith as a continuation of the biblical story of God’s dealings with Israel and the world, the radical change in perspective and the consequent reinterpretation and revaluation make the term conversion apposite (cf. Phil. 3:4-14).¹³

Paul understood this conversion experience, which probably took place around 33CE, a few years after the crucifixion of Jesus,¹⁴ not only as a revelation of Christ to him, but also, at least in retrospect, as his own commission specifically to be apostle to the Gentiles, a role he later affirms in conjunction with Peter’s different commission as apostle to the Jews (Gal. 1:15-16; 2:7-8). In the years immediately after his conversion, then, years about which we know so very little,¹⁵ it seems likely that Paul was involved in spreading the message about Christ and making converts (Murphy-O’Connor 1996: 82), though on what basis is debatable.¹⁶ For about three years he was in Arabia and Damascus (Gal. 1:17). Then he went up to Jerusalem for his first meeting with Peter (Gal. 1:18; c.37CE). The next nine years were probably spent in activity as a missionary based in Antioch, alongside, or perhaps even under the direction of, Barnabas (Murphy-O’Connor 1996: 96). From around 46CE, on Murphy-O’Connor’s reckoning, Paul became an independent missionary, and began an extensive journey that took him through Galatia, Macedonia, and to Corinth (see fig. 1). Fourteen years after his first visit to Jerusalem, in about 51CE, he returned there again, this time for the ‘conference’ called to discuss the issue of Gentile converts and the requirements to be placed upon them (see above; Gal. 2:1-10). After this conference Paul undertook another extensive tour, returning first to Antioch, then moving on to Ephesus, Macedonia, Illyricum and Corinth, before returning once more to Jerusalem with the proceeds of his long-standing collection project — money raised from the Pauline congregations for the ‘poor among the saints in Jerusalem’ (Rom. 15:25-26).¹⁷ After that he undertook a somewhat less voluntary journey, as a prisoner, to Rome, where he may have remained for some time before being executed under Nero some time in the 60sCE. Whether he made his hoped-for visit to Spain (Rom. 15:24) between his first arrival in Rome and his later execution there is possible but seems unlikely, for there is no direct evidence of such a visit.¹⁸

Whatever the details of his travels and their dates — and the conventional picture of Paul’s three missionary journeys is, as John Knox has pointed out, based upon the evidence of Acts more than on that of the epistles (Knox 1987: 25-26) — Paul travelled many thousands

of miles, enduring all the dangers of travel: shipwreck, robbery, lack of sleep, hunger and thirst, not to mention punishments by both Roman and Jewish authorities (2 Cor 11:24-29). He did so because he believed he had a crucial role to play — and one he was divinely compelled to play (1 Cor. 9:16-17) — in making the gospel known among the Gentiles (Rom. 15:18-24), so fulfilling his part in the divinely orchestrated drama which was reaching its final culmination. Once the full number of the Gentiles had come in, Paul believed, Israel would then be saved, and God's plan of mercy for humanity could finally be brought to fruition (Rom. 11:25-32), the last enemy of God destroyed (1 Cor. 15:24-26), and the renewed creation liberated to share in the glorious freedom of God's redeemed children (Rom. 8:19-25). And all this, Paul was convinced, lay just around the corner.

These theological convictions motivated Paul and undergirded what he sought to achieve as apostle to the Gentiles. To understand him, therefore, we must attempt to understand his theology, and the message which he announced as he travelled round the cities of the Roman empire.¹⁹

THE HEART OF PAUL'S THEOLOGY: CENTRAL THEMES

One of the difficulties inhibiting the quest for the heart of Pauline theology is that Paul never wrote a summary either of his theology or of his missionary message. His letters are all, including Romans,²⁰ shaped by the contingent circumstances of the communities which he is addressing and hence are enormously varied. For some the differences lead to the conclusion that Paul was not consistent (Räsänen 1983), while others posit development in his thought over time (Dodd 1934; Hübner 1984). Many, however, consider that Paul was a coherent thinker, even though his expression varies according to situation (Beker 1980; 1990) and even if he reasons 'backwards', from 'solution to plight' (Sanders 1977: 442-47, 474-51; see below).

It is not easy, then, to express concisely what lies at the centre of Paul's theology. Much of the modern debate revolves around two opposing poles. The first, which finds its roots primarily in Martin Luther's interpretation of Paul, claims that the idea of 'justification by faith' is the key to Paul's gospel. The guilty and undeserving sinner finds unexpected forgiveness from a gracious God. The dominant imagery is juristic or legal: the acquittal of the guilty. The second pole, whose most famous modern exponent is Albert Schweitzer, is the notion of participation in Christ. Schweitzer argued, contrary to Luther, that the mystical notion of 'being-in-Christ' was the key to understanding Pauline teaching: 'once grasped it

gives the clue to the whole' (1953: 3). For Schweitzer, in a way 'incomprehensible' to modern people, Paul 'speaks of living men (sic) as having already died and risen again with Christ' (1953: 18). These two alternatives remain prominent in much recent discussion, although proponents of either view seek more nuanced ways of expressing their ideas — such as Morna Hooker's notion of 'interchange' (Hooker 1990). E.P. Sanders, for example, insists that 'the "participationist" way of thinking brings us closer to the heart of Paul's thought than the juristic', though he rightly maintains that the two 'sets of terminology' serve to 'interpret' and 'correct' each other (1977: 520; cf. 502-508; 1991: 74). The language of sacrifice and acquittal is certainly present in Paul (Rom. 3:23-26; 4:24-25; 5:6-9; 1 Cor. 5:7; 15:3) — so this theme should not be denied — but Sanders is right, I think, to emphasise the centrality for Paul of the language of identification, or participation, 'with' or 'in' Christ (e.g. Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor. 15:22; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; Gal. 2:19-20). It is by dying with Christ that the believer is freed from the dominion of sin, and by living in Christ that s/he begins anew as a person with a new identity, a new creation (see further below).

One attempt to circumvent the often polarised debate is that of J.C. Beker (1980; 1990), who argues that at root Paul is an 'apocalyptic theologian' whose thought revolves around the conviction that in Christ God has acted decisively and in a way which demonstrates that the end of time is near. For Beker, 'the real center of Paul's gospel lies in the lordship of Christ as it anticipates the final triumph of God' (1990: 92). According to Beker, neither mystical nor juristic language can rightly be elevated as more fundamental than the other; rather, Paul uses various symbols and themes according to context, which are 'analogous to the coherent field of interlocking circles on the Olympic logo' (Beker 1990: 114).

Certainly Beker has valuably drawn attention to the fact that Paul is a theocentric theologian (1980: 362-67; 1990: 21-24, 115). Although his gospel is focused on the death and resurrection of Christ, Paul is always clear that this is the work of God, that God is the one whose saving purposes for creation are being worked out and brought to fruition. One need only read, say, Rom. 3:21-31, or 1 Cor. 15:27-28, to see how clearly God is the author of all that Paul describes. And this God is, of course, the God of Abraham and Moses, the God whose dealings with his people Israel are recorded in the Hebrew Bible. Paul is quite convinced that it is the promises of God to Abraham — the 'father' of God's people the Jews — which have been fulfilled in Christ, even if he sometimes uses some rather clever exegesis to establish this (e.g. Gal. 3:16; cf. Gen. 12:2-3; 13:15-16; 15:3-6; 17:4-8). The act of God in

raising Christ from death, then, is the decisive act of Israel's God which demonstrates that the end is near. Thus Paul's thought is fundamentally eschatological — orientated towards 'the last things'. The structure of Jewish eschatological hope can be broadly summarised in terms of a contrast between 'this (evil) age' (cf. Gal. 1:4) and 'the age to come', with the day of the Lord expected to mark the establishment of the latter (see e.g. Joel 2; Mal. 4:1-6; 4 Ezra 7:113; 8:52; Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; fig. 2). This structure was adopted and altered by Paul and the early Christians, who believed that Christ's coming, and specifically his resurrection, marked the 'beginning of the end': somehow, the decisive and long-awaited intervention of God had happened, but had not yet happened! For believers in Christ, who had died to sin and begun a new life in the power of the Spirit, who were already new creations, the present was a time of tension, an interim time 'between the ages' (see fig. 3; cf. Dunn 1998a: 462-66). The time of tension, of groaning, suffering and waiting, was, however, expected to be short; for the day of the Lord would soon come, when the return of Christ would signal the final victory of God and salvation for his people.

We may then attempt to summarise Paul's gospel briefly, though virtually every phrase could be, and often has been, the subject of extended and intricate discussion. The one true God, the God of the Hebrew Bible, has fulfilled his promise to Abraham — to bless all the nations of the earth through him (Gen. 12:3) — in Jesus Christ, who was sent by God as a human being, to die for the sins of humanity. God raised him from death and exalted him as Lord, the firstborn of a new creation, that, in him, all who have faith might also die to sin, to their former lives, and live as holy people in the power of the Spirit, which is given to all who believe. The completion of the process of salvation is near, when the mysterious plan of God to show mercy to all and to restore the whole creation in himself will finally come to fruition, and when believers will live with the Lord forever.

To understand this somewhat compact summary, and to appreciate some of the tensions and debates which it conceals, it is necessary to examine various areas of Paul's theology in more depth. We begin with what from Paul's own writing can clearly be seen to be central: Christ (cf. Phil 3:7-11).

Christology

Whilst it is God who is the author of all Paul describes, and God who will ultimately be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28), the focus of Paul's devotion and proclamation is Christ, and specifically his death and resurrection. Paul clearly shares and repeats the early Christian creed: Christ

died for us (huper hêmôn) and was raised from the dead (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-4). Here again the debate concerning the ‘heart’ of Paul’s theology looms large: Did Paul understand the significance of Christ’s death primarily in sacrificial or in participationist terms? Paul certainly presents the view that Christ died as a means of atonement for the transgressions of others (Rom. 3:22-25; 4:24-25; 5:6-9; 1 Cor. 15:3), a view which he seems most likely to have inherited from his predecessors and is happy to repeat. But his own thought is arguably more focused on the participatory idea of dying with Christ:

the prime significance which the death of Christ has for Paul is not that it provides atonement for past transgressions (although he holds the common Christian view that it does so), but that, by sharing in Christ’s death, one dies to the power of sin or to the old aeon, with the result that one belongs to God... The transfer takes place by participation in Christ’s death.

(Sanders 1977: 467-68, citing Rom. 6:3-11; 7:4; Gal. 2:19-20; 5:24; Phil. 3:10-11, etc.)

In the death of Christ God has not only dealt with past transgressions, but has provided the way in which believers in Christ can be liberated from the dominion of sin, by dying with Christ; in the resurrection of Christ God has not only vindicated Christ and exalted him as Lord, but has also made him the first-born of a resurrected new humanity (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20). Those who live in Christ look forward confidently to their own attainment of resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3:11).

The appellation Christ, so frequent in Paul, is itself a declaration of faith, an affirmation about who Jesus is: the Greek word Christos is a translation of the Hebrew Mashiah, Messiah, anointed one. Thus Paul’s primary conviction about Jesus is that he is the expected Messiah, the anointed one of God, sent to save and restore God’s people. Equally fundamental for Paul, and also frequent in his letters, is the affirmation that Jesus is Lord, this affirmation being the touchstone of Christian confession (Rom 10:9; 1 Cor. 12:3). Somewhat less frequently attested, though nevertheless significant, is the description of Jesus as Son of God (Rom. 1:4; 8:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor 1:19; Gal. 2:20; 4:4; 1 Thess. 1:10 etc.). Each of these ‘titles’ — Christ, Lord, Son of God — has roots in the Jewish scriptures, though the latter two also have resonances in the wider world of the Roman empire, where the emperors adopted or were given various titles, including kyrios (Lord) and divi filius (son of the divine; see fig. 4).²¹ None of these terms in themselves necessarily implies that Jesus is divine, nor that he is ‘God the Son’ in the later sense of the trinitarian confession. Indeed, there has been

considerable debate as to whether Paul actually thought of Jesus as divine and preexistent or not.

In an important but controversial book, *Christology in the Making* (1980, ²1989), James Dunn argues that Paul did not view Jesus as a preexistent divine figure who became ‘incarnate’ at his birth. On the contrary, Dunn argues, Paul’s Jesus was a man in whom God’s ‘wisdom’ and power are embodied, and who, through his obedience to the call and commission of God, was raised and exalted to become Lord. A particularly crucial passage is Phil. 2:5-11, most likely a pre-existing hymn to Christ which Paul adapts for his purposes in that letter (see Martin 1983). According to Dunn, the hymn is best read in the light of its parallels with the story of Adam in Gen. 1–3: both Adam and Jesus were made in God’s image, yet while Adam reached out to become like God (Gen. 3:5, 22), Jesus willingly took the role of humble obedience, even to the point of death on the cross. Because of his obedience, he accomplished the restoration of what Adam had ruined, and was exalted by God to the position of Lord, from where he will receive the acclamation due to God himself (cf. Isa. 45:23; Dunn 1980: 114-21; 1998a: 281-88).

Without needing to deny the parallels with the Adam story here and elsewhere in Paul, it seems to me more compelling to follow those who consider that Phil. 2:5-11 does encapsulate a belief in Christ’s preexistence (e.g. Casey 1991: 112-13; Fee 1995: 203 n.41; Bockmuehl 1997). Such preexistence is also hinted at in 1 Cor 8:6 and probably 2 Cor. 8:9 (which Dunn interprets as referring to the moment of Christ’s death, rather than his becoming human; Dunn 1980: 122).²² It is notable, however, that Paul avoids stating that Jesus was God (note Phil. 2:6, 11). Within the framework of Jewish monotheism at the time, Paul and the early Christians could affirm Jesus’ preexistence with God from the beginning of time and his exalted position as God’s supreme agent, since there were parallels in Jewish scripture and tradition, notably in the personification of wisdom as God’s agent in creation (see esp. Prov. 8:22-31; Wisd. 7:22–8:1; Sirach 24:2-22).²³ Indeed, the wisdom tradition seems likely to have influenced Paul’s christological language at some points (1 Cor. 1:21-30; 8:6), and certainly influenced the follower of Paul who wrote Colossians (Col. 1:15-20). Precisely because he was a Jew and thus a monotheist, however, Paul not only avoids calling Jesus God, but also retains a clear and careful distinction between God (the Father) and Christ (the Lord), in places clearly implying the subordination of Christ to God (see esp. 1 Cor. 3:23; 11:3; 15:28; cf. also 8:6; Phil. 2:11, etc.).²⁴

One of the characteristic features of Paul's Christology is what has been termed his 'corporate Christology'. In this area of his thinking, the parallels with Adam are particularly significant. Paul refers to Adam as a 'type' of Christ (Rom. 5:14); indeed, he explicitly speaks of 'the first Adam' and 'the last Adam', contrasting their identities and roles (1 Cor 15:45-49; cf. Barrett 1962; Scroggs 1966). In Rom. 5:12-21 the nature and scope of Christ's redemption are described by contrast with Adam: through the disobedience of one man (Adam), sin and death came into the world and affected all humanity, but through the obedience of one man (Christ) came grace, righteousness and eternal life. The life of humanity under the power of sin and death can be described as life 'in Adam' (1 Cor. 15:22); similarly, the life of those who with Christ have died to this realm of sin and death (see Rom 6:1-11) is described as life 'in Christ', a phrase which Adolf Deissmann long ago emphasised as frequent and significant in Paul.²⁵ Christians live, individually (2 Cor. 5:17; 12:2) and corporately (1 Cor. 12:12-27; Gal. 3:26-28), 'in Christ'; indeed, they are the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27). This body-image is one of Paul's most profound and memorable descriptions of 'the church' — a rather anachronistic term for the local gatherings of Christians which Paul called ekklêsiai, the usual term for the gathering of citizens in a Greek city, and frequently used in the LXX of the 'assembly' of Israel (ekklêsia translating the Hebrew qahal).²⁶

The Spirit, Ethics and the Christian Community

Paul writes to his fellow followers of Christ as members of a local ekklêsia, a body of people who together are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), and who eagerly await the return of Christ to announce God's final triumph. The rite of initiation into this new movement was baptism, administered in the name of Christ Jesus, which symbolised believers' participation in the death of Christ, and their taking on a new identity, clothed with Christ, dead to the old, alive to the new (Rom. 6:1-11; 1 Cor 1:13-15; Gal. 3:26-29). At the regular gatherings for worship and instruction, the Christians shared a meal together which recalled the fundamental narrative of their faith — about 'the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed' (1 Cor. 11:23) — and demonstrated their integration into one body in Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17).²⁷ They are addressed by Paul as 'holy ones' (hagioi), brothers and sisters (adelphoi), fellow members of the body of Christ.

As such, Paul's Christian converts are clearly expected to live in a particular way, to be distinctive, set apart ('holy') from the 'evil age' in which they live. A number of times in his letters, Paul paints in stark colours the contrasts between his converts' former and present

lives, between evil things and good things (Rom. 13:11-14; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; Gal. 5:19-23). Yet these 'lists' of vices and virtues can apparently be both a description of a change that has taken place and a warning, or exhortation, about the ways in which people must live if they are to inherit God's kingdom. Indeed, one of the puzzles in Pauline ethics is to comprehend the relationship between what is generally labelled the 'indicative' and the 'imperative'.²⁸ As we have already seen, Paul describes believers as people who have died with Christ; they have died to sin and are new creations. These are indicative statements about their new identity. Yet living in a way 'appropriate' (in Paul's view) to being a new person in Christ clearly did not simply come automatically. Indeed, Paul was sometimes scandalised at the conduct of some of his converts (1 Cor. 5:1-13). He had to urge them to act rightly, to live in a holy manner; and so, along with the indicatives, we find imperatives (cf. e.g. Rom 6:2-10 with 6:11-14; see also 1 Cor. 10:14; 1 Thess 4:9-12). The relation between indicative and imperative in Pauline ethics has often been summarised in the phrase: 'Be what you are!' For Paul it is profoundly true to say that a believer has already died with Christ and is already a new person; yet in the in-between times, the (short) time between the resurrection of Christ and his final return, there is also a sense in which this dying and rising has not yet occurred (hence another popular epitome of Pauline eschatology: 'already but not yet'). The final act in the drama, the defeat of death itself and the day of resurrection, lies in the future, and so the completion of the process of redemption, the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23), is still awaited. While dying with Christ can be spoken of as having already happened, resurrection for the believer remains for Paul a future hope (see Rom. 6:4-5; 8:22-25; Sanders 1977: 449-50, 468; Beker 1990: 73, 85; contrast Col. 2:12; 3:1). In the here and now, Christians must make a commitment; they must 'set their minds' one way and not the other, must live in the power of the Spirit and not allow sin to reign over them (Rom. 8:5-13). They must anticipate what will soon be complete. To this extent Pauline ethics is eschatologically orientated, though the imminence of Christ's return is not, in my view, as controlling a theme as some have suggested (Sanders 1975). Rather, it is their identity 'in Christ' which for Paul lies at the foundation of believers' conduct, and specifically the fact that they are brothers and sisters, co-members of the one body of Christ. On these grounds, and in fulfilment of a commandment of the Jewish scriptures (the command to love one's neighbour; see Lev. 19:18; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14), Christians are urged to be pure and holy, to love one another, to imitate Christ in looking to the interests of the other (e.g. Phil. 2:1-16).

While the theological underpinning of Pauline ethics consists primarily in believers' identity in Christ, and in the need for them to live holy lives in the power of the Spirit, the substance of Pauline ethics is derived from various sources. Already mentioned immediately above are the Jewish scriptures and the example of Christ. Also to be considered are the various parallels between Paul's ethics and various Greco-Roman sources, especially those of the Stoics and Cynics (Malherbe 1989; Deming 1995; Downing 1998), though the extent of such influence on Paul is debated. Paul certainly cites and alludes to the Jewish scriptures in his ethical exhortations (see e.g. Rosner 1994) and is deeply shaped by his Jewish heritage — for example, in his aversion to idolatry and sexual immorality (cf. Rom. 1:18-31 and Wisd. 13–15). However, he makes very little clear reference to the teaching of Jesus. The number of echoes and allusions to that teaching is much disputed, but most scholars are agreed that there are at most only a handful of explicit references (1 Cor 7:10-11; 9:14; 11:23-25; perhaps Rom. 14:14; 1 Thess 4:15-17).²⁹ Moreover, some of these teachings may have come to Paul mediated as Christian teaching or liturgy, so he may not cite them specifically as Jesus' words (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:23-25; 1 Thess. 4:15-17), and in one case, he refers to Jesus' teaching, only to state that he does not follow it (1 Cor. 9:14-15; Horrell 1997a). More important, perhaps, is Paul's emphasis on Jesus as an example, with the pattern of Christ's self-giving serving as a paradigm for Christian morality (Rom. 15:2-3; Phil. 2:3-8; 1 Cor 11:1; see Horrell 1997b: 105-109; Dunn 1994: 168-73).

The power to live a holy life in the in-between time before the return of Christ, is, for Paul, given by the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-17) — 'God's empowering presence', active in the world and in the lives of God's people (Fee 1994). Just as there is a basic contrast in Paul's thought between life 'in Adam' and life 'in Christ', so another clear dichotomy is between life kata sarka ('according to the flesh') and life kata pneuma ('according to the Spirit'). The former produces deeds of wickedness that lead to destruction, whereas the latter produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, and so on (Gal. 5:16-26). More fundamentally than this even, the Spirit is the essential mark of someone's being a true Christian (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:3). The Spirit affirms their adoption as God's children (Rom. 8:14-29; Gal. 3:26; 4:4-7; see Scott 1992), gives diverse gifts for the good of the whole community (1 Cor. 12:4-11), produces the fruit of holy living (Gal. 5:22-23), and groans and prays with the believer in their present time of suffering and yearning for redemption (Rom. 8:26-27). How Paul conceives of the consummation of this process of redemption we shall consider further below.

Israel and the Law

Thus far we have focused on Paul's commitment to Christ, and on how he understands the implications of what God has done in Christ for those who now live as Christians. Yet throughout it is obvious that Paul's gospel is a thoroughly Jewish message, rooted in the Jewish scriptures and in a claim about how the God of Israel has acted in fulfillment of his covenant promises to Abraham. But although the very notion of messianic hope is also entirely Jewish, Paul's insistence that these promises of God have been fulfilled in Christ — beside whom all his Jewish credentials are nothing but 'crap'³⁰ — distances him from his fellow (non-Christian) Jews. For them, there is simply no reason to believe that this crucified messianic leader, despatched by the Romans like so many other deluded characters, marks the pivotal and long-awaited intervention of their God. For Paul, on the other hand, convinced of Christ's resurrection and lordship through his vision, his christophany, Christ is the one in whom God has manifested his saving righteousness and through whom all the nations will come to join Israel in worshipping God, just as the prophets foresaw (Isa. 2:1-5; Micah 4:1-5). One of the most prominent areas of recent discussion in Pauline studies then, and one with considerable implications for Christian theology and Jewish-Christian dialogue, concerns Paul's Christian view of the law which he had as a Pharisee so zealously sought to uphold, and of God's people Israel. Only a very brief sketch of the issues and of recent discussion can be given here.

In seeking to present his gospel as the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel, as the culmination of Israel's hopes, yet at the same time insisting that salvation is to be found, for both Jew and Gentile, only in Christ, Paul is caught in a profound tension. He would never take the route later taken by Marcion, denying that the 'Old Testament' God had anything to do with the God who had acted in Jesus Christ. Paul is insistent that the same God was at work throughout Israel's history and in Christ, and that Israel's law and scriptures, given by God, testify faithfully to God's purposes now fulfilled in Christ. On the other hand, however, since Paul is convinced that salvation is found only in Christ, he has to maintain that Israel's law — the basis of her identity and covenant relationship with God — cannot 'save', for else Christ died in vain (cf. Gal. 2:21).

In short, Paul has to maintain that God gave the law, but that salvation is now found in Christ. He cannot therefore condemn the law, for that would be to deny its God-given nature or to impugn God, but neither can he portray it as sufficient to create a righteous people, for then Christ came to no purpose. Hence we find in Paul both negative and positive comments

about the Jewish law (positive statements include Rom. 7:12, 22; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; negative ones are 1 Cor. 15:56; 2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:10-13 etc.).

The problem over which scholars continue to wrestle, with little apparent agreement, is how to make coherent sense of Paul's view of the law, if indeed coherent sense can be made of his varied and contrasting statements (for overviews of recent discussion see Roetzel 1995; Thielman 1994; Kruse 1997). Discussion of this issue has been decisively influenced by the publication of a book often credited with opening up a whole new perspective on Paul (see Dunn 1983), E.P. Sanders' Paul and Palestinian Judaism (1977). Sanders showed how New Testament scholars, often influenced by a Lutheran understanding of Paul's gospel, had presented a negative caricature of Judaism, portraying it as a religion of 'legalistic-works-righteousness', a religion in which people sought to earn their salvation by notching up a sufficient quantity of 'good works'. Through an exhaustive study of relevant Jewish texts, Sanders sought to demonstrate that this portrayal of Judaism was completely inaccurate. He proposed instead that Judaism's 'pattern of religion' could be epitomised in the term 'covenantal nomism': the basic foundation of Judaism was the covenant, made through the gracious and generous initiative of God, and the appropriate response on the part of those who were members of the covenant people was to live in obedience to the way of life, the Torah or law (Greek: nomos) given by God. Obedience to this law did not earn one's place in the covenant people; it served to sustain and confirm it (Sanders 1977: 419-28).

Sanders' book has given rise to considerable discussion, and books and articles on Paul and the law abound. But whether they agree or disagree partly or profoundly with Sanders, scholars have certainly been forced to consider Judaism at the time of Paul on its own terms, and not rest content with Christian caricatures. In the light of Sanders' work, however, the question remains as to how then to understand Paul's criticisms of the law. Was Paul not attacking 'legalism', and if he was not, what was he criticising and why?

Sanders' own answer is essentially that Paul is reasoning from a new perspective: since he is now convinced that God has acted in Christ to save all, both Jew and Gentile, Paul reasons backwards to the conclusion that all must have needed saving. Paul as a pre-Christian Jew did not feel himself to be labouring under a heavy conscience, under the weight of impossible legal commands; on the contrary, he evidences a robust view of his (previous) status under the law (Phil. 3:6; Stendahl 1976: 78-96). But having become convinced that Christ is indeed God's chosen way to save all people, Paul's perspective on his Jewish past radically alters. 'In short', Sanders argues, 'this what Paul finds wrong in Judaism: it is not

Christianity' (1977: 552). The apparent inconsistency in Paul's statements about the law can be resolved, Sanders suggests, by observing that Paul gives different answers to different questions (Sanders 1983). To the question 'How does someone enter the people of God' Paul's answer is emphatically 'Not by works of law but by faith in Christ' (Rom. 3:28; Gal. 2:16). But on the question of what behaviour is appropriate for those who are 'in' God's people, and wish to remain 'in', the answer is that the law's demands must be fulfilled, not in all its particular requirements (specifically circumcision, food laws and sabbath observance), but in its basic demand of love for one's neighbour (Rom. 8:4; 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14; Sanders 1983: 93-135).

Inevitably, some scholars have not found Sanders' reconstructed Paul convincing, and other attempts to make sense of Paul's view of the law abound. Heikki Räisänen, for example, argues that Paul's statements on the law are more contradictory and inconsistent than Sanders allows and that they simply cannot be reconciled or brought into a coherent schema (Räisänen 1983). Going further than those who have suggested that Paul's views change between different letters, especially between Galatians and Romans (Hübner 1984; cf. Drane 1975), Räisänen maintains that even within one and the same letter, Paul's statements about the Jewish law do not reveal a consistent perspective.

At the other end of the spectrum are scholars who insist that Paul is rather more consistent than scholars like Räisänen allow, but who nevertheless are unsatisfied with Sanders' Paul. Some, while taking Sanders seriously, have argued with renewed conviction the case for a largely 'traditional' understanding of Paul's criticism of the law and his doctrine of justification by faith (e.g. Westerholm 1988; 1991: 57-74; 1997). Others have sought to develop a 'new perspective' on Paul, indebted to, yet differing from, Sanders. James Dunn, for example, regards Sanders' picture of Paul as unsatisfactory, presenting a Paul who simply and arbitrarily jumps from one system of religion to another, without there being any real reason or sense in his critique of Judaism (Dunn 1990: 186-87). Dunn accepts Sanders' presentation of the Judaism contemporary with Paul, and thus agrees that Paul cannot have been attacking legalism *per se*, nor the idea that doing good works could lead to salvation, since Jews did not believe this anyway. Rather, Dunn argues, Paul attacks the way in which the Jews of his time regarded the works of the law as a boundary marker demarcating who is and who is not 'in' the people of God; he attacks their narrow, racially-, ethnically-, and geographically-defined notion of God's people and, in its place, sets out a more 'open', inclusive, form of Judaism (based on faith in Christ). Thus, 'Paul's criticism of Judaism was,

more accurately described, a criticism of the xenophobic strand of Judaism, to which Paul himself had previously belonged... Paul was in effect converting from a closed Judaism to an open Judaism' (Dunn 1998b: 261; cf. 271; 1998a: 137-50, 349-66, 514-19).

However, despite his clear advocacy of a 'new perspective' on Paul, Dunn's Paul is perhaps not as different from the Lutheran Paul as Dunn himself suggests (Matlock 1998: 86; Campbell 1998: 99-101). Instead of criticising his fellow Jews for their legalism, Paul now criticises them for their xenophobia, or ethnocentric separatism, but the basic structure remains the same: there really was a 'problem' with Judaism and Christ really was the answer! That formulation should highlight how theologically loaded Dunn's perspective is; nothing wrong with that, of course, as long as we make clear that this is Paul's Christian perspective on Judaism.³¹ Moreover, what Dunn sees as an 'open' form of Judaism is of course a Judaism (if the term can still be appropriately claimed) based on belief in Christ, with its own forms of particularism and exclusivism (see Barclay 1997). While Dunn is right that Paul did not see himself as in any way betraying his Jewish heritage, his evangelistic message to the Gentiles was entirely based on the conviction that it is in the crucified and risen Christ that God has fulfilled his promises to Israel. His argument only makes sense from that perspective — here I think Sanders is right — and while Paul is utterly convinced of its truth it is equally understandable that most of his Jewish contemporaries were not.

Paul reasons from a 'Christian' perspective. From that viewpoint, a decisive moment has occurred in the death and resurrection of Christ, and a new era has begun. Whereas people previously lived under law, as human beings 'in Adam', enslaved to the power of sin, now they can live in Christ, dead to the old era, alive in the Spirit, by whose power they 'walk in newness of life' (Rom. 6:4). The law belongs to the old era, so even though its righteous requirements will be fulfilled by those who live in Christ (Rom. 8:4; 13:8-10; Gal 5:14), Christians, whether they be Jew or Gentile, no longer live 'under law' (hupo nomon) but live 'in Christ', in the power of the Spirit (Rom. 6:14-15; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal. 2:14-21). To a considerable extent Paul's dispute with his fellow Jews, and specifically with his Jewish-Christian opponents, concerns a fundamental question of boundaries and identity: from a Jewish perspective it is living in obedience to Torah that defines the identity of the people of God called Israel; Paul argues that the people of God — the 'true' Israel, as he sees it — find their identity in Christ alone.

Even that summary, contentious though it doubtless is, raises a further question: Why then did God give the law, if it was inadequate for the task of creating a righteous people?

Paul recognises the force of this question, and attempts a number of answers to it, even though, again, scholars disagree as to how exactly to interpret those answers. Clearly Paul regards the law as given for a time, a time now ended, since Christ has come (Rom. 10:4; Gal. 4:4-5) and God's children have come of age (Gal. 4:1-7). In Galatians 3:19-25, Paul gives the law a temporary and subsidiary role in the purposes of God (cf. Ziesler 1992: 44-49): it was given 'because of transgressions' (that is, probably, to provide a means of reckoning, limiting, and dealing with sin)³² and came 'through angels by a mediator' (Gal. 3:19), a description which relativises the status of the law vis-à-vis the promise made to Abraham (cf. Gal. 3:15-18). The law acted as a tutor, or guardian (*paidagōgos*; Gal. 3:24), until Christ came, in whom people are redeemed from 'the curse of the law' (Gal. 3:13). In Romans 7, where Paul is a good deal less angry and confrontational than in Galatians, he is more concerned to defend the law's status. The bondage of humankind under sin is not the law's fault. On the contrary, the law itself is 'holy, just and good' (Rom. 7:12); the fault lies with sin (portrayed as an almost personified 'power'). In two similar yet different attempts to elucidate this situation, Paul first portrays sin as stealing in to take advantage of the opportunity the law offered (Rom. 7:7-12) and secondly describes a divided self in which the inner self delights in the law of God and wishes to do right, while the outer self is subject to the law of sin (7:13-25; see further Sanders 1983: 65-91). The deliverance from this anguished situation comes through the Spirit-empowered new life in Christ (Rom. 7:24-8:4). The law, then, was given to show what was right and to keep track of sin, but was powerless to liberate humanity from the power of sin, under which all in Adam are enslaved.

A further pressing question underlies all this: What has become of Israel's special status as God's people? Crucial questions concerning God's faithfulness and reliability are at stake here (cf. Meeks 1991): Does God make promises but then break them, or try plan A but abandon it for a new plan if it fails? Here again Paul was aware of the questions, but once more was caught in an awkward tension by the very nature of the gospel he proclaimed. Especially in Romans, Paul tries to hold together on the one hand the assertion that both Jew and Gentile are equally in need of salvation and are dealt with on the same basis by an impartial God (Rom. 1:16; 2:9-11; 3:20, 29-30; 10:12-13), and on the other hand the insistence that Israel does indeed have a special status and that God's gift and call to her are irrevocable (3:1; 9:4-5; 11:29).³³ This awkward tension is clearly visible, for example, in Rom. 3:1-9. To the rhetorical question: 'What advantage, then, has the Jew?' Paul replies, 'much in every way' (3:1-2). Yet only a few verses later Paul refutes any claim to special

confidence or defense on the part of the Jews, since ‘all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin’ (3:9b).³⁴

However, it is in Romans 9–11 that Paul turns to face these issues head on. These chapters are among the most dense and difficult in the Pauline corpus, as Paul wrestles to make sense of God’s purposes and their implications for the people of Israel. Paul’s anguish over the matter is clear (9:1-3) and his need to explain Israel’s lack of faith (in Christ) pressing. Various reasons are given in this profound yet complex argument, as it progresses (and progress it does) through the three chapters. ‘Not all Israelites are true Israelites’, is one argument (9:6-13); ‘God is sovereign and can do as he likes’, is another (9:14-29).³⁵ ‘Only a remnant of Israel is faithful, as at other times in her history’, is a further explanation (11:1-6). Finally, Paul sees a divine purpose in the faithlessness of Israel, and in the faith found among the Gentiles: just as Israel’s rejection meant the offer of salvation to the Gentiles, so in turn the salvation of the Gentiles will make Israel jealous and in the end ‘all Israel will be saved’ (11:7-27; cf. 9:30–10:21; Bell 1994). This is indeed, Paul exclaims, as well he might, a ‘mystery’ (11:25-26), and he does not answer the questions that immediately crop up in our minds: What does he mean by all Israel? Does he mean every individual Israelite who has ever lived, or only the ‘true’ Israelites he referred to earlier? And will Israel be saved when she finally comes to have faith in Christ, or simply as Israel — since God’s gifts and call are irrevocable?³⁶ Yet even the mystery of Israel’s final salvation is only a part, albeit a central one, in the wider mystery with which chapter 11 ends. That is the mystery of God’s plan to have mercy on all people, Jews and Gentiles (11:30-32), a marvellous yet mysterious plan to which Paul can only respond with words of wonder and praise (11:33-36). Here too Paul hardly answers all the questions about which we would like to have heard his views: Does he mean all people? And if he does, how does he hold together the need for people to turn in faith from wickedness to Christ with his conviction that God’s sovereign plan of salvation will ultimately be unstoppable? Without formulating it in so many words, Paul is of course caught on the horns of a well-known theological dilemma: how to hold together both human responsibility and the sovereignty of God. And without denying either side of the tension, it is important to do justice to the theme of God’s universal mercy in Paul, to Paul’s vision of the redemption not only of all humanity but also of the whole creation (Rom. 8:21), not least because these have all too often been ignored. That leads us on to consideration of one final theme: Paul’s hopes for the future, his vision of the eschaton.

The goal of salvation: Paul's view of the eschaton

In his earliest letter, 1 Thessalonians, Paul describes the Thessalonian Christians as having 'turned to God from idols... to wait for his Son from heaven' (1 Thess. 1:9-10). Later in the same letter he deals with the apparent worries caused to some of the Thessalonians by the fact that some of their number had died before this expected return of God's Son (4:13–5:11). The message they had heard from Paul had clearly led them to expect an imminent return of Christ, and an imminent end to the process of their salvation. Paul's response to their worries indicates that he still envisages Christ's return as very near (4:15), and as an apocalyptic event when those in Christ, both dead and living, will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air, to be with him for ever. The precise time is unknown, but the day will come suddenly, 'like a thief in the night' (1 Thess. 5:2; cf. Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39).

By the time of 1 Corinthians it may be that more of the first generation of Christians have died (1 Cor. 15:51; cf. Lüdemann 1984: 239-41) and because of the specific problem Paul is dealing with at Corinth he focuses primarily on the future resurrection of all believers. But the general picture is similar to that in 1 Thessalonians: the final day of victory and resurrection will soon come, following in order from the event of Christ's resurrection, for he is 'the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep' (15:20). On this final day, announced by the sound of the trumpet (15:51; 1 Thess. 4:16), not only will the dead in Christ rise and be clothed with immortality, but death and sin will finally be destroyed; God will complete the task of subjecting all such powers to Christ, and so Christ will be subjected to God, who will be 'all in all' — almost a panentheistic vision of the final consummation of the saving work of God in Christ (see 15:20-28, 35-50; Héring 1962: 169).

Perhaps through the experiences of near-death suffering and imprisonment (Dodd 1934; Harvey 1996), Paul comes in later letters to reflect more on the possibility of his own death, and on the confidence with which he faces death. In 2 Cor. 5:1-5, for example, he describes the transition from earthly life to heavenly life in terms of an unclipping and reclipping: he will one day leave his earthly tent (a metaphor for the body) and put on a heavenly dwelling (cf. also Phil. 1:20-24, written from prison). Whether or not Paul is anxious about the time of disembodiment he might face between death and the final resurrection is not altogether clear,³⁷ but it is clear that his reflections on death are framed by his belief in the final day of judgment (5:10) and his hope for resurrection (4:14; Phil. 3:11). In Rom. 8:18-39 the contrast between the sufferings of the present and the far greater glory to come is powerfully portrayed. Paul is confident that no suffering or hardship — absolutely

nothing (see 8:35-39) — can separate Christians from the love of God in Christ, while they await the completion of the process of redemption which is already begun and anticipated on earth (8:23). Unique to Romans 8 in Paul's writings is the vision of the whole creation yearning for the completion of God's saving work, yearning for the liberation which will come when God's children are revealed (8:20-23).

Although the most extensive discussions of the final day of victory and resurrection are found in Paul's earlier letters, whereas reflections on the prospect of death occur in later letters, the evidence does not really support the idea of a change in Paul's mind, as has sometimes been suggested (Dodd 1934). Changes in emphasis there may be, caused by Paul's own experiences of suffering and imprisonment and by the delay of the Lord's return, but the expectant hope for the final day of salvation is a constant feature throughout (Rom 13:11-13; Phil 3:11, 20-21; 4:5). Paul's theology is eschatologically orientated: he is constantly looking forward amidst the sufferings and pressures of the present to the completion of the process of redemption, the salvation of Israel and of all humanity (Rom. 11:25-32), the liberation of creation, and the resurrection and immortality of God's children. These are the future visions towards which Paul's life and work as apostle of Jesus Christ are orientated; these are the goals which drove him on with resolute determination. 'One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus' (Phil. 3:13-14; NRSV)

PAUL'S LEGACY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT AND BEYOND

Because of the debate about Paul's authorship of some of the letters attributed to him, it is difficult to say where Paul ends and the interpretation of Paul begins. If we accept only the seven letters listed above as authentically from Paul, then the appropriation and reinterpretation of Paul's theology begins in 2 Thessalonians, Colossians and Ephesians (see Beker 1992). In these letters we find characteristic Pauline themes and phrases, yet also significant theological developments, such as the more realised eschatology of Colossians (2:12; 3:1), together with its more exalted Christology (1:15-20; 2:9-10) and more conservative social teaching (3:18-4:1). The Pastoral Epistles stand at an even clearer distance from Paul, with new themes and phraseology reflecting the demands of a different time and context. With the apostle long since dead, and the perceived threat of heretics and false teachers pressing, a prime concern is to preserve and guard what is seen as sound teaching (1 Tim. 1:10; 6:3 etc.), the 'deposit' of the apostolic generation (1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim.

1:14). This deposit, however, appears only in concise credal formulae (e.g. 1 Tim 3:16) and the theological themes characteristic of Paul are hardly developed at all; instead we find an emphasis on the need for behaviour which is decent and respectable (e.g. 1 Tim 3:1-13; 6:1-2; Titus 2:1-10; cf. Verner 1983: 147-60).

It is certainly clear, even within the New Testament itself, that Paul's legacy rapidly became subject to varied and disputed interpretations. The complexity of his letters, and their extended arguments, may well have contributed to the diversity of appropriations of Paul (2 Pet. 3:15-16) and to the tendency to focus on Paul as a heroic apostolic figure rather than on the substance of his teaching (see further Lindemann 1979; Babcock 1990). Paul was as popular — perhaps more popular — with versions of Christianity which were eventually deemed to be 'heretical' as in what we might call 'orthodox' circles, as can be seen from some of the apocryphal literature (e.g. the Acts of Paul) and from the use of Paul's writings by the Gnostics (see Pagels 1975), not to mention his centrality for Marcion. Indeed it can be claimed with some justification that Paul's theology was more frequently ignored or misinterpreted than understood in the subsequent history of the Church.

Paul's writings have, however, played an enormously important role in the thinking of some of the great and most influential figures in Church history. The names of Augustine and Luther are most frequently mentioned. Whether they rediscovered or distorted the apostle's teaching — or perhaps, inevitably, to some degree both — may be open to dispute, but the power and influence of their interpretations cannot be denied. Paul was not 'the founder of Christianity', nor hardly even 'the second founder of Christianity', but his thought and letters were of enormous significance in the construction of Christian, as distinct from Jewish, identity. Paul's letters continue both to inspire and to irritate, to challenge and to confuse, not only within the Christian Church. He remains a mountain on the landscape of Christian history and an enormous influence on all subsequent Christian theology.³⁸

¹ For this image, see the marvellous poem entitled ‘Paul’ by R.S. Thomas (pp. 172-73 in Later Poems, London: Macmillan, 1983).

² Quoted by Beker 1990: 2.

³ A view currently represented by Maccoby 1991. Wilson 1997 also makes much of the influence of non-Jewish religions on Paul; note the critique in Wright 1997: 167-78.

⁴ The precise sense of the Greek historêsai Kêphan (Gal. 1:18) has been much discussed; see e.g. Dunn 1990: 110-13, 126-28.

⁵ For a brief overview of this period from the perspective of the ‘Jewish Christianity’ represented by James, Peter, et al., see Horrell 2000: 000-00.

⁶ See esp. Hengel 1983: 1-29, 53-58; also Wedderburn 1989a; Räisänen 1992: 149-202.

⁷ For criticisms of Hill, see Esler 1995.

⁸ Hengel and Schwemer (1997: xi) date the beginning of the mission of the ‘Hellenists’ in Antioch to c.36/37. They stress the importance of the Hellenists to the early Christian mission, but also emphasise both that this Gentile mission is not strictly pre-Pauline (see pp.31-34, 208, 281, etc.), since Paul was converted in c.33CE, and that Paul was crucial in establishing and justifying theologically the Gentile mission (p.309).

⁹ See, e.g., Justin’s comments on those within the Church who practise the Jewish way of life (Dial. 46-47). On Jewish Christianity and its eventual exclusion from ‘orthodox Christianity’, see Horrell 2000.

¹⁰ I take it that these two accounts describe the same occasion, though that is not universally agreed.

¹¹ There has been extensive discussion of the ‘incident at Antioch’ and the issues surrounding it; see e.g. Dunn 1990: 129-82; Esler 1987: 71-109; 1998: 93-116; Sanders 1990.

¹² See discussion in Murphy-O’Connor 1996: 65-70; Hengel 1991: 63-86; Elliott 1994: 143-80.

¹³ See Segal 1990, e.g. p.6: ‘Paul was both converted and called.’ For an overview of the considerable discussion on this subject, see Hurtado 1993.

¹⁴ Working out the chronology of Paul’s life is complex and difficult, not least because of the paucity of relevant data and the problems involved in correlating the more detailed information in Acts with the primary data in the epistles. On all of what follows in this paragraph, see Murphy-O’Connor 1996: 1-31; Jewett 1979; Lüdemann 1984; Riesner 1998.

¹⁵ On this period, see Murphy-O'Connor 1996: 71-101 and esp. the massive studies of Hengel and Schwemer 1997; Riesner 1998.

¹⁶ It is debated whether Paul's 'law-free' gospel for the Gentiles goes back to his conversion (so e.g. Kim 1982: 56-66, 269-311), or whether he initially required full obedience to Jewish law (cf. Gal. 5:11), or whether indeed he initially preached to Jews rather than Gentiles (so e.g. Watson 1986: 28-31).

¹⁷ For the details of this itinerary see Murphy-O'Connor 1996: 24-31; Jewett 1979:162-65. On Paul's collection see Horrell 1995 and other literature mentioned there.

¹⁸ Cf. Koester 1982: 144-45. For a discussion of this last phase of Paul's life see Murphy-O'Connor 1996: 341-71, who draws evidence from the Pastoral Epistles (especially 2 Timothy, which he regards as authentic) for a rather over-imaginative reconstruction of this phase of Paul's activity, including the idea of a visit to Spain.

¹⁹ Particular mention should be made of the massive recent study of Paul's theology by Dunn (1998a).

²⁰ See Wedderburn 1988; Donfried 1991. It is now widely accepted that Romans is not a systematic compendium of Paul's theology, but is shaped by the particular circumstances both of Paul himself and of the Roman churches.

²¹ See further Wright 1997: 56-57, 88; Horsley 1997. On the use of the title kyrios in the eastern empire see Deissmann 1910: 353-64, and on the deification of Roman emperors, Kreitzer 1996: 69-98.

²² Other passages subject to such debate include Rom. 1:3-4; 8:3; Gal. 4:4.

²³ See further discussion in Dunn 1980: 163-212; Hurtado 1988. Hurtado explores the Jewish evidence for 'divine agency speculation' — that is, concerning 'heavenly figures who are described as participating in some way in God's rule of the world and his redemption of the elect... as occupying a position second only to God and acting on God's behalf in some major capacity' (1988: 17). Hurtado distinguishes three types of such speculation: divine attributes and powers (such as wisdom); exalted patriarchs (such as Moses and Enoch); and principal angels.

²⁴ A different view is taken by Wright 1991: 120-36; 1997: 65-75, who argues that Paul has redefined Jewish monotheism, weaving Christ (and the Spirit) into the very being of God, in a trinitarian manner.

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- ²⁵ Deissmann 1926: 140. According to Deissmann, the phrase ‘in Christ’ (or ‘in the Lord’) occurs 164 times in Paul’s epistles.
- ²⁶ See e.g. Deut. 23:2-9; 1 Kings 18:14, 22, 55. However, sunagôgê appears somewhat more frequently in the LXX than ekklêsia.
- ²⁷ On these ritual dimensions of life in the Pauline churches, see Meeks 1983: 140-63; Horrell 1996: 80-88.
- ²⁸ See Furnish 1968; and the essays by Bultmann and Parsons in Rosner 1995: 195-247.
- ²⁹ See Horrell 1997a: 588-90; Wenham 1995: 3-4. Wenham provides the most detailed recent discussion of this whole area of debate. See also Wedderburn 1989b.
- ³⁰ This is the translation of skubala (Phil. 3:8) suggested by Hays 1989: 122. Whether this is the best rendering has been disputed (see Fee 1995: 319) but the word is certainly a vulgarity referring to filth, dirt, excrement etc.
- ³¹ Matlock is therefore right, in my view, to insist that ‘Paul’s Christian theology of the law has an irreducibly solution-to-plight character that Dunn would avoid’ (1998: 78).
- ³² The meaning of the phrase is much discussed in the commentaries; see e.g. Dunn 1993: 188-90.
- ³³ The recent argument of Stowers (1994) that Paul is addressing Gentiles only in Romans has been refuted by Hays 1996.
- ³⁴ The translation of Rom. 3:9a, it should be noted, is notoriously difficult and open to various possibilities; see Dunn 1988: 146-48.
- ³⁵ Famously regarded by Dodd (1959: 171) as ‘the weakest point in the whole epistle’: ‘man is not a pot; he will ask, “Why did you make me like this?” [9:20] and he will not be bludgeoned into silence’.
- ³⁶ See further discussion in Longenecker 1989; Hvalvik 1990; Donaldson 1993.
- ³⁷ The nuances and ambiguities here are discussed in the commentaries; see e.g. Thrall 1994: 356-85; Barnett 1997: 255-67.
- ³⁸ I am very grateful to David Catchpole for his comments on a draft of this essay, and to Fern Clarke for help in compiling the bibliography. However, I alone am responsible for the opinions, and any errors, in this chapter.