



The Root, the Remnant, and the Branches

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For centuries the man Paul was largely obscured by his letters, which were usually interpreted dogmatically. In the 1830s F. C. Baur initiated the historical-critical study of Paul and his letters, specifically Romans. Baur regarded the letter as addressed to Christians who had converted from the Jewish community. However, his view that the church in Rome was totally Jewish Christian in its constituency met with considerable opposition and was eventually modified.

Today a growing number of scholars locate the origin and reason for writing Romans in Paul's own life. Paul had finished his work in the east, and planned to go to Jerusalem with the collection for the church before beginning work in the west (cf. Rom 15:14-29). A few examples illustrate this trend in interpretation. Günther Bornkamm regards Romans as Paul's mature expression of his missionary gospel.¹ James Martin believes that Romans is rooted in Paul's missionary vision for the whole world.² Franz Leenhardt regards the occasion for the letter to be located in Paul's understanding of what the missionary work in Spain means for the unity of the church.³ Jacob Jervell interprets Romans as Paul's defense speech to the Jerusalem church so that his collection, and he himself, will not be rejected.⁴ Johannes Munck emphasizes the eschatological implications of Paul's missionary work.⁵ The writing of Romans occurred then at a "kairotic" moment in Paul's ministry because the gift from the gentiles to Jewish believers in Jerusalem was an opportunity to bridge the gap between the

¹Günther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 88-96.

²James P. Martin, "The Kerygma of Romans," *Interpretation* 25 (1971) 303-328.

³Franz Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary* (London: Lutterworth, 1961) 12-23.

⁴Jacob Jervell, "The Letter to Jerusalem," *The Romans Debate*, ed. Karl P. Donfried (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 64-74.

⁵Johannes Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (Richmond: John Knox, 1959). For Munck's exegetical study of Romans 9-11, see *Christ and Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967).

two by finding a connection between the gentile and Jewish missions (Romans 9-11).

There has also been a gradual shift among commentators regarding the relationship of Romans 9-11 to the rest of the letter. Once it was claimed that with the ending of chapter 8 "St. Paul has now finished his main argument. He has expounded his conception of the Gospel."⁶ Then too C. H. Dodd suggested that chapters 9-11 may originally have been written as a sermon which Paul preached on appropriate occasions.⁷ In contrast to these earlier views, Krister Stendahl regards Romans 9-11 as the "climax" and "real center of gravity" of the letter, with chapters 1-8 as a "preface."⁸ The "mystery" revealed to Paul was the call to preach Christ among

the gentiles with apostolic authority; the “no” by the Jews opened up the possibility of “yes” by the gentiles (chs. 9-11); in the preface both are found equally culpable (3:9), yet equally capable of being saved (3:21-30).⁹ In addition, there is an increasing emphasis on interpreting Paul’s message in the context of an apocalyptic world view, wherein the horizons of salvation history are pushed back to creation and forward to a new heaven and a new earth.¹⁰

With this background for information and perspective, we turn to an exegesis of Romans 9-11.

I. EXEGESIS

Romans 9:1-5, The Privileges of Israel.

Paul had reached a state of great exaltation at the end of chapter 8; in chapter 9 the mood changes to sober and sorrowful reflection as he considers the fact that Israel has rejected the gospel. The style here is rhetorical.

Israel’s rejection causes Paul great grief (*lupe*) and unceasing anguish (*hodune*) in his heart. The verb form of the latter word is used in Mark 13:8 to express the apocalyptic birth-pangs that precede the end of the age. Paul is *in extremis* with a grief that is both emotional and physical.

The proof of Paul’s sincerity is demonstrated in 9:3 (cf. Moses’ statement in Exodus 32:31-32). Paul could wish himself literally to be “anathema from Christ” for the sake of his countrymen. “Anathema” in the LXX is equivalent to *herem* = (“a thing or person accursed” or “devoted to destruction” in the Old Testament). The phrase “cut off from Christ” probably reverses the integration into Christ in baptism. In human terms the Jews are Paul’s kinsmen, and so he grieves for them. With mournful pride he lists the privileges of “the Israelites,” who are and remain the people God has chosen and on whom he has bestowed these gifts: (1) the adoption (cf. Exod 4:22; Hos 11:1); (2) the glory—the

⁶William Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC, 8th ed.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1903) 225.

⁷Charles H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper, 1932) 148.

⁸Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 3-5 and 27-29. See also Jacob Jervell, *The Unknown Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 36ff., 56-67.

⁹K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 29.

¹⁰In addition to Stendahl, the apocalyptic background of Paul’s letters is emphasized by Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), and J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

Shekinah presence (cf. Exod 16:10); (3) the covenant;¹¹ (4) the giving of the Law; (5) the worship; (6) the promises; (7) the patriarchs; and (8) the Christ, according to the flesh. The Christ, or Messiah, is climactic in the list. He has come forth from Israel, and yet has been rejected by them. This is a disturbing paradox that sets in motion Paul’s argument in the remaining section of chapters 9-11.

The list of gifts is appropriately followed by a doxology which, grammatically and exegetically, is very difficult to interpret. Ernst Käsemann regards Paul’s lament as an introductory counterpart to the doxology in 11:33-36.¹²

Romans 9:6-29, Divine Election.

The introduction in 9:1-5 has sharpened the problem. Since God has given Israel such unique privileges, does Israel's unbelief mean that God's word has failed (cf. 3:3)? This is a very serious question, because it is the word of God that establishes salvation history. Paul's initial thesis in 9:6 (cf. 3:4) is then supported by an analysis of the meaning of Israel.

Structurally the sections in 9:6b-9 and 10-13 are parallel and are brought to a climax in 9:14-24. The goal of the divine election is considered in 9:25-29. If Israel has rejected the message of Christ, has God's promise become meaningless? Has God's word failed (cf. 3:5)? Paul does not answer the question by spiritualizing Israel, as did later gentile Christians (cf. Marcion). For Paul, Israel according to the flesh cannot be shoved aside.

Stylistically the section is a diatribe. Paul is arguing with a typical Jew of his time. So he deals with the issues from a Jewish perspective. Three questions interact and overlap in the discussion: the meaning of Israel's history, the validity of the promise, and the faithfulness of God, which undergirds the first two.

Paul begins his argument with a reference to Israel, using the term in a dialectical way. "Israel" in the covenant terminology did not mean everyone in the historic nation itself. "Israel" is not created by blood and soil, but by God's word and promise. Furthermore, God is not bound by physical descent because his freedom transcends these limitations.

Consider Abraham and his descendants as the prime example. "Children of Abraham" does not mean all physical descendants. Abraham had a number of children besides Isaac (cf. Gen 25:1-4). Isaac's birth occurred when both parents were old and sterile and as good as dead, and this points to God's creative power and freedom to fulfill the promise of offspring for Abraham (cf. Rom 4:19; Gen 17:15-21). Thus Isaac was a child of the promise, while the others, like Ishmael, were children according to the flesh. But a Jew might point out that Ishmael was the son of the slave woman and obviously not the true heir. Paul answers this objection by moving to the next generation (9:10-13). The twins, Esau and Jacob, obviously not only have the same father, Isaac, but also the same mother, Rebecca. It follows that genetic descent is not the determining factor, but God's election. "Jacob I loved (=chose), but Esau I hated (=did not

¹¹There is textual support for the singular *he diatheke* (the covenant) in Papyrus 46, Vaticanus, Codex Bezae, and several of the ancient fathers.

¹²E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 257. There are three ways to translate this doxology: (1) "Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever" (RSV, footnote); (2) "God who is over all be blessed for ever" (RSV); and (3) "He who is God blessed for ever."

choose)."¹³ God's purpose, operating on the basis of election, is sure. It cannot fail.

But if this choice of one and not the other is God's election, isn't this injustice on God's part? Paul had raised the question earlier in 3:5. The answer that he gave, in the following verse, was that the Judge of the world *must* do right, which is not a logical answer. Here, in 9:14, Paul emphatically (*me genoito*) denies injustice on God's part. Yet the denial does not squarely meet the objection. Paul reinforces his answer with another Old Testament quotation, and then concludes: "So it depends not upon man's will or exertion, but upon God's mercy" (9:16). Consider not only God's freedom but also his mercy! Now Paul draws upon a theme which occurs again and again in these chapters and which had been the basis for God's justifying and

saving action in chapters 1-8 (cf. especially 3:21-31).

However, Paul continues to press his argument, using a text from Exodus. It is an argument *ad hominem*, with which the Jew would identify, for he would acknowledge the authority of Scripture which states that God “hardened” Pharaoh’s heart. “Hardening” is an offensive word, and again there is an objection (9:19). If God treats people in this arbitrary fashion, they have no moral responsibility. It isn’t just for God to condemn a sinner whom he himself has hardened! Paul responds in 9:20-21 with more Old Testament imagery, the analogy of the potter and the clay (cf. Isa 29:16; 45:9; 64:8; and especially Jer 18:6). Perhaps every analogy has a weakness, particularly this one. Humanity is not clay, or a clay pot. Every analogy that is sub-personal is suspect! But the purpose of the analogy was not to portray human weakness but to show God as Providence; God as the potter has a plan which he proceeds to execute.¹⁴ The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart is now transferred to Israel. As the hardened Pharaoh once prosecuted the people of God, so now Israel persecutes the church (cf. 9:22-24 with 9:17). The other side of this action is the calling of the gentiles, which is also in accordance with God’s purpose.¹⁵

In 9:25-29 Paul demonstrates that the goal of the divine election, the calling of the gentiles, has a basis in the Old Testament (cf. Hos 2:23 and 1:10). The prophetic oracle originally referred to God’s reclaiming of Israel after she had forsaken God and lost her covenant status. Now Paul daringly, and eschatologically, applies the passage to the gentiles. Käsemann considers this interpretation to be a paradoxical reversal of “the Jew first” theme in 1:16. This discontinuity is characteristic of the apocalyptic reversal of human values (cf. 1 Cor 1:26-31).¹⁶ The quotations from Isaiah in 9:27-29 reinforce this position. Judgment has fallen on Israel. Isaiah had proclaimed that only a minority of historic Israel—a remnant—would constitute part of the chosen people. The unit ends with Paul viewing Sodom and Gomorrah as types of unbelieving Israel (cf. the similar view of Qumran.) Yet there is hope even in this darkness, for God

¹³F. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 250. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 265, notes that this is the one instance of double predestination in Paul’s letters.

¹⁴F. Leenhardt, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 255-56.

¹⁵Thus “vessels of mercy” (9:23) = “us whom he has called” (9:24), consisting of believing Jews and gentiles.

¹⁶E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 274.

has preserved a believing remnant. Exegetically, the term “children” (or “seed”) in 9:29 is identical with the “remnant” in 9:27. With the introduction of the “remnant” he has prepared readers for chapter 11.

Romans 9:30-10:21, Human Responsibility

The previous section had led to a historical and theological paradox—a gentile Christian church confessing a Jewish Messiah who had been rejected by his own people, and this situation was in accordance with God’s purpose. In this section, which is something of a digression from the main argument, Paul struggles with this issue.

Unfortunately, Israel had made the righteousness based on the law its aim. The law itself is good (Rom 7:12), and would have produced righteousness had it been kept (Gal 3:10). But

human beings are weak and sinful; and the law in itself is powerless. Israel had sought the right goal (righteousness) but by the wrong means (the law.)

Paul reaffirms his intense desire and prayer for Israel's salvation in chapter 10. They have a "zeal" for God, but it is a mistaken zeal, for it is based on a misunderstanding of God's righteousness. This has led them to establish a righteousness based on law, which is contrary to the way of faith, for Christ is the "end" (*telos*) of the law for everyone who believes. The word *telos* means "purpose" or "goal" unto righteousness. "Jesus is the goal to which all law and all religion move."¹⁷ God's righteousness is "apart from the law" (Rom. 3:21-22) and the crucified and risen Christ is the "end of the law" (10:4).

Romans 10:5-17 is an example of the process by which scriptural passages and present events reciprocally influence one another in interpretation. Citing Old Testament authorities—Leviticus 18:5 (LXX); Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (LXX); Joel 3:5; Isaiah 52:7 and 53:1—Paul draws a picture of Christian preaching, faith, confession, and the responsibility of hearing, while yet maintaining the connection with Israel. Exegetically, he goes beyond the meaning of the texts in affirming the resurrection and lordship of Christ. The word of faith implicit in Deuteronomy 30:11-12 is now explicitly preached in the "kerygma" (10:9-10). Righteousness is by faith alone for *all* who call upon the Lord; there is no distinction between Jew and Greek (10:12-13). Yet tragically, Israel has not called upon the name of the Lord (10:16), i.e., the Christ who is preached (10:17).

Paul produces a "catena" of Scripture texts that demonstrate Israel's unbelief (10:18-21), arranging them in the artistic form of a chain syllogism. Reflecting his apocalyptic views, Paul already sees the whole world filled with Christian proclamation (cf. 10:18). The catena closes at 10:20-21 with quotations from Isaiah 65:1-2 that summarize Israel's stubborn unbelief. Israel has heard the preached word, but has rejected it, and for that she is responsible and accountable. Yet both the prophetic pleadings and Israel's unbelief are part of God's eternal purpose. And the paradox of the gentiles' faith is matched by the

¹⁷Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University, 1933) 383. J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 237-38, responding to E. P. Sanders' irenic approach to Judaism in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), appropriately asks: "Why did the Christophany evoke such a crisis in his life, one that turned his former allegiance upside down and provoked a view of the Torah that differed considerably from his Jewish-Christian brethren?"

paradox of Israel's unbelief. Having analyzed the existing situation, Paul returns to his main theme in chapter 11.

Romans 11:1-36, God's Work of Grace with Israel.

The style of the diatribe is again evident in this chapter as Paul returns to the theme he had considered in Chapter 9. "Has God cast off his people? Certainly not!" His emphatic answer is based on an important fact: "For I myself am an Israelite." Paul, a Jew and a Messianic believer, is proof that God had not rejected his people.

As scriptural evidence, Paul recalls the story of Elijah and the 7000 in Israel who had not bowed the knee to worship Baal. The nation was not completely apostate then, a faithful minority or remnant remained. Paul's application of this history is obvious: the body of believers in Christ

is analogous to the faithful at the time of Elijah, and their existence is due to God's gracious election (11:5-6). The "remnant," consisting of Jewish Christians of whom Paul is a part, is a sign of God's enduring grace.

There is still the problem of the "rejects" in Israel, however. Paul states the paradox in the form of a rhetorical question (11:7) which sums up 11:2-6. The contrast is between the "elect" and "the rest" (Israel—minus the remnant) who were "hardened." C. K. Barrett comments: "Because those Israelites who were not of the remnant stood outside the relation of grace, the more they sought righteousness (as all Jews did—10:3) the further they fell from it. Their religious enthusiasm was turned to sin."¹⁸ Israel outside of Christ was in a "Catch 22" situation! To explain the hardening there is again the customary appeal to Scripture in 11:8-10 with citations from the prophets (Isa 9:10) and writings (Ps 69:22-23) and the Torah (Deut 29:4). Something more than human stupidity and stubbornness caused their unbelief; there was something "preternatural and mysterious" about it.¹⁹

Following the Old Testament citations, Paul returns in 11:11 to the question he asked in 11:1: "Did they stumble in order to (completely) fall?" Again he gives the emphatic answer "By no means" (*me genoito*). What then has happened? By Israel's stumbling, salvation has come to the gentiles (11:11; cf. 5:20-21). The gentiles' coming to faith will make the Jews jealous. The salvation of the gentiles will be an incentive for Israel to come to faith. Paul's argument, common in rabbinic circles, is an argument "from the lesser to the greater." As their rejection has enriched the world, *much more* their full inclusion. Against Sanday-Headlam and others, Munch argues that "all" (*pas*) does not mean Israel's full number, but rather is parallel with "the fullness of the gentiles," which is the conclusion of the gentile mission.²⁰ Paul is speaking eschatologically.

Paul addresses the gentiles directly in 11:13-15, changing to the second person plural pronoun. Paul is referring to nations and parts of nations, not to individuals. Given the interrelatedness of the salvation of Israel and the gentiles, and his commission to be the apostle to the gentiles, Paul magnifies his office.

¹⁸C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1957) 210.

¹⁹C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 175. Cf. Stephen's statement in Acts 7:57.

²⁰J. Munch, *Christ and Israel*, 136.

He is not on a big ego trip, but affirming his unique role in salvation history as the apostle to the gentiles. When they have come to faith, Israel will also be saved. Again there is an argument "from the lesser to the greater" in verse 15, although it is not as explicit as it was in 11:12: "for if their rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?" "Was ist noch grosser als die Versöhnung? 'Leben aus Toten'"²¹ ("What is greater than reconciliation? 'Life from the dead'").

Romans 11:16 is a transitional verse from 11:11-15 to 11:17-24. Paul's expectation is expressed in two metaphors: the first-fruit and the whole lump (dough), and the root and the branches (tree). Inherent in each is the idea of tribal and national solidarity as well as growth and development.

Paul expands the latter metaphor into an allegory in 11:16-24. Obedient Israel is the cultivated olive tree, and the gentiles are the wild olive tree. The main allegory is this: certain

gentiles, despite their wild origin, may be grafted by faith into the good tree. Interwoven with the main allegory is the sub-allegory. Certain Israelites are like branches broken off from the tree through their unbelief. They are not under judgement, but by repentance may be grafted in again (by coming to faith in Christ). Paul's message is clear, though the botany is puzzling.

There have been generally three interpretations of this allegory. One is that Paul really "blew it" botanically with his illustration. He was a city man ignorant of country ways and horticulture.²² Yet what about the phrase in 11:24 ("contrary to nature") which suggests that Paul might have known better?

A second interpretation suggests that Paul deliberately used the language of paradox in order to bring out a deeper meaning. There is a double monstrosity in the breaking off of the tame branches (rejection) and the grafting in of the wild shoot (election of those outside). But Paul's concern defies every natural analogy. The parable is a lesson in the human nakedness with which we stand before God.²³

Sir William Ramsay has suggested a third interpretation. If a cultivated olive stock was old and leafy but unfruitful, a wild shoot was sometimes grafted into it. Though it was a deliberate reversal of the normal process, it gave the old tree a "kick"—somewhat like a healthy commoner marrying into a royal but badly in-bred family, thereby improving the stock. Paul, himself of the old stock is addressing the young stock, urging them to be grateful and humble. He reminds the gentiles, who have brought vitality to the old stock, that the covenant privileges which they now share are not irretrievably lost to Israel.

Regarding the broken branches in the sub-allegory, Paul's intention was perhaps paradoxical—with the paradox giving an extension to the main allegory. The verb *egkentrizo* ("to graft into") might mean to "re-incorporate" the broken branches.²⁴ Apostate Jews are then reincorporated into the vine by a miracle of

²¹Adolf Schlatter, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit. Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1935) 323.

²²C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 179-80.

²³K. Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 408.

²⁴Cf. the article by Roy A. Steward, "Engrafting: A Study in New Testament Symbolism and Baptismal Application," *The Evangelical Quarterly* (1978) 8-22.

grace as profound as that of reincorporating the broken off branches back on the olive tree.

Paul makes a twofold application of the allegory. First, he warns his gentile readers against self-conceit and contempt for the Jews. Second, if the gentile may lose his salvation by losing faith in God, so the Jew may be restored, or grafted in, by renouncing his unbelief. And it is easier to graft a native shoot into the stock than an alien one.

The conclusion is reached in 11:25-32. Paul's promise is that God's gifts and calling are "irrevocable" (11:29); he is constant and unchanging in his purpose. The theme of "mystery" is intertwined with this premise (11:25). "Mystery" has a wide range of meaning. "Mystery" designates the secret plan of universal salvation (mystery at the level of divine being), which was realized in Christ at the concrete level of salvation history (Käsemann, Beker, and Munck), and finally "mystery" at the human level when the gospel is received by faith.²⁵ It consists of three stages: the partial and temporary hardening of Israel, the salvation of the gentiles, followed by the

salvation of “all Israel.” Whether this latter insight came from sudden revelation (Jervell) or from tradition is impossible to determine.

The phrases, “the fullness of the Gentiles” and “all Israel,” are parallel; *pleroma* in 11:12 then means “complement” or “totality,” as does “all” (*pas*) with reference to Israel in 11:26. The verses express God’s saving purpose or goal for both gentiles and Jews. The conclusion is supported with the customary Scripture quotations (11:26-27; cf. Isa 59:20-21; 27:4).

The theme of God’s mercy as set forth in 11:30-32 is an appropriate summation. Mercy has been the overarching pillar of the discussion from 11:11. In chapter 11 Paul has demonstrated that even Israel’s disobedience is within the parameters of God’s purpose. In fact, God has consigned all to disobedience (cf. 1:18-3:20) “in order that” (*hina*, introducing the purpose clause) he might have mercy on all (11:32). If human beings were not predestined to disobedience, they could not be predestined to mercy, for only sinners can be the object of his mercy.

Paul appropriately ends with a doxology (11:33-36). It is “a doxology in pure God-language” (Stendahl). Stylistically it is a hymn in nine ascending lines, in which Paul weaves together exclamations of awe, Scripture quotations, and a Stoic formula into a unified whole. God’s ways are deeper and more wonderful than any human mind can comprehend. God is the source, agent, and goal of all things (cf. 1 Cor 8:6). Even in the face of Israel’s rejection of the Messiah, God’s power and mystery is at work, and this leads Paul to praise him who remains hidden despite all that he has revealed.

II. HERMENEUTICAL ISSUES

Our discussion has established the centrality of chapters 9-11 in Paul’s letter to the Romans. The exegesis, hopefully, has revealed both the logic and progres-

²⁵Joseph Coppens, “Mystery in the Theology of Saint Paul in its Parallels at Qumran,” *Paul and Qumran*, ed. Jerome Murphy-O’Connor (Chicago: Priory Press, 1968) 132-158. Cf. also J. Jervell, *The Unknown Paul*, 66-67.

sion of Paul’s thought as well as the depth and pathos of his emotional involvement. Rooted by genealogy and heritage in Judaism, he belonged since his Christophany to a remnant that stood in a unique spiritual relationship to the gentile branch of the church. Paul was a member of both faiths, of the synagogue and the church. The tension between the two during Paul’s life eventually resulted in a split that tragically became a wide gulf in succeeding centuries when lovers of Jesus became haters of Jews.

After centuries of alienation and hostility, Jews and Christians are again in dialogue with each other. Even theologically informed Christians have often held the view that, since Israel rejected the Messiah, God in turn had rejected them. The unPauline character of this “replacement theology” is obvious when we read Romans 9-11. This view has resulted in all kinds of Marcionite mischief in Christendom from the second to the twentieth century. Furthermore, such ideas challenge the conviction that God himself is righteous and therefore keeps his promises. If God rejected Israel when he adopted the gentiles, how can we know that he will not reject the gentile Christians for some third community at some future time? To such a mentality Paul’s words echo across the centuries: God’s word has not failed (Rom 9:6); he has

not rejected Israel (Rom 11:1).

On a positive note, Romans 9-11 raises a number of issues where Paul and the modern Jewish-Christian discussion intersect. I suggest three which emerge from these chapters and are of current concern.

The first is general in nature and scope, though central to the dialogue. It concerns the theological (and practical) relationship of synagogue and church. We might say that there are two theologies that are current in the Jewish-Christian discussion: “recognition” and “remnant” theology.

The “recognition” theology stresses mutual recognition and co-existence. Drawing on an analogy from Franz Rosenzweig, Marcus Barth illustrates the relationship by referring to the two sons in Luke 15, the elder corresponding to the Jews, the younger to the gentiles.

The priority and hard labor of Israel is as little disputed as the shameful life of the ‘goi’ with the swine. Their history is different: the one has many things to be proud of; the other has absolutely nothing. But the two are not left to themselves. God is the father of both, and thus they are and remain brothers. It is not the junior brother’s right or mission to reproach his senior. The father has reserved it to himself to call his older son to take part in the joy of his house together with the junior.²⁶

A conciliatory summary of the relation is offered by Hans J. Schoeps: “Sinai and Golgotha, one for Israel and one for the nations of the world, both equally valid but separate in the mind of God who turned to Israel on Sinai and to the nations at Golgotha.”²⁷ “Recognition” theology then presupposes two covenants with two covenantal institutions, synagogue and church, co-existing side by side, each with its own special self-understanding and mission.

The “remnant” theology starts with the conviction that the Hebrew Christian is the bearer of the historical continuity of the early church (Rom 11:1). A

²⁶Marcus Barth, *Israel and the Church* (Richmond: John Knox, 1969) 30.

²⁷Hans J. Schoeps, *Paul* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 258.

prominent Jewish Christian author has summarized the unique position of the Hebrew Christian as follows:

As the Gentile believer is the ‘first-fruit’ of the nations, so is the Hebrew Christian the ‘first-fruit’ of historic Israel. But in respect of history there is a difference between Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus Christ, though theologically there is none. The Gentile, by turning to Christ, renounces his heathen heritage; he turns away from idols to serve the God of Israel. The Jew, by turning to Christ, re-turns to the God of Israel, the God of his fathers. The Gentile therefore always remains the ‘proselyte,’ whereas the Jew is only a returner. This is the very meaning of ‘repentance’—*teshuvah*. The Jewish believer returns to his greatest spiritual heritage by returning to the Messiah; he thus ‘normalizes’ his own position and that of his people. To this return to ‘normalcy’ belongs the acknowledgement of

God's special purpose with his people, the humble acceptance of Jewish failure, and the willingness to carry the burden of Jewish destiny.²⁸

This theology stresses the freedom and responsibility of the individual believer in view of his unique position. Vis-à-vis his fellow Israelites, he is a witness of loneliness and suffering. He is an iconoclast, refusing to accept human traditions as the oracles of God. Vis-à-vis gentile believers he is a watchman, warning against the dangers that emerge when a religious movement is cut off from its roots. He is a visible proof that in Christ the wall of partition between Jew and gentile has been broken down.

A second important issue concerns Paul's understanding and use of Scripture. Is there Jewish precedent for such a varied and multidimensional interpretation of the Old Testament as we have found in Romans 9-11?

Jewish interpretation was, in fact, quite multi-dimensional. Deuteronomy ("second law") itself is an interpretation of the legal tradition of the book of Exodus. There was a rabbinic legend that each of the 600,000 present at the giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai had his own interpretation, and this too was revelation. There was a tradition, based on Psalm 68:11, that every word which went forth from the Lord was immediately divided into seventy languages. Jeremiah 23:29 was interpreted in a similar way: just as a hammer breaks the rock into little pieces, so the word from God breaks into seventy different languages (*Shabbath* 88b). The principle reflected in these examples, and others too numerous to mention, is that humanity at large participates in the revelation of the word of God, allowing for a multiplicity of understandings.

Viewed against this background, we can better understand Paul's use of the Scriptures. On the one hand, Paul appears to be traditional and rabbinic in his appeal to Scripture as authoritative, drawing upon the Prophets and Writings (especially the Psalms) as well as the revered Torah. He knew Scripture from the readings and exposition in the Temple, the synagogue, and the schools. He usually quoted from the Septuagint (about 60 of his more than 70 Scriptural quotations come directly from it), though he used considerable freedom with the text, altering the words or adding a word or phrase where it illustrated or strengthened his argument. Research in Israel's literature and history, its faith and traditions, has demonstrated that Paul's concepts of

²⁸Jakob Jocz, *A Theology of Election* (London: SPCK, 1958) 180-81. For similar views, cf. Leonhard Goppelt, *Jesus, Paul and Judaism* (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1964).

righteousness and sacrifice are close to corresponding Old Testament concepts. On the other hand, there is an innovative and universal dimension in Paul's christological interpretation which, while prophesied in the Old Testament, is *now* presented as fulfilled. The appearance of the risen Christ, or the Christophany, is *the* source of his life and thought as one called to be an apostle, so the Old Testament is interpreted in light of this calling. As the one who ushered in the new age, Christ is even the "end" of the Torah (Rom 10:4). Finally, Paul's apostolic calling to preach to the gentiles is consistent with his understanding of many Old Testament texts which he quoted, and also in keeping with rabbinic views that the word of God was meant for the seventy (gentile) nations.

The third issue, the person and mission of the Messiah, remains the most sensitive of all

the differences between Jews and Christians. Paul's views on this subject have already been discussed. Suffice it to say, by way of summary, that for Paul the gift of the Messiah was climactic (Rom 9:5); that he is the "end" of the Law (Rom 10:4); that faith comes from the preaching of Christ (Rom 10:8-17); and that Israel's rejection of him is the occasion for Paul's personal grief (Rom 9:2-3).²⁹ Nevertheless, God can even make human rejection serve his own purposes. The Jewish rejection of the Messiah has become the occasion for the gentile mission, with Paul as God's commissioned apostle in this eschatological endeavor, and Israel too will finally be restored. "The mission of the apostle is a fantastic detour on the way to the salvation of Israel" (Käsemann).

It is interesting to note the variety of messianic ideas in Judaism just prior to or at the time of the origin of Christianity. While the prevailing popular notion was of a political Messiah in David's line, sectarian views also existed. The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Qumran writings tell about two Messiahs, a priestly and a political Messiah (cf. Zech 4:14; 1QS 9.10; 1CD 12.22). In the Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, the priestly Messiah from Levi is prior to and superior to the political Messiah of the tribe of Judah (*Test. of Simeon* 7:1-3; *Test. of Judah* 21:1-5). Rabbinic writings also reflect a range of views on this subject, showing apocalyptic as well as political features in thinking. The rabbis even admitted a time of suffering prior to Messiah's glorification; when he waited in concealment, the delay in his coming being due to Israel's sin.

Historically the messianic movement which centered on Jesus of Nazareth was but one of a number in Judaism. Zealot enthusiasm produced several messianic figures, the most notable being the second century A.D. Simon BarCochba, whom even Rabbi Akiba acknowledged as the "star out of Jacob" (cf. Num 24:17). In the seventeenth century, Shabbetai Zevi (1626-1676) led an apocalyptic messianic movement that swept thousands of Jews into Shabbateanism.

Existentially there is a challenge to both Jew and Christian in this discussion, but perhaps the greater challenge is to Jews. Confronted with the Christian

²⁹Exegetically, I agree with Nils A. Dahl, *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 155, that God's promises to Israel concern Christ, and that this presupposition underlies the whole discussion in Romans 9-11. The view of K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles*, 3-5—based on the observation that the name of Jesus Christ is not mentioned in Romans 10:17-11:36—that Christian mission efforts among Jews should be held in check, is an argument from silence.

belief that Jesus is the Messiah, Jews are encountering a reality which has endured. Scholem ben-Chorin states the challenge in these words:

What begins with Jesus from Nazareth is the only messianic movement in Judaism that was not an episodic movement; and we can continue these famous words of Gamaliel in Acts: 'If this came from God, you cannot stop it.' It was not stopped. And so it is a challenge to our Jewish existence.... We as Jews, have to realize that what has happened with the movement of Jesus and his followers, is not one of these thirty messianic movements in Judaism, which were like this 'kikayon' plant of the book of Jonah which lasted only one night and was forgotten the next morning.³⁰

H. J. Schoeps' words are an appropriate concluding statement to this particular discussion. He summarizes the difference and the affinity between Judaism and Christianity as follows:

The Messianism of Israel is directed towards that which is to come, while the eschatology of the universal Christian church looks for a return of Him who has come. Both are united in the common expectation that the decisive event is still to come, that event which will disclose the consummation of God's ways with men, already partially and differently manifested in His dealings with Israel and the church. The church of Jesus Christ has kept no picture of its Savior and Lord. But it might well be that He who comes at the end of time, He who has been alike the expectations of the synagogue and the church, will bear one and the same countenance.³¹

Paul's version of the future (Rom 11:25-26), like that of the imminent parousia, has not been fulfilled. The synagogue and church, mutually alienated from each other, have gone their separate ways. The church, which soon became overwhelmingly gentile, has necessarily clothed the gospel in other cultural forms. Yet the synagogue has endured, even when banned to the ghetto by the church. However, in a general sense, the synagogue and church are now partners in dialogue, and this is surely providential, for we are related as root and branches. Through our interaction, we have a common responsibility to supplement each other, while working for a common goal. The synagogue, vis-à-vis the gentile church, points to the living God of the covenant who remains faithful to his promises and his people. The gentile church, vis-à-vis Judaism, bears witness to God's grace of engrafting it, as well as to the climax of God's gifts to Israel, the Christ (Rom 9:5), and through him to the whole world. The Hebrew Christians, the remnant, are neither heretics nor an embarrassment, but that visible sign of God's faithfulness to his ultimate purpose to save "all Israel" (Rom 11:26). Then Paul's vision of God's redemptive plan will have been fulfilled.

³⁰Scholem ben-Chorin, "Two Comments by Scholem ben-Chorin," *Christian-Jewish Relations in Ecumenical Perspective* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, n. d.) 11-12.

³¹For a scholarly work sympathetic to "recognition" theology, see F. Mussner, *Tractate on the Jews*; cf. also the discussion by Pinchas Lapide and Jürgen Moltmann, *Jewish Monotheism and Christian Trinitarian Doctrine* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981). For a representative view of "remnant" theology, cf. the publication edited by Ole Chr. M. Kvarme, *Let Jews and Arabs Hear His Voice* (Jerusalem: United Christian Council in Israel, 1981).