

Divergent Images of Paul and His Mission

Examples from the Reception of Romans in the Twentieth Century

A CERTAIN DUPLICITY IN PAUL'S Letter to the Romans has been observed by a number of interpreters from C. H. Dodd in his 1932 commentary *The Epistle to the Romans* in the Moffatt series to more recent scholars such as Heiki Räisänen¹ of Helsinki, Francis Watson of London,² and Charles Cosgrove³ in the USA. Although there are several points where lack of clarity or consistency emerge, the most frequently discussed chapters tend to be chapters 9 and 11, which are seen by quite a few scholars as somewhat at odds with each other.

C. H. Dodd sets out the issue with exquisite clarity: "The fact is that the whole argument of 3:1–8 is obscure and feeble. When Paul who is normally a clear as well as a forcible thinker, becomes feeble and obscure, it usually means that he is defending a poor case. His case is inevitably a poor one, since he is trying to show that, *although there is no partiality about God*, yet the Jew's superiority is, somehow, *much in every way*. It is no wonder that he becomes embarrassed, and in the end dismisses the subject awkwardly."⁴ Dodd continues in similar vein on Rom 3:9 "Well, now, are we Jews in a better position? Not at all. Though temporarily and relatively the Jews have a certain advantage, yet in an absolute view of the matter, that advantage

1. Räisänen, "Paul, God, and Israel: Romans 9–11 in Recent Research," 178–206.

2. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*.

3. Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel: The Puzzle of Election in Romans*.

4. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 46.

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vanishes. This is very near to his (Paul's) conclusions in chapters 9–11, and it is at least a possible interpretation of the Greek here."⁵

Dodd's diagnosis of the reasons for Paul's weak arguments was that Paul had argued from the promise to Abraham on two divergent and perhaps inconsistent lines⁶ and his logic was vitiated by his emotional interest in his own people. Logically, the Jew can have no advantage whatsoever, but "the trouble is that the 'Jewish objector' is in Paul's own mind. His Pharisaism—or shall we say his patriotism?—was too deeply engrained for him to put right out of his mind the idea that somehow the divine covenant with mankind has a 'most favoured nation clause.'"⁷

A brief glance at Francis Watson's criticisms will illustrate similar problems with Paul's argument: "It is ironic that Paul's arguments for the consistency of God in 9–11 are themselves inconsistent, for Romans 11 is based on the definition of the chosen people rejected in Romans 9."⁸ Räsänen's criticisms are similar. E. P. Sanders, on the other hand, maintains that part of the problem with Paul is his method of argument—the apostle does not, as we would normally expect, argue from problem to solution but on the contrary, from solution back to problem. Nevertheless, Sanders too admits in relation to chapters 9–11 that what is noteworthy is not so much the ideas they contain but the feelings of anguish, concern, and triumphant expectation that Paul expresses in relation to his own people.⁹ Paul's solution in chapter 11 is a "somewhat desperate expedient" to meet the problem of "competing convictions which can be better asserted than explained": of reconciling native convictions with those received by revelation. Paul's anguish is that he seeks desperately for "a formula which would keep God's promises to Israel intact, while insisting on faith in Jesus Christ."¹⁰ The fact that we are confronted by a variety of readings of Paul's letter is occasioned largely by the difficulty of his topic as much as by his style and method of argument—the use of diatribe style in large sections of the letter and the frequent recourse to the Hebrew Scriptures, especially in chapters 9–11, increase the potential for diverse readings and charges of at least apparent inconsistency. We are particularly interested in the canons of consistency, the standards of measurement, the criteria by which we are to esteem one reading as more acceptable than another. In this regard it is illuminating to

5. *Ibid.*, 47–48

6. *Ibid.*, 183.

7. *Ibid.*, 43.

8. Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 168.

9. E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* 193.

10. *Ibid.*, 197–99.

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note the charges or explanations that are stated as reasons for Paul's failure to convince or to maintain consistency.

Consider the following proposed reasons: The apostle has confused relative advantage with absolute advantage, perhaps because of patriotic and emotional attachment to his own people;¹¹ anguish and concern to solve an insoluble problem;¹² a new revelation received as Paul wrestled with the subject matter in writing Romans;¹³ either one has to conclude that Paul was capable of thinking coherently only for very short periods of time, or if one rejects an artificial harmonizing process the only possible solution lies in examining afresh the social context and function of Romans in order to make coherent sense of it.¹⁴ We note in passing the need to be careful lest we seek anachronistically to judge Paul by our standards of logic and consistency and the need also to maintain an awareness of the fact that Paul was operating in a very different culture to ours where somewhat different standards of consistency—perhaps even of rationality—and methods of argument applied. Paul was after all seeking to convince a first-century audience and we must not judge him as if he had targeted us.

But allowing for all the explanations and or reasons that help us to understand the apostle and his letters, it must still be noted that the most powerful voice that can be raised against the apostle is his own. This can have three main forms. The first form of Paul's voice comes from his other letters written prior to Romans. From them, particularly from Galatians, we know the content of Paul's gospel already and we legitimately expect what we find in Romans to harmonize with this, the Early Paul, or at least the Earlier Paul. The second form of Paul's voice emerges not so much from what he said as from what he did—his missionary activity as apostle to the gentiles—we expect him to fight for them and to uphold their rights. The third form of Paul's voice is however the most powerful of all and it is this that raises such difficulties in Romans. In the earlier part of the letter even up to the end of chapter 9, or perhaps for some, the end of chapter 10, many see what they recognize as the familiar (Earlier) Paul. But in chapter 11 another voice of Paul suddenly and surprisingly appears, what we might call the Later Paul. This "Paul" seems to some to be completely at odds with the Earlier Paul, and contrasts sharply with the previously well-known pattern of his life and his publicly proclaimed gospel in his letters to other churches.

11. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 43.

12. Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 199. Räisänen, "Paul, God, and Israel," 195–96.

13. Noack, "Current and Backwater in the Epistle to the Romans," 165–66.

14. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 170.

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Is the different voice the result of the apostle facing a changed situation, or the outcome of a development in his thought?

Which is the genuine voice of Paul? Will the real apostle stand forth! Various strategies may be adopted here. One is to put all the weight on Rom 1–8, 1–9, or even 1–10, and to interpret Rom 11 from the perspective of the rest of the letter, thereby reducing the significance of its specific contribution. This has been a dominant pattern among some Lutheran interpreters,¹⁵ but there are many parallels in Dodd. Dodd was of the opinion that Rom 12:1ff. seems to be the real sequel to 8:39, rather than chapters 9–11, which are a somewhat self-contained unit, a treatise or sermon possibly in existence prior to the writing of Romans.¹⁶ The surprise resulting from the inclusion of 9–11 at this point arises from the fact that Paul has earlier in the letter apparently spoken of the abrogation of the privilege of Israel in a dispensation in which no distinctions are drawn.¹⁷ Effectively this means in practice ignoring or dismissing at least part of chapter 11, and presuming we already know and understand the *authentic* Paul without the wisdom or otherwise of chapter 11. The outcome of this may well produce a view of Israel entirely at odds with Paul's conclusion at the end of Rom 11. Israel is not saved but has lost any special status whatsoever; according to Klein, Paul's theology "radikal entheiligt und paganisiert . . . die Geschichte Israels."¹⁸ Klein's perspective typifies the approach of those who tend to force the contents of Rom 11 to fit the mould of the Paul they already know and understand from elsewhere—the apostle to the gentiles, or more specifically, the Paul of Paulinism.

Klein's essay was written, of course, some thirty-five years ago, and we must allow for the changes and development in interpretation since then. Nevertheless, there are close parallels even in a very recent study. Cosgrove cannot help stressing what a surprise is the content of 11:25f. in an otherwise coherent argument in Romans. Because of this he asks, "If what Paul affirms about Israel in Romans 11 comes as a surprise, that in itself shows how strong the countervailing reading of Romans 9 is."¹⁹ Again he questions, "If Paul's teaching about divine impartiality seems to contradict the notion of a special election of the Jewish people, is it reasonable to affirm

15. Dahl, in a review of Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, noted that whilst Bultmann had much to say about Rom 1–8 he had relatively little to say about chapters 9–11, cf. *Theologische Rundschau* xxii (1954), 21–40.

16. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 148.

17. *Ibid.*, 151.

18. G. Klein, "Römer iv und die Idee der Heilsgeschichte," 441.

19. Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel*, 29.

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that special election when one can also reasonably construe his arguments in a way that does not require this conclusion?”²⁰

What emerges from the above overview of opinions is that chapter 11 has become a focal point in the discussion. This marks a refinement of the earlier view that sought to interpret 9–11 from the perspective of 1–8, and thus somewhat neutralize its contribution, but now it is recognized that chapters 9–10 fit reasonably well with the content of 1–8. This in effect isolates chapter 11 and highlights apparent discrepancies between its contents and those of chapter 9.²¹ Thus Rom 11, and especially its conclusion, comes as a somewhat surprise intrusion in a letter that can be consistently interpreted in a direction other than what this chapter suggests. This probably indicates that the work done in recent years on the connections between 1–8 and 9–11 has been partially successful in demonstrating real links across these chapters. But the problem of perceived contradictions between the content of chapter 11 and that of chapter 9 or of the whole of the earlier part of the letter, for some scholars at least, remains a serious obstacle.

One possible explanation of this interpretative conundrum that faces us in the history of the exegesis of Romans is not just that there are divergent readings of the letter itself, but rather that there were already in existence, whether implicitly or explicitly, divergent understandings of the significance of Paul’s gospel and mission. It may in fact be the existence of these that forms part of the explanation for the parallel, if not conflicting, readings of his letter to the Romans.

Paul, Champion of the Gentiles: The Partisan Paul

If the Romans were aware even indirectly of the contents of Galatians and possibly of some of his other earlier letters, and knew a certain amount of information, reliable and otherwise, about the apostle to the gentiles who had promised to visit them for some time now, then they already would have formed a specific view of Paul and his theological opinions, especially in respect of the gentiles. They would certainly have been familiar with a rough outline of his gospel. We need to differentiate between what Paul knew of the Romans and what they thought they knew about him. Thus although he had not yet been to Rome, Paul was not a complete stranger to the Roman Christians.

20. *Ibid.*, 37.

21. Cf. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 168–72; Räisänen, “Paul, God and Israel”, 182, 192f.; and Cosgrove, *Elusive Israel*, 30–37.

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It would appear, however, that their perception of the apostle may, in fact, have been slightly suspect, especially as to how they understood the significance of his gentile mission. Paul may have been understood by the Roman gentile Christians as being pro-gentile and conversely as being indifferent to Jews. Paul's inclusion in the letter of phrases such as "to the Jew first" may indicate a correction of their viewpoint in this area. This hypothesis would gain support also from the content of 11:13ff, where it is clear that Paul wishes to correct the gentile Christians' self-understanding in relation to Israel.

If we can project an image of Paul as he can be understood from his personal experience of call, etc., from his writings prior to Romans (or reports of same), and from the impression created by his mission to the gentiles (such as the creation of mainly gentile communities exercising a certain degree of freedom in relation to the Jewish law), then we can envisage how Paul might have been viewed by the gentile Christians at Rome. He was probably seen as the champion of the cause of gentiles throughout the church and at the council of Jerusalem and so forth, a pro-gentile Paul committed to winning the gentile world and indifferent to the concerns of Judaism.

In many ways this pro-gentile Paul is very similar to the Paul of liberal scholarship as reflected in the work of someone like C. H. Dodd. The emphasis upon "no distinction" and upon the universal scope of the gospel are only two aspects of this portrait. But it includes the assumption that Jews who accepted the gospel, even those not situated within the Pauline mission area, would cease to associate with the synagogue community and probably also cease to abide by the Mosaic law. An associated mindset may have been the tendency to view almost all Paul's opponents as Judaizers. At every point of contact, Paul seems to be in conflict with Jewish Christians and the Jerusalem Christian leaders. This reading derived much of its strength from the Lutheran tendency to stress the antithesis between the gospel and the law. It was therefore simply assumed that Paul and his gentile mission were engaged in an ongoing war with Jewish Christians and Judaism, two competing cultures and missions. Existentialist theology such as that of Rudolf Bultmann also did little to challenge the prevailing current of opinion, mainly because of a lack of interest in historical continuity between the old and the new. So the continuity between Paul's gentile communities and the Jewish roots of their faith was seldom stressed whilst radical discontinuity was everywhere assumed.

It is difficult to be precise in broad areas of interpretation such as these, but it would appear that here we have in outline the generally accepted image of Paul and his mission, which continued to dominate until about 1970, and

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which is still viewed by many as the norm even up to the present time. An alternative opinion was already in process with the work of Johannes Munck in the 1950s.²² Munck's interest in a fresh appraisal of Paul's thought, especially as represented in Rom 9–11 was, more than a decade later, advanced by Krister Stendahl's timely stress upon Paul's thought and mission as encompassing real Jews and gentiles.²³ The solid mold of Pauline scholarship had been broken and this opened up the way for a fresh appreciation of the apostle particularly from the perspective of Romans, around which an increasing volume of scholarship would rapidly concentrate.

The outcome of this scholarly development has gradually led to a re-discovery of the Jewishness of Paul and therefore to a more balanced reading of his theology and practice. The new perspective on Paul necessarily took account of a fresh understanding of Rom 9–11, particularly as these chapters could no longer be viewed as being simply an appendix of secondary importance in the interpretation of the letter. Assisted as it was by the growing interest in the relevance of the Holocaust for the interpretation of the New Testament, by a blossoming interest in a sociological approach to the study of the Christian origins,²⁴ and by recent critiques of the Lutheran understanding of faith and works, the scene was set for a revised understanding of Paul's thought and work. This radical reassessment of Paul is well demonstrated by the coining of the now well-known term "The New Perspective on Paul" by James Dunn.²⁵

In my opinion, the conflict surrounding the question of contradictions in Paul's thought arises mainly from a debate as to what constitutes the "real Paul." Is he the heroic Paul who is depicted as the champion of the gentiles, or is he the "revised Paul" of Romans, especially of Rom 11? To put it another way: is the real Paul to be identified with the previous pro-gentile image of the apostle, or with the recent more Jewish Paul identified in Romans, particularly in chapters 9–11? Is the apostle really pro-gentile (partial to gentiles and their cause) or is his gospel "to the Jew first and also to the gentile" (inclusive and impartial)?

The answer we give to these questions is crucial if we are not to be left with two very divergent images of the apostle and his mission. Is it really likely that Paul would recognize the rights of Jewish Christians in certain situations to continue to abide by the law? Would he not have advocated

22. Munck's study of Rom 9–11, *Christ and Israel*, was completed in Danish in 1952 as a prelude to his better known *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*.

23. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays*.

24. See for example, Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity*.

25. Dunn, "The New Perspective on Paul."

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that they forsake the synagogue? Did he recognize continuing distinctions between Jews and gentiles even in Christ, so that ethnic differences remain a consideration in some contexts? Did he stress a certain priority for the Jew in the purpose of God and did he really hold that God had not cast off Israel, but would still save “all Israel” in some miraculous way in the future? It could, of course, be argued that this revised reading of Paul emerges from post-Holocaust guilt²⁶ and that we are now trying to update our image of him to suit a revised understanding of what constitutes liberal Christianity. We are perhaps, after all, still “discovering” the image of Paul we expect to find. Whatever our response to this issue, it is necessary to look again at some of the texts where our conflicting images of Paul are generated, and to seek afresh to assess to which image they give most support.

Continuity between Romans 3–4 and Romans 9–11

There are obvious links between chapter 3:1ff. and chapters 9–11, which we do not need to discuss in detail here: the advantage of the Jew, the value of circumcision, and the faithfulness of God despite the faithlessness of Israel are clearly common themes noted in chapter 3 to be dealt with in detail later. There are, however, other points in chapter 4 that again point beyond themselves to an anticipated later sequel. Adolf Schlatter correctly perceives the relevance of Abraham in chapter 4 for the rest of the letter. “If this section of the letter were missing, much of the clarity of the second part of the letter would be removed. Why are there two types of sons of Abraham, and why is Israel the olive tree into which the believer is grafted?”²⁷

One of the more interesting of these “forward looking” passages is 4:16 where the aim of Paul’s discussion of Abraham’s faith is clearly indicated. In a tightly constructed argument, Paul asserts that faith and grace were necessary ingredients in guaranteeing that the promise would be realized for all the seed of Abraham, *not only* for those who adhere to the law, *but also* for those of the faith of Abraham. We wish to note the inclusive emphasis and form of argument here, “father of us *all*,” designed to specifically include both those who may be of Jewish origin as well as those of gentile origin.²⁸

26. See Chae, *Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles*. If there were no intrinsic connection between Christian anti-Judaism and the Holocaust, Chae’s thesis would be more convincing.

27. Schlatter, *Romans: The Righteousness of God*, 107.

28. Franz Leenhardt (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 119) rightly criticizes Otto Michel’s view (based, probably, on 4:11) that for Paul Abraham is the father of the uncircumcised much more than of the circumcised. Michel (*Der Brief an die Römer*, 167–71), however, correctly emphasizes that the discussion in Rom 4 is not about the faith of individuals but rather about Abraham’s “house,” “Abrahamskindschaft.”

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Paul does not argue exclusively (*either Jews or gentiles*). He argues inclusively (*not only Jews but also gentiles*), and the surprise use of $\acute{\omicron}\iota\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\ \nu\omicron\mu\omicron\upsilon$ in a neutral rather than a pejorative sense underlines that he specifically wishes to stress “the national reference,”²⁹ the inclusion of Jews *as Jews*. We would wish to insist that the emphasis here is not simply on the inclusion of gentiles, but on the inclusion of *both* Jews and gentiles.³⁰

This form of argument is fairly typical of Paul’s mode of arguing in the entire letter. Another interesting use of the same argument occurs at 9:24, again at the high-point of a discussion. In 9:23 Paul speaks of vessels of mercy as the goal of the divine purpose, and in the following verse he further elaborates on the composition of these vessels as being “not from the Jews only but also from the gentiles.” What is obvious here is that Paul uses a Jewish form of argument—not only from the Jews, as if there was no need to discuss this and as if what follows was the surprise element, “but also from the gentiles.”³¹ Now it could be argued that in both places, 4:16 and 9:24, Paul’s concern is to argue for the inclusion of gentiles, as gentiles, in the people of God. This is not in my opinion his primary intention.

It is clear that Paul is deliberately arguing for an inclusive salvation that includes Jews *as Jews* as well as gentiles *as gentiles*. It is pointers such as these—and more could be enumerated—which indicate that there is a real continuity in subject matter as well as intent between Rom 3–4 and 9–11. There seems to be real continuity in substance between these sections. This will become clearer as we turn to consider the relationship between chapter 9 and chapter 11, as well as their place within the letter as a whole.

Romans 9 and the “Surprise” Ending to Romans 11

Räsänen is certainly correct in his comment that “Romans 9–11 has long been a test case in Pauline exegesis. Decisions made concerning the internal consistency or inconsistency of these chapters, or concerning the place

29. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, 216. Dunn also correctly notes that the inverted order, uncircumcised followed by circumcised, is due simply to following the sequence of events in Abraham’s case, and does not contradict the “not only but also” pattern we have noted (*ibid.*, 211). Nor does it indicate a complete rejection of Jewish salvation history as Klein asserts (“Römer 4 und die Idee der Heilsgeschichte,” 434f.).

30. That this is so should have been evident from the very different understanding of $\sigma\pi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\mu\alpha$ in Gal 3:16f. and Rom 4:13f. In the former it is interpreted in relation to the one seed, Jesus Christ, but in the latter specifically with reference to *two* peoples. Cf. Beker, “The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel in Paul’s Letter to the Romans,” 327–32 (329).

31. Cf. Dahl, “The Atonement—An Adequate Reward for the Akedah?” 27–28.

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of the thoughts expressed in them in Paul's theology at large, will deeply influence—or quickly reveal—one's understanding of many central issues of New Testament interpretation.³² Some scholars, such as Dodd, have expressed surprise that Paul did not conclude his theological argument with the high point reached at Rom 8:39. This is partly because 12:1ff. seems to be a theological sequel to 8:39 rather than the somewhat self-contained and compact argument of 9–11 that “can be read quite satisfactorily without reference to the rest of the epistle.” This section was possibly in existence as “a separate treatise which Paul had by him, and which he used for his present purpose.”³³

Dodd is aware, of course, that the inclusion of Rom 9–11 has been hinted at or envisaged at earlier points in the letter and admits it is likely that Paul already knew that he was going to use his sermon on the rejection of Israel when he briefly discussed the difficulties raised in 3:1–9. The surprise presented by the inclusion of chapters 9–11 is, according to Dodd, that Paul has apparently already spoken of the abrogation of the privilege of Israel, in a dispensation in which no distinctions are drawn.³⁴ As Dodd understands Paul's argument, the promise is not broken even if the *entire nation* is rejected.³⁵

Few scholars would favor Dodd's reading here. Schlatter sees the connection between the two sections of the letter very differently. “The question, for what purpose did God make Israel and what does he make of them now, was precipitated by all of the following: The designation of the message of Jesus for the Jew first (1:16); the rejection of any favouritism for Israel on God's part.” Schlatter gives seven more reasons from Rom 1–8 why the new topic rises with compelling urgency from the concluding sentence of chapter 8. He then goes on to note, “How woefully limited the interests of the Reformation's interpretation of Romans remained is demonstrated with unusual force in Calvin. He was completely surprised by the new section and saw no connection between it and the first section.”³⁶

Those for whom the inclusion of Rom 9–11 are a surprise are obviously missing something that was implicit if not explicit in Paul's reasoning in chapters 1–8. Whether or not the implicit logic of Paul's argument would permit the rejection of “all Israel,” Paul himself could not entertain such a

32. Räisänen, “Paul, God, and Israel,” 178.

33. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2.216.

34. *Ibid.*, 151.

35. *Ibid.*, 155; Räisänen, “Paul, God and Israel,” 184; Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 162–63.

36. Schlatter, *Romans*, 200.

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scandalous notion—“God forbid!” was his response. Schlatter is probably correct in claiming that “only the one who grieves over Israel’s fall speaks correctly about it.” To Christ Paul attributes the fact that he does not take pleasure in gloating over Israel’s misery and that he does not merely stand before them as the angry messenger of judgment.³⁷

Implicit in Paul’s argument is that the faith of the gentiles in Christ is the outcome of God’s promises to Abraham (cf. Rom 4:17ff.), and that Abraham is not merely a fine example of a man who believed as a gentile, but rather the first of the faithful to whom all subsequent believers are deeply indebted. Gentile believers in Christ are deeply indebted also in that they are grafted into the stem of Abraham, as 11:13ff. will make plain. The gentile branches are dependent on the stem of Abraham, and if this ceased to exist, or if they were separated from it, they too would fall.³⁸ Implicit here is the assumption that God is faithful to his covenant and that he will preserve his people to such an extent that his purposes for them will not fail. The latter is made explicit only in chapters 9–11. The righteous “remnant” concept, to be developed gradually from 9:6ff. through to chapter 11, assumes that God always maintains by his grace a faithful minority, and moreover that he will never cease to do so. The implicit thinking behind this appears to be that it is in and through this remnant that God’s long-term goals for Israel will be attained. In Paul’s thought, gentiles can share in Israel’s inheritance only with and through this righteous remnant. So the salvation of the gentiles assumes the prior realization of the promise for Israel, and therefore excludes the possibility of a salvation for gentiles alongside the *complete failure* of the promise to Israel; that is, even the concept of a gentile “new Israel” is ruled out by this.³⁹ For Paul, the option of salvation “also for the Greek” presupposed that it is enjoyed by “the Jew first.” For Paul, if not for his interpreters, it was meaningless to consider the election of gentiles apart from the election of Israel; it is this that constitutes the priority of Israel.

In fairness to those interpreters whose readings perceive Rom 9–11 as somewhat of a surprise, it has to be acknowledged that it is only in these chapters that Paul spells out what seems to have been until now only implicit. The problem for these, as for the first interpreters to whom the letter

37. Ibid.

38. Schlatter (*Romans*, 223; cf. 107) develops this further: “The existence of a people of God is not due to those in the church who believe in Christ; rather, because there is a people of God, they are its members.”

39. As Beker (“The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel,” 330) notes, “Such a rejection of Israel by God would simply cut the connection of the gospel to its foundation in the Hebrew scriptures and degrade the God of Jesus Christ into the God of Marcion—a ‘new God’ who has no relation either to creation or to Israel’s salvation history.”

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was addressed, is that we all bring to these chapters preformulated views of the apostle and his thought that may need to be somewhat revised in the light of their content.

Paul appears to be insisting that it is not enough that individual Jews find faith in Christ; he wants the salvation of Israel, but not simply as a small remnant attached to a predominantly gentile church. Thus, although his arguments in Romans may be read in light of the principle “there is no distinction” (Rom 3:22; 10:12), and this might imply that since there can be no favoritism for Israel, then the elect may indeed be a purely gentile phenomenon, this does not appear to be what Paul had in mind. It is here that we must stress again Paul’s formula “to the Jew first and also to the Greek,” which indicates that what he intends to argue for is an extension of Israel’s privileges to gentiles (rather than a transfer of them away from Israel). Paul’s formula is thus an affirmation of Israel’s status as the covenant people rather than an annulment.⁴⁰ But what has not always been realized is that the two elements—affirmation of Israel’s covenant and its extension to gentiles—belong together in Paul and are certainly not mutually exclusive, as might have been anticipated. Paul’s theme in Romans, therefore, is *not* that the goal of the divine purpose is the salvation of the gentiles; it is rather the salvation of Jews and gentiles both.

This is where unconscious assumptions may color interpretation and lead to very divergent readings of the same text. This is clearest in the interpretation of Rom 9. Watson objects to the content of chapter 11, which seems to suggest that the ultimate purpose of Paul’s gentile mission is not the salvation of gentiles, but the salvation of Jews, whereas “elsewhere the salvation of the Gentiles, together with the Jewish remnant, is itself seen as the ultimate goal of God’s purposes.”⁴¹ The passages that Watson cites in support of his reading are 4:16ff. and 9:24ff. I want to question whether these are in fact supportive, because, as already noted, these are verses that repeat the formula, “not only . . . but also,” which I have argued stresses the inclusion of gentiles alongside Israel, as an extension of Israel’s covenant. We need to look more closely at 9:24, as this is crucial to our discussion.

40. The occurrence of *βεβαίος* in Rom 4:16 (as also *βεβαιῶσαι* in 15:8 in a final construction) denotes “legally guaranteed security” (Dunn, *Romans* 1–8, 216). The latter verse with its reference to Christ indicates the intertwined relation of the salvation of Jews and gentiles in Paul’s thought; as Fitzmyer (*Romans*, 704) renders it, “Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s fidelity, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs, and Gentiles have glorified God for his mercy” (emphasis mine). Note there is no exact parallelism between the patriarchs and gentiles.

41. Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 169.

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The dominant theme in Rom 9–11 is the people of Israel, and only indirectly and in relation to this, the inclusion of gentiles. In chapter 9 gentiles are introduced only at two points: 9:24 and 9:30. In 9:30 the reference to gentiles enters merely as a foil to contrast their success with Jewish failure, so we will concentrate on 9:24 to see whether there is any basis here for the view that this chapter sets out a charter for God's election of a new people (as Watson reads).

Watson notes that whereas in Rom 11:1ff. “his people” (τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ) refers to the present generation of Jews, in 9:25, in diametrical opposition, “my people” (λαόν) refers to gentile Christians.⁴² We need to look more closely at the text. Paul cites from Hos 2:23, “Those who were not my people I will call ‘my people,’ and her who was not beloved I will call ‘my beloved.’” Dodd voices the sentiments of many commentators when he states, “It is rather strange that Paul has not observed that this prophecy referred to Israel, rejected for its sins, but destined to be restored.” But it was Dodd's further comment that aroused my curiosity and caused me to look more closely—“strange because it would have fitted so admirably the doctrine of the restoration of Israel which he is to expound in ch. 11.”⁴³ Further evidence for the strangeness of Paul's application of Hosea's words to gentiles is demonstrated in the two further citations that succeed this one. Fitzmyer points out that “whereas Paul quoted Hosea's promise apropos the Gentiles, he will next quote Isaiah's admonition apropos of Israel.”⁴⁴ Surely, Paul himself must have been aware of the arbitrariness of his application of Scripture in the space of a few chapters. And of course, it seems foolish that he would not avail himself of the benefit of a scriptural text that offered apparent support for the restoration of Israel, a desired outcome toward which his own argument is tending.

An alternative reading of Rom 9 may be required in order to clarify Paul's consistency. According to this reading, the chapter is not a further argument for the inclusion of gentiles—as if 9:24 were the point toward which all of Paul's argument is tending, as if the inclusion of gentiles were in and of itself the goal of God's purpose, the thing in need of justification. But neither the starting point of the chapter, Paul's grief over Israel, nor its contents, such as the emphasis that God can have mercy on whomever he wills, adequately supports this notion. As Räsänen rightly notes, “It is the negative traits in God's dealings that according to Romans 9 cry for an explanation; the salvation of Gentiles is not a sufficient one.”⁴⁵

42. Watson, *Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles*, 168.

43. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 160.

44. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 573.

45. Räsänen, “Paul, God and Israel,” 184.

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That Rom 9:21–22 reaches some sort of a conclusion is clear; it sums up the argument about the divine freedom in relation to Israel: “Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for beauty and another for menial use?” (9:21). That 9:22 continues this emphasis is not so clear, because here Paul introduces what is apparently a hypothetical statement, “What if God . . . ?” In succession to this in 9:23, he adds a purpose clause but fails to conclude the condition he began in 9:22, thus creating an anacoluthon.⁴⁶ So we are left with the unexpected hypothesis “What if God, because he wished to display his wrath and to make known his power, endured with much long-suffering vessels ripe for destruction?” Where Paul could have argued that God had cast off Israel, having first of all established the divine right of freedom, he surprisingly argues for God’s right to be patient with Israel. It is only after this proposition that Paul, after a fuller elaboration and explanation of what has already been established in describing the purpose of the divine patience as being “to make known the riches of his glory,” proceeds to further elaborate on the identity of its recipients in 9:24.

If we were to proceed into Rom 9:24 without a break, it might give the impression that gentiles are equally if not primarily the object of the divine purpose. With Fitzmyer and others, it is advisable to put 9:24–29 in a new subsection, which Räisänen entitles, “the inclusion of Gentiles.”⁴⁷ But as he himself notes, the inclusion of gentiles is not the primary emphasis of the chapter. Fitzmyer’s heading is therefore more appropriate: “God does not act arbitrarily: Israel’s call, infidelity and remnant as foreseen in what God announced in the Old Testament.”⁴⁸ This heading makes clear what I think is the case, that the topic under discussion is still primarily Israel or, more precisely, God’s activity, but particularly in relation to Israel.

I conclude from this that it would be most unlikely for Paul to use the Hosea citation with reference to gentiles when this was not its original purpose and especially since it is immediately followed by two other Scripture citations that clearly apply to Israel. I would maintain that the Hosea citation is taken by Paul to apply *primarily* to Israel and thus the three citations all have the same point of reference, Israel. Rejected Israel, like the northern tribes, will be restored. This is Paul’s primary thesis, but in and with the restoration, another “non-people,” the gentiles, will also be blessed. Paul does apply the Hosea citation in a secondary sense, typologically, to gentiles also, but only after he has first used it to refer to Israel.⁴⁹ Like Hosea, he envisages

46. Cf. Bornkamm, *Das Ende des Gesetzes: Paulusstudien*, 76–92.

47. Räisänen, “Paul, God, and Israel,” 183.

48. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 571.

49. There is some support for this proposal from Karl Barth (*A Shorter Commentary*

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the reuniting of the twelve tribes into one people, that is, the hardened and the remnant parts of Israel will one day be reunited.

When we see how minimal are the references to gentiles in Rom 9 and recognize that all the discussion about God's selection in 9:6ff. is not about the choice of gentiles at all but only about selection *within* the people of Israel in their *past* history,⁵⁰ then it is plain that another reading is possible; the chapter may now be read as not being about God's choice of a new people, but as being still specifically focused on the people of Israel. Where the gentiles are included at 9:24 and at 9:30, it is either in a secondary reference after Israel, or in 9:30 to contrast the outcome of the gentile mission with the Jewish response to Jesus, as if the two were causally related (as they seem to be in relation to the concept of hardening). The beginning of chapter 10 supports this reading because it refers to bearing witness to "them," where it is clear that the referents can only be the people of Israel.

The most surprising factor in Rom 9 is the somewhat unexpected twist with which Paul makes use of his powerful argument about the divine freedom. Instead of arguing that God is free and therefore can cast off Israel, Paul turns this around and asks, What if, as is the case, God patiently endures his people Israel.⁵¹ When we follow closely the manner and sequence of Paul's argument in chapter 9, and recognize that the primary interest is in God's activity with Israel, then chapter 11 and its ending are not such a surprise after all, because the "surprise" has already been tentatively introduced in 9:22ff.

Recontextualizing Paul's Statements in Romans 9

No other passage in Paul's letters or perhaps even in the entire New Testament suffers so severely from the Augustinian⁵² and Reformation readings

on *Romans*, 122–23), who interprets somewhat differently: "To whom did these words originally apply? To the Israel of the kings of Samaria, which had been rejected by God and which had yet been granted such a promise. And because these words have now been fulfilled in the calling of the Gentiles to the church of Jesus Christ, they obviously also speak with renewed force in their original sense; they also speak of the rejected, disobedient Israel. Now that he has fulfilled it superabundantly among the rejected without, how could God's promise not apply also to the rejected within, to whom he had once addressed it?"

50. Cf. Campbell, *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context*, 43–49. There I describe Romans as "a reinterpretation of covenant righteousness in the light of the Christ-event." From a theological perspective, a distorted view of Paul's mission reveals a mistaken view of covenant (*ibid.*, 173).

51. See Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 189.

52. See Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans*, 293–303. Stowers regards the entire epistle

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as does Rom 9. Despite the valiant efforts of Karl Barth (though his own reading has led to further problems), Johannes Munck, Franz Leenhardt, and Krister Stendahl, among others, there is an inherent tendency to regard Paul's words in this chapter as referring to the timeless election of individuals by an arbitrary act of a mysterious and omnipotent deity.

Although there is now general agreement that the purpose of the argument of Rom 9–11 as a whole is to maintain or defend the trustworthiness of God regarding his promises to Israel, there are diverse opinions as to how chapter 9 serves this purpose. Watson sees chapter 9 as offering a different definition of the chosen people from chapter 11: “9:6–29 offers a clear and coherent argument for the view that the salvation of Gentiles and the rejection of Jews was entirely consistent with God's purpose of election as revealed in scripture. Yet in 11:1ff., and indeed throughout this chapter, Paul reverts to the old view of the people of God which he had previously rejected.”⁵³

Räisänen also, in his reading, finds problems with the content of Romans. Is Paul thinking theologically or historically? “Paul's argument is curious. It implies that empirical Israel—the unbelieving majority—should be identified with Ishmael and Esau. But what seems bewildering in terms of common sense is possible in Pauline theology.”⁵⁴ Räisänen feels that interpreters eventually have to make a choice between the negative view of Israel in chapter 9 and the positive view in chapter 11. Romans 9:6–13 shows that the majority of Israel never belonged to the elect (and therefore God's promise is not affected by the unbelief of empirical Israel). In fact, “v. 22 implies predestination in damnation.”

We can see that Räisänen seems to be dealing here with what he considers to be an abstract doctrine of predestination very similar to that of Augustine or Calvin. But scholarship has progressed radically on this topic since the Reformation. Barth correctly argued that if we start where Calvin started and if we are as consistent as he was, we will inevitably end up at the same point of conclusion.⁵⁵ So Barth moved the discussion forward by arguing not for the election of individuals as such but for election *in Christ*.⁵⁶

as having been written to gentiles and gives a superb critique of the traditional view of 9–11 in opposition to Räisänen.

53. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 168.

54. Räisänen, “God, Paul and Israel,” 182–83.

55. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 2.2, 35–37.

56. This recognition of Barth's contribution does not overlook its weaknesses. Goppelt (*Jesus, Paul and Judaism*, 163), for example, complains, “He understands election too much as predestination outside of history.”

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Munck, Leenhardt,⁵⁷ and Stendahl, all in differing ways, have stressed the need to see Rom 9–11 as a text of the missionary outreach of the first century, which as such should not be interpreted in the Augustinian and Calvinist manner of dealing with it as abstract and timeless theology.

What is lamentable, however, is that the insights of these interpreters from Barth to Stendahl seem to have been forgotten or overlooked even in some of the most recent studies of Rom 9–11.⁵⁸ I am not suggesting that there is no basis for discussing some of these issues (election and predestination) in relation to chapter 9. Paul himself applies these theological categories to his own day: “So too at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace” (11:5).

Nevertheless, it is legitimate to read Rom 9 as a discussion of God’s dealings with Israel in its *past*, as distinct from its present to which Paul specifically refers in 11:5. It is also clear that chapter 9 is not even about the number of the elect in Israel in the past. The categories of “the rest” and “the remnant” are implicit throughout the entire discussion, but these represent categories rather than a specific number of individuals. It is gratuitous to add, as in the RSV translation, “only” before the reference to a remnant in 9:27 (“*only* a remnant of them will be saved”). In point of fact, the emphasis in chapter 9 is not upon individuals *as such* but on chosen leaders and a righteous remnant to secure the future of the people. On this reading, it is an argument to show *how* God has maintained his purpose for this people throughout their history, sometimes through a minority, even by using Pharaoh.

Paul does make general theological statements about the “children of the promise” in distinction from the “children of the flesh.” But he is not discussing God’s election outside of or beyond Israel; the entire discussion up to Rom 9:24 is about God’s elective purpose *within* Israel. It is not until 9:24, and then, as already noted, almost as an aside, that gentiles are mentioned. Thus, it *cannot* be argued that the interest here lies in the ingathering of gentiles. Paul’s primary aim is to demonstrate that God is not tied to Israel in any specific way. Despite the covenant, God remains free even in relation to

57. Leenhardt (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 249–50) realized that the theme here was not the personal salvation of those who were called, but rather their utilization as instruments in a saving process, and that the interest is not so much in named individuals as much as in peoples who are thus named after their eponymous ancestors according to Old Testament practice.

58. Despite being aware of the problems surrounding these approaches to Rom 9–11, Cosgrove (*Elusive Israel*, 26ff.) frequently reverts to them as if they still had some validity; see also Räisänen “Paul, God and Israel.”

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Israel—free, that is, within his compassion to do as he wills (9:18).⁵⁹ Though it is also part of the divine method of working in the history of his people, Paul's primary interest is not in hardening either. The point Paul makes in both the hardening and having compassion is that God is free in his choice of individuals or groups to use them as he wills for the divine purpose for his people in history. Read from this perspective, Pharaoh's future salvation (9:17–18) is not the issue, but rather the future of Israel as perceived from the perspective of Paul's contemporary mission. The choice of people to serve, whether positively or negatively, God's purpose for Israel in its *past* prior to the coming of the gospel era is by no means the same issue as God's choice of people for eternal life, whatever parallels may legitimately be drawn between them.

If Rom 9 is read as not being primarily concerned with those whom God elects, but rather about his manner of acting in history, then it would be inconsistent to view it as a charter for the election of gentiles as the new people of God. Again, if chapter 9 is primarily about establishing God's freedom in relation to Israel, whether then or in the present and the future, the fact that *only* a remnant was elect *in the past* does not necessarily prevent all Israel, in whatever sense, being within God's purpose of election *in the future*. It appears from this that it is because Paul's use of election terminology is anachronistically interpreted in the light of post-Augustinian categories that a conflict is perceived between the fate of Israel in chapter 9 and a posited future in chapter 11. Theologically speaking, there cannot actually be a contradiction between the content of chapters 9 and 11 as we now have them. The basis for the salvation of Israel in both chapters is the same: God remains free to be compassionate with Israel as he wills. But when this is interpreted as we have already argued in relation to 9:22, God's freedom means that he is not obligated to discard Israel, however unworthy an object of his mercy she may actually be at any particular point in history. The freedom of God in relation to Israel is not a threat to Israel, because God's action toward Israel must then be based solely upon divine steadfastness and compassion rather than on Israel's fluctuating loyalty.⁶⁰ Since neither Israel nor the gentiles can constrain God to accept them, because he is free, so too he is not compelled

59. Cf. Barth's (*A Shorter Commentary on Romans*, 143) assertion "God remains free as regards the disobedient, just as he remains free as regards the obedient."

60. This is clearly recognized by Leenhardt (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 252–53): "If his reaction had depended on 'man's will or exertion,' . . . then Yahweh could only have punished with the greatest severity. Instead of that he gave to this rebellious people a new revelation of his grace and at the same time displayed its basic principle: my mercy is utterly free."

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by their failures to cast them off. A salvation determined by works cannot be denied on the one hand and reaffirmed on the other.

My conclusion on this point is that the perceived contradictions within Rom 9, or in its relation to chapter 11, or in its relation to the letter as a whole, have been at least partly due to interpreting “a missionary’s contribution to a discussion”⁶¹ as if it were a timeless theological treatise seeking to solve questions that Paul, at this juncture at least, had no interest in asking. It is, moreover, inconsistent and anachronistic to read most sections of this letter in the light of the contemporary interpretation of Paul’s letters as a whole, and yet read this particular section as if we were living in the seventeenth century.

Divergent Understandings of the Significance of Paul’s Gentile Mission as a Factor in the Roman Context

In my reading, I have argued with Munck that Rom 9 ought to be interpreted as “a missionary’s contribution to a discussion” rather than in abstract theological or philosophical categories. A sociological approach might lead us to regard, with Räisänen and Watson, this chapter as addressed to those who, like Paul, felt the plight of Israel to be a calamity; that is, to Roman Jewish Christians for whom Paul’s predestination language would function as consolation for their lack of success among their own people.⁶² But 11:17ff. makes it clear that the addressees of Paul’s argument are gentile Christians for whom the fate of Israel was of little concern.

A possible scenario is that Paul addresses gentile Christians throughout Rom 9–11, and that Paul, in chapter 9, using himself as exemplar, thus demonstrates what their proper attitude to Israel ought to be. At the same time, this would also provide comfort and reassurance to those who wished to continue to follow a Jewish lifestyle. But why, then, should Paul need to protest so solemnly that he indeed does care for Israel? He appears to be refuting rumors to the contrary.⁶³

61. Cf. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*; cf. also Dahl, *The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans*, 70–94.

62. Räisänen (“Paul, God and Israel,” 186) rightly focuses on the social function of the doctrine of predestination. However, it seems to point to Jewish Christians as the addressees (ibid., 181). On this view, Paul’s real concern seems to be with Jewish Christian queries (ibid., 195). Watson’s (*Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 97–98; cf. 151–53, 163–64, 172) sociological approach likewise seems to target Jewish Christians, especially their social reorientation away from the synagogue.

63. “Paul had to dispel suspicions that he is hostile or indifferent to Israel” (Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 180). Räisänen (“Paul, God and Israel,” 198) notes that

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What alternative images of Paul and his mission may have been current at Rome? It had been anticipated that Paul would pay a visit. He protests that despite wanting to come and remembering them continually in his prayers, he has hitherto not been able to do so (cf. 1:9–13; 15:22). It is not until 15:25 that he admits that he is actually not going to visit them even now, but is going instead to Jerusalem with the collection. From Paul's obvious embarrassment here, we can be sure that some of the Roman Christians expected Paul to visit them, and he recognizes that they reside within the sphere of his gentile mission (1:13).

If Paul's reputation depicted him as a champion of the gentiles, it would then probably be gentile Christians who legitimately expected a visit from him, especially if there was conflict between rival groups at Rome. The reason Paul gives for not visiting the Romans is significant: he is a pioneer missionary unwilling to build on another's foundation (15:20–22). But now that this kind of work has been completed in the east, he is heading for Spain to continue in a similar vein. He does not come to evangelize in Rome, but for mutual edification in each other's company (1:11–13), and hopefully to receive support for a new outreach in Spain (15:24).

The crucial issue is this: did Paul delay a visit to Rome because Rome was regarded by Paul as already founded, that is, because in coming there he would in fact not be going to those who had never heard (15:21)? The best explanation is that Rome differed from Paul's normal pioneering areas in that it already possessed Christian communities, most of whom were formerly, and continued to be, in association with the city's synagogue communities. In this context, gentile Christians may have felt, particularly in the earlier days of their communal existence, a need of Paul's support to champion their cause and maintain their rights.

As Paul writes, however, to the Romans, we do not get the impression that they are either weak or dominated by Jews or Judaizers. They are self-confident enough to interpret the world from their own conceited perspective. Paul seeks to prevent this by helping them to understand "the mystery of Israel" (11:25f.). We can be reasonably sure of that. Therefore, they are deficient in their understanding of God's purposes for Israel, and this deficiency is a cause for boasting (11:13ff.). There is an additional factor not sufficiently noted. In 11:13ff. Paul not only warns the gentile Christians against boasting over Jews, but he somewhat surprisingly introduces his

besides Rom 9:1, οὐ ψεύδομαι occurs in Paul only in 2 Cor 11:31 and Gal 1:20 (assuming that 1 Timothy is non-Pauline), and that in both cases Paul is refuting rumors, whereas Käsemann (*Romans*, 257) sees this as resulting from Paul's often being accused of hostility to Israel.

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own mission as an element in the discussion. Paul, while addressing them as gentiles, wants them to realize that his ministry to gentiles has direct relevance not only to the salvation of his fellow Jews, but also that the salvation of them relates to their own salvation (11:13ff.).

Taking these two factors together, it seems beyond reasonable doubt that a misunderstanding of the significance of Paul's mission on the part of the Roman gentile Christians had contributed to their inflated self-esteem (cf. 12:3ff.) and to their corresponding denigration of Israel,⁶⁴ which was manifesting itself in their intolerance of those conscientiously committed to living a Jewish lifestyle.⁶⁵

Paul is implicated in the situation at Rome, in fact, doubly implicated. As apostle to the gentiles, the churches there come within his remit, but beyond this, it is clear that reports of his own gospel and mission have probably been a catalyst in the situation. Based on the knowledge that Paul viewed himself as apostle to gentiles and that he set up congregations that did not force their adherents to observe the Jewish law, it would have been easy for a one-sided, gentile-sided, image of Paul to develop. This, coupled with the frequent hostility of Jewish opponents who regarded him as a disloyal apostate, could soon have assisted the development of an image of the "partisan Paul." By the very location of his work—predominantly gentile territory—it would also be unlikely that Paul would have often needed to discuss the future or even the evangelization of his own people. It would have been very easy for an image of a pro-gentile Paul to gain credibility. His opposition to Judaizers in Galatians in defense of his gentile converts must have had some such outcome. His "face to face" with Cephas in the encounter at Antioch was no doubt perceived in this way and thus served as a pivotal event in the creation of the image of the partisan, pro-gentile Paul.

This was the Paul the Roman gentiles were expecting to visit them. Even allowing for the normal exaggeration of hearsay reporting, it must be recognized that before the letter was sent to them, the Roman Christians could have expected a somewhat pro-gentile apostle—in my view, one very similar to the Paul of Paulinism.⁶⁶ But there were new elements in the situa-

64. For further emphasis on the deficiency of the gentile Christians see my *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context*, 170–77. Schlatter (*Romans*, 221) claims, "For those who were Greeks by birth, it was easy to assume that Paul had separated himself completely from the Jews. In this case they also argued . . . that they were under no obligation to the Jews." Theologically speaking, they had misinterpreted the covenant and hence the divine purpose for the world, that is, for Jews and gentiles *both*.

65. See Jewett, *Christian Tolerance*. It is not possible to deal adequately here with the vast literature on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Roman Christians, but see also Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 75ff.

66. Against Watson's thesis (*Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles*, 98) that Paul wants to

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tion at Rome as well as possibly in Paul's own mission that were to combine to bring to light a rather different apostle.

However Romans is read, it is beyond dispute that Jewishness in one form or another was an issue among the Roman Christians. If Nanos⁶⁷ and others are correct in their reading that there were some Jews there who were at least open to the Christian message, if not already fully committed, then Paul had to take these into account, particularly if, as seems to be the case, they were a minority. Since Paul did not found the churches in Rome, he faces a problem, because he has to accept what already exists there or run the risk of destroying the weak "for whom Christ died" (14:15). Moreover, if he simply supports the arrogant gentiles in their mistaken conceit, such support will have repercussions throughout the church, not least in Jerusalem, where Paul now heads with fear for his own safety. But more serious still, as Stendahl notes, "Paul may have found something unnerving in the missionary zeal of his bragging Gentile converts over against the Jewish people."⁶⁸ Perhaps Paul encountered here for the first time a supersessionist form of Christianity that his own mission, at least as it was reported, had helped to produce.

The Inclusive Paul: The Purpose of God for Jews and also for Gentiles

As Paul writes Romans, he is apparently faced with a dilemma. Not only is he not coming now to Rome, but worse still, he is heading for Jerusalem with a collection from his gentile communities, something in itself open to great misunderstanding. If he alienates the gentile Christians, not only will this help to accentuate their errors but he may also lose their much-needed support for his mission in Spain. This combination of factors resulted not only in the creation of the content of Romans,⁶⁹ but also helps to explain the manner of its presentation. Paul is forced to start with the images of himself and his mission that the gentiles actually hold and then to seek discreetly to lead them in the direction he wants them to proceed; hence his employment of the dialogical style of the diatribe.⁷⁰ It is this point of departure that helps to explain why the earlier parts of Romans can be read in such a way that Rom

convert the Roman Jewish congregation to Paulinism.

67. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans*, 95–119.

68. Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 53.

69. On the combination of Rome, Jerusalem, and Spain, see Käsemann, *Romans*, 405–6.

70. See my *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context*, 136–41.

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11, with its *apparently* pro-Jewish conclusion, is not even envisaged, and why many scholars see such similarities between these chapters and Galatians.⁷¹ Paul stealthily prepares throughout the letter for the disclosures concerning his attitude toward and his hope for his own people. If, as Sanders claims, Paul works from solution back to problem,⁷² then Romans as we now have it perhaps ought to be read in reverse! In this approach, the content of chapters 9–11 would not be seen so much as a surprise.

For Paul, the entire argument of Romans presupposes the faithfulness of God to his people, and this is made clear at many significant points. See, for instance, Rom 1:16, the gospel is the power of God “to the Jew first and also to the Greek”; 3:26, “it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous”; 4:16, “in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham.” Paul was certain that the faithlessness of Israel could not destroy the faithfulness of God, and he gives only a hint about this in 3:1–8 in order to alert the observant reader that this is a presupposition throughout the letter. For Paul, in contrast to his interpreters, to insist on faith in Jesus Christ while also maintaining God’s promises to Israel is not irreconcilable.

It should be acknowledged, however, that despite the many indications already given in Rom 1–8, even a superb exegete such as Ernst Käsemann could still find problems with the Paul of chapter 11. Admittedly, this was in the different intellectual climate of 1961, when the significance of the Holocaust for interpretation was not yet fully recognized. Käsemann holds that Israel has exemplary significance for Paul—“in and with Israel he strikes at the hidden Jew in all of us”—and he finds it fortuitous that “Romans 9–11 repeats the argument of the whole letter.” He continues, “Is the apostle contradicting himself when he nevertheless ends chapter 11 with the promise of salvation for the whole people of Israel?” Despite Käsemann’s recognition that Paul concedes to Israel “the rights of the first-born,” he eventually concludes, “Thus the justification of the ungodly, which is also the resurrection from the dead, is the only hope both of the world in general and also of Israel.”⁷³

Our conclusion from all this must be that different readings of Romans, especially from chapters 9–11, arise chiefly from those presuppositions we bring with us to this point. Included in these, and of primary importance, is

71. See Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 487–88.

72. *Ibid.*, 443ff. and 499.

73. Käsemann, “Christ and Israel,” 183–87. This essay originated from a broadcast talk.

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our image of Paul himself and his mission. Also of some significance is our larger understanding of how Christianity, particularly in its origins, relates to Judaism.⁷⁴ In Käsemann's reading it is clear that he interprets chapters 9–11 out of chapters 1–8, and Israel becomes an exemplar or symbol for the justification of the ungodly. There may be a parallel here to what happens when Paul commences to write his letter to the Romans. He is faced with the fact that they are already in possession of an image of the apostle to the gentiles and that they therefore think they know how he will respond to their situation. So Paul has to present as discreetly as possible another image of himself, this time one that includes his own understanding of how the gentile mission relates to God's purposes for *both* Jews and gentiles. The image of the "partisan Paul"—the apostle for the gentiles—is thus revised and updated to become the image of the "inclusive Paul" of "not only the Jew but also the Greek," of Paul among Jews and gentiles.

Despite dedicated attempts to get behind the overlay of centuries of readings of Romans, scholars will never be able fully to comprehend its message as it was first delivered to the Romans. But we must give the text its due weight and not interpret it on the basis of Galatians,⁷⁵ of an already known gospel, or of a familiar portrait of the apostle at an earlier stage in his career. As far as is humanly possible, we must interpret Paul's mission and Paul himself as they are presented in this specific text before we resort to harmonization or revision from any other sources, however significant. Within the letter, the same principle applies: we must allow, as we are able, each section of the letter to reveal its own peculiar content before we seek to relate it to a coherent view of the whole.

74. As long as Judaism and the Hebrew Scriptures are regarded as simply preparatory to Christianity, then it is inevitable that the gentile mission will be viewed as the climax of God's work, and the Christian church will continue to be confused with the kingdom of God (see Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 19).

75. Against Cosgrove's (*Evasive Israel*, 88) proposal: "As part of the Christian canon, Galatians 2 now supplies part of the canonical story of the Gentile mission. In a constructive canonical interpretation, it is therefore appropriate to interpret Rom 11:19 within the context of this canonical story."