

## CHAPTER I

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God <sup>2</sup>which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, <sup>3</sup>the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup>and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup>through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about obedience to the faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup>including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ;

<sup>7</sup>To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

(1) PAUL IS UNKNOWN to the church of Rome. In presenting himself to it he describes himself both as "a servant of Jesus Christ"\* and as "an apostle". In his introductions, Paul described himself as "a servant" once only, namely in writing to the Philippians, where it is significant that he does not claim his title of apostle. On the other hand in writing to the Galatians, of whom he has to complain, he sharply and somewhat impatiently emphasizes this title. The first of these titles suggests humility; the second, authority. In addressing people whom he does not know, there would be a touch of arrogance in invoking only the second title, while to use only the first would savour of a displeasing astuteness.†

\* The words are arranged thus in B.P.<sup>10</sup>, Origen, etc. Paul several times reversed the original order, Christ thus becoming a proper name (Rom. 8: 39; 2 Cor. 4: 5; Col. 2: 6). *Χριστός* already denoted "Messiah".

† Every Christian is a "servant of Christ" (1 Cor. 7: 23; Eph. 6: 6), but the word has here a very special meaning; cf. Phil. 2: 22. It is a question of being the servant of the Word; the prophets were already that, but every believer is too (see Lietzmann on 1: 1).

In the other letters Paul describes himself as an apostle “by the will of God”. He expresses the same idea when he says here that he is “called to be an apostle”, i.e. an apostle by vocation. He is exercising a divinely given mandate from which he draws both the justification of his missionary activities and the authority he claims in exercising them.\*

In saying that he has been “set apart for the gospel”, Paul refers to the special character of his apostolic vocation. In fact, Gal. 1: 15, 16, using the same terms, shows that the apostolic vocation of Paul means in fact his mission to the Gentile world. Hence “set aside for the gospel” certainly suggests the task peculiar to Paul as apostle of the Gentiles—that mission for the accomplishment of which he has renounced all things, and which he now wishes to pursue to its completion by carrying his missionary activity as far as Spain.† From the very beginning the whole letter is placed within the perspective of the proclamation of the gospel to the heathen and of the latter’s access to the knowledge of Jesus, the Messiah.

The expression “gospel of God”‡ suggests that the preaching with which the apostle has been entrusted springs from God as its ultimate author. It is God who sets aside His heralds and gives them their message. This message, though clad in human terms, is a Word of God, an action in which God is actively present, an event in which the thought of God

\* In Jewish thought, the apostle (אָפּוּסְטוֹל) is a delegate who enjoys the authority conferred on him by his mandate; he is legally a representative of the power which sends him. Not only envoys representing ecclesiastical authority were described thus, but also men who had fulfilled a specially important task which God had laid on them (whether priestly or otherwise; e.g. Moses, Elijah, etc.). The Christian apostolate, which probably goes back to Jesus Himself, has retained the same features: the apostle represents the power which sends him forth. On this point, cf. Strack-Billerbeck, III, pp. 2ff.; Rengstorf, *Th. Wb. NT*, I, pp. 406ff.

† Vocation, the sense of being set aside, makes the apostle akin to the prophets. Paul was certainly conscious of being, in the hands of God, an instrument for the realization of the divine plan of salvation. This is a point which Joh. Munck, *Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte*, 1954, stresses very forcibly though not without a certain exaggeration in order to deliver us from psychologizing theories of the Pauline apostolate.

‡ Cf. Rom. 15: 16; 2 Cor. 11: 7; 1 Th. 2: 2, 8, 9 (Mk. 1: 14; 1 Pet. 4: 17). Matt. 10: 20; Lk. 10: 16; 2 Cor. 5: 20.

is embodied and by which it enters into the course of human history. God is the real Subject of the apostolic gospel, it is He (i.e. the Holy Spirit, or Christ Himself) who speaks.\*

(2) In speaking of the gospel of God, Paul already connects the proclamation of Jesus Christ with the plan of God which the prophets first disclosed. There is only one God, who speaks differently according to the diversity of times and seasons; but His message is eternally the same, for He is true; and He ever pursues the same work, for He is faithful. His veracity and His fidelity culminate in Jesus the Christ, who says “yes” to the promises, who is the utterly conclusive “Amen” (2 Cor. 1: 20; Rev. 3: 14); in Him all that God has said is verified and confirmed. In a sense there is nothing new about the gospel, as the whole letter will show; there is no rupture between the promises which appeared to be reserved to some only, and the reality which fulfilled them for all. The culmination which the prophetic oracles find in Jesus Christ elucidates them by showing the goal to which they tended. The end illuminates the meaning of the process which led up to it. Thus Holy Scripture in its totality arranges itself into a meaningful pattern. The Word of God to the elect people remains, for the hearers of the gospel message, the prophetic word announcing the coming of Jesus Christ. The Gentile Christian church inherits the most precious of all the treasures of Israel, namely the promise.

\* In Paul’s writings, “flesh” as opposed to “spirit” has always a pejorative sense. The formula “according to the spirit of holiness” is foreign to Paul; he would have written: “according to the Holy Spirit”. It is surprising to find no allusion to the cross. The juxtaposition of his “Son” and “Son of God” shows that Paul is using a given formula. The Christology of this confession seems to distinguish two successive conditions of existence, separated by the resurrection which inaugurates the life of glory. In some ways it recalls that of Phil. 2: 5-11, though it cannot be identified with the latter; an adoptionist interpretation is not excluded (Michel). Cf. on the point C. H. Dodd, *Apostolic Preaching*, 1936, p. 14; *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 1932, p. 4; R. Bultmann, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 1948, p. 50 (E.T. *Theology of the New Testament*); O. Michel, pp. 30-1; Ed. Schweizer, *Erniedrigung und Erhöhung bei Jesus und seinen Nachfolgern*, 1955, pp. 55-56 (E.T. *Lordship and Discipleship*).

(3f.) Nothing expresses more clearly the continuity of God's plan and of His church than the historic roots of the gospel. For the essential function of the latter is to proclaim the good news of the fulfilment of God's plan at the very heart of the people which bears the promise. The gospel represents, not a break with the past, but a consummation of it. The Son of God is in the first place the Son of David.

To express his conviction on this point, Paul seems indeed to make use of a traditional formula, a confession probably of Palestinian origin, as is suggested by the concern to connect the Messiah with the lineage of David and the similarity with the preaching of Peter as reported in the Acts, 2: 22-36 (cf. 3: 13-15; 4: 10-12).<sup>\*</sup> For the apostle himself the Son of God was pre-existent to His earthly birth, but the latter appeared as a historical event and doubtless also a natural one, for there is no allusion to any miraculous birth (neither here nor in Phil. 2 or Gal. 4: 4).<sup>†</sup> The Davidic origin of the Messiah was a postulate of faith; we must see here a theological affirmation: the name of David sums up the whole history of Israel and expresses the hope that one day it will find a glorious fulfilment.

To the human conditions of existence of the Son of God as the Son of David there succeed in contrast the conditions of existence to which He is introduced by His resurrection from the dead. He is "designated Son of God in power".<sup>‡</sup> In accordance with the pattern of thought in Phil. 2, Paul has interpreted this formula as expressive of the glorification which followed the abasement of Christ. Of course the glorification of the Son is an act of power: hence the meaning is:

<sup>\*</sup> Instead of *γενομένου* we read in 5161.441 and the Latin MSS. *γεννωμένου* (natus). Vulgate: *qui factus est ei*.

<sup>†</sup> Cf. Ps. Sol. 17: 21. The expression "Son of David" is found only there in the period before Christianity, but it had become a current expression among the contemporaries of Jesus; the rabbis will often use it (see Sanh. 97-98). Cf. Strack-Billerbeck, I, pp. 11, 525. E. Lohmeyer, *Gottesknecht und Davidsohn*, 2nd ed. 1953, pp. 64ff.

<sup>‡</sup> *ὀρίζειν*: to limit or define, hence determine, constitute or establish (by deed or word), which comes to mean declare, manifest. Greek commentators adopted the latter sense. The parallelism with *γενομένου* suggests that we see in *ὀρισθέντος* the second phase of the career of the Son, and not an allusion to the divine predestination of which He is said to be the object (Vulg. *praedestinatus*).

“established as Son of God with power” (Godet). But the Pauline antithesis is concerned with the successive conditions experienced by the Son of God; the infirmity of His flesh has given place to the power of His Spirit. The resurrection has inaugurated, first for Him, and then for believers, a new era: the Christ has been designated “Son of God in power” by the fact that His resurrection has brought into being the age of the Spirit according to ancient prophecy.\* The time foretold has come, in which God is to set up a personal communion between Himself and believers; it is the Son who accomplishes this work, thus manifesting that the power of God is at work in Him to inaugurate the promised new age. For the Son is at once the Bearer and the Dispenser of the Spirit.† Hence the expression “according to the Spirit of holiness” cannot be limited to the meaning that it is “the activity of the Holy Spirit manifested in Christ during His terrestrial existence” (Godet). The thought of Paul reaches out already to the post-resurrection ministry of Christ “designated Son of God in power”; henceforth the Holy Spirit which is also the Spirit of Christ will act with power.‡

Is the resurrection of Christ the cause of His exaltation or

\* The relation between the Spirit and the “world to come”, as inaugurated by the resurrection, is attested in Ez. 37: 14; Joel 2: 28. For Judaism, cf. W. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums*, 1926 (3rd ed.), p. 394 and *passim*. P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde*, 1934 (2nd ed.), p. 392. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 1948, p. 216. Strack-Billerbeck, III, pp. 192, 134, 615; IV, pp. 882, 915ff.

† Gal. 4: 6; cf. Acts 2: 33. Paul says indifferently “Spirit of God” and “Spirit of Christ”. It is well known that the idea of “power” is closely connected with the idea of the “Spirit” (Lk. 24: 48; Acts 1: 8; 1 Th. 1: 5; 1 Cor. 2: 1–5; Rom. 15: 19; 2 Tim. 1: 7). Our verse should be read in the light of the antithesis “weakness: power” (cf. 1 Cor. 5: 4; 2 Cor. 13: 4; 1 Cor. 1: 24). Note that these texts offer three possible combinations: “Spirit and power”; “power of the Spirit”; “spirit of power”. Cf. W. Grundmann, *Der Begriff der Kraft in der neutestamentlichen Gedankenwelt*, 1932, and *Th. Wb. NT*, II, pp. 311–318.

‡ We should not try to be too subtle about the phrase “Spirit of holiness” (cf. Test. Lev. 18: 7). It is far-fetched to think with Lagrange that what is meant is “a very specially holy Spirit, different from the Holy Spirit”. *Πνεῦμα ἁγιοσύνης* is the exact replica of “Holy Spirit” (Is. 63: 10; Ps. 51: 11); see O. Procksch, *Th. Wb. NT*, I, p. 116. See the wise remarks of W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1930 (5th ed.), p. 9.

does it merely disclose the latter? ἐξ can bear the two meanings: *in virtue of* and *since*. This ambiguity of the text is further accentuated by the absence of an article.\*

It is probable that this confession of faith, just quoted by the apostle, was familiar to his Roman readers. Precision of phrase was less important for him than the hope of finding fellowship with his readers by a proclamation of the faith which he had in common with them.† This faith culminates in the confession of Christ as Lord, and it is with the sovereignty of Christ that Paul connects the mention of his apostolate about which he is anxious to give detailed information such as v. 1 could only have suggested.‡

(5) It is by the Lord Himself that Paul has been called to be an apostle. Now the name *Lord* (κύριος) evokes the One before whom every creature must bow the knee (Phil. 2: 10, 11). Jesus the Messiah, linked by His natural birth to the people of Israel alone, has become the Lord of all mankind. Hence the apostolate which He instituted concerns all men. The universal Israel is continuous with the limited Israel. The extension of the preaching of the gospel to include all men is based on the elevation of the Messiah Jesus to the rank of κύριος.§

\* Whilst Godet considered the temporal sense abandoned, it is kept, for example, by Lietzmann, or J. Sickenberger, *Die Briefe des heiligen Paulus an die Korinther und Römer*, 1932 (4th ed.), p. 178. The ambiguity of the text is safeguarded by the translation: "following . . ." (A. Tricot, in *Bible Crampon*; S. Lyonnet, in *Bible de Jérusalem*). O. Michel adopts the causal sense: on the ground of the resurrection. Gaugler, still more explicit, completes: in the power of the resurrection.

† His formulae are pre-theological, as Dodd says in *Romans*, p. 5. He probably makes use of expressions which are current in Christianity, and this would explain the type of phrase found here, which is not usual with him, as also the phrasing of the Christological ideas which are out of harmony with the apostle's own Christological formulae. What is here suggested rather is the phraseology of Acts 2: 22-34.

‡ Father Boismard, *R.B.* 1953, makes an interesting comparison between our verse and Acts 13: 23-39 and Heb. 1: 5, and insists that the thought of the verse should not be interpreted in terms of essences or natures; Paul could have said that the Son was *constituted* Son of God, "understanding this expression in a functional Messianic sense" (p. 17).

§ The plural "we have received" is probably a matter of style. Paul means himself, indirectly, modestly. Popular Greek and the style of

As far as Paul personally is concerned, the call of one who persecuted the first believers was the effect of a conspicuous grace; in the mind of Paul the notions of grace and of the apostolate were closely allied (1 Cor. 3: 10; 15: 10; Gal. 2: 9; cf. also Rom. 12: 3; 15: 15). But if the apostleship was, for Paul, the result of a peculiar grace, it is also clear that the first effect of grace which made him the slave of the Christ whom he was persecuting merged with his call to be an apostle. Conversion and vocation were for him one and the same event (Gal. 1: 15-16).\*

The apostolic ministry to which Paul was called is intended to bring men into "obedience to the faith" (cf. 16: 26). This expression is not quite explicit; it may mean the obedience of the believer with regard to the objective content of the faith that is preached to him; or else an obedience which is called faith; or again obedience which leads to faith. The question of faith will be taken up again in ch. 4 where it will be seen that faith is always obedience, an act of inner submission to a word which is essentially a promise, an act which accepts as true the word or the person speaking and declaring what he is about to do. Faith is the response to a God who acts to open up new possibilities; it clings to a word which is also an action; it trusts in the "good news" which is always the ultimate content of what God says. The object of faith is not an abstract proposition, a static truth. Its object is a person and the word which renders that person actively present. Consequently in faith the objective and the subjective aspects are inseparably commingled; to isolate them from each other would be to distort them; faith arises only in an encounter, in a relation which concerns both God who speaks and man who listens, God who offers and man who receives, he who makes the promise by the preaching of the good news and the one to whom the promise is made.

The expression here used by Paul defines admirably the diatribe passed very easily from the singular to the plural. Cf. K. Dieck, *Der schriftstellerische Plural bei Paulus*, 1900, and Von Dobschütz on 1 Th. 1: 3. See, in Paul, 2 Cor. 1: 12-13; 1 Cor. 9: 11, 12; Rom. 3: 8.

\* The words "through whom we have received grace and apostleship" may be interpreted as "grace *and* apostleship" or "the grace *of* apostleship". Since with Paul conversion is inseparable from vocation we must closely connect the two.

goal at which Christian apostleship aims; to bring men back into a state of obedience, since their present state is essentially one of disobedience (5: 19); and the obedience to which they are reclaimed is not the vain effort of the slave who cannot break his chains, but a free participation in the liberating action of God in Christ, communion with Him whose life was the incarnation of obedience. It is the faith which receives the promise of the obedience fully disclosed in Christ. Without having any definite polemical intention, the expression well brings out the contrast between the obedience of faith and the obedience which man would like to acquire by his own effort, even if on the basis of the Mosaic law.

Thus is prepared the allusion to the wide field of missionary endeavour to which Paul as apostle is called to devote himself. His work far exceeds the frontiers marked out by the knowledge of Moses and his law. It includes all peoples (cf. Gal. 1: 16; 2: 7, 9). It extends to all peoples the knowledge of the name of the God of Israel. It in fact accomplishes the mission which was that of Israel itself, i.e. to mediate the revelation of the name of God—which is to say, the person of God—to all the nations.

(6) Those to whom the letter is addressed are themselves the proof of the wide extension and efficacy of the saving grace mediated through the apostolic ministry. The existence of their church confirms the truth that Christ gathers His believers from all the nations. "You too have sprung from those peoples."<sup>\*</sup>

(7) The long salutation thus culminates in its second member, by naming the addressees (v. 7 is linked with v. 1: Paul . . . to all God's beloved . . .). The Christians in Rome† are the object of God's love; they are so in virtue of their being believers, and their own love of God echoes the divine love which has struck them. They are saints, not through a holiness which their irreproachable conduct has earned for

\* We may also understand: you live in the midst of them, in that Rome which is the meeting point of the peoples.

† The mention of Rome is lacking in some MSS., e.g. G and Orig.; as also in v. 15. Zahn (p. 51) considers it an addition.



them, but because the calling of God (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2) has set them apart so that they may shine as lights in the world (cf. Gal. 1:4; Phil. 2:15; Matt. 5:14-16). Holiness consists in being withdrawn from what is profane, and consecrated to God (Lev. 11:44; 19:2). God chooses for Himself a people which is holy for that reason, and because of that divine destiny. The new Israel is, like the ancient *κλητῆ ἀγία*, an assembly called to be a “holy people”.\*

Thus, the vocation springing from the love of God has made of these pagans “saints”, incorporating them with a communion to which they were originally foreign. It is surprising not to find in this address the word “church” (*ἐκκλησία*);† but the expressions used by the apostle are vivid enough to imply it.

The Greeks greeted by saying *χαίρε* (joy to you!) the Jews by saying *שלום* (peace!). Paul seems to make a play on words, joining these two terms in a way which recurs in all his salutations.‡ The goodness of God is the source of peace because through Jesus Christ it restores order and effects a new economy in the relations between man and God.§ The pair “grace and peace” evokes both the source and the reality of this new order which is being realized in the life of the church. For Paul there can be no better greeting than that of the angels: “Peace among men with whom God is well pleased” (Lk. 2:14). All graces are indissolubly connected with God the Father from whom they proceed and with the Lord who is the Dispenser of grace to mankind.

\*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you,

\* Ex. 12:16; Lev. 23:2-44 (9 times); Num. 28:25, offer the expression *שָׁלוֹם-רָא-קָרְבָּן*. Paul seems to have used this very characteristic expression of the liturgical language of the Pentateuch, by a literal transcription into Greek. Cf. L. Cerfaux, *La théologie de l'Église suivant saint Paul*, 1948 (2nd ed.), p. 89.

† Cf. 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2.

‡ He did not however create this formula (cf. Apoc. Bar. 78:2; Strack-Billerbeck, II, p. 25), and he knows how to vary it (Gal. 6:16: *εἰρήνη καὶ ἔλεος*).

§ In Hebrew thought, peace (*שלום*) refers to order rather than tranquillity. There is peace when there is order. *שלום* expresses the idea of integrity. (W. Foerster, *Th.Wb.NT*, II, 398ff.)

because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. <sup>9</sup>For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers, <sup>10</sup>asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup>For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you, <sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine. <sup>13</sup>I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup>I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish: <sup>15</sup>so I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

<sup>16</sup>For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. <sup>17</sup>For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live."

(8) As always (except in Galatians) the apostle begins his letter by giving thanks;\* for the point of departure of faith and the church is what God has already done; that is the foundation of all doctrinal or ethical reflection. To give thanks in this connexion is to remind both himself and his readers of the sole foundation which can be laid. The act of thanksgiving ascends to God through Jesus Christ since it is through Him that grace has come to men; He is the mediator, the intercessor, the one who speaks perfectly of God to men and of men to God.

(9f.) It is not the quality of the faith of the Roman Christians which arouses gratitude in the heart of the apostle—he did not perhaps know much about this—but the fact that their faith was known in all the world.† This hyperbole is no mere flattery. It is in part justified by the very situation of Rome; the provinces soon get to know what goes on there.

\* To judge by the papyri, ancient forms of civility required that a person should begin a letter by pious formulae, generally a prayer on behalf of the one addressed, and sometimes with an expression of gratitude to the gods. See Dodd, p. 6, several examples and sources.

† Comparable situation with regard to Thessalonica (1 Th. 1 : 8).