

most clearly in Rom. chs. 9-11.² In order not to go beyond the bounds of a lecture, I shall confine my reply to the Epistle to the Romans, tempting though it would be to analyse the whole Pauline *corpus* in the light of this question.

I. BASIC CONSIDERATIONS

First, I should like briefly to indicate the mental climate in which such a thesis could grow up. It is not only extremely surprising, when we remember that it is a former Swedish Lutheran who is supporting it. It also has the most momentous significance for the whole of Pauline interpretation, for our present theological discussions and for the situation of our churches. At bottom, Stendahl's conclusions are not new. William Wrede³ and Albert Schweitzer⁴ both already considered that the doctrine of justification was a mere tributary of Pauline theology (though they thought so for different reasons), and they were only expressing openly what was a widespread view in historical criticism. Long before, F. C. Baur saw Rom. 9-11 as the peak and thematic centre of the epistle, which he, too, pleaded should be understood primarily in the light of its own historical background.⁵ The differences between the Pauline and the Lutheran doctrines of justification were brought out by P. Althaus.⁶ Finally, J. Munck⁷ and O. Cullmann⁸ especially have recently proclaimed in unmistakable terms an interpretation not only of Paul but of the whole of the New Testament based on salvation history. Stendahl therefore belongs within the context of an established theological tradition. His essay is significant because he combines old questions and brings them up to date, thus becoming the spokesman of a line of approach which is beginning to find increasing acceptance in New Testament theology. Three general remarks may help to make clear what I mean.

What has been said indicates that today Pauline interpretation is just as controversial as, for example, the problem of the historical

² Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 204ff., 214.

³ *Paulus*, 1904 (*Das Paulusbild in der neueren deutschen Forschung*, ed. by K. H. Rengstorf, 1964, pp. 1-97), p. 67.

⁴ *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 1931, pp. 220f.

⁵ 'Über Zweck und Veranlassung des Römerbriefs und die damit zusammenhängenden Verhältnisse der römischen Gemeinde', *Tübinger Zeitschrift für Theologie*, 1836, 3, pp. 59-178.

⁶ *Paulus und Luther über den Menschen*, 1951.

⁷ *Christus und Israel*, 1956; *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, 1959.

⁸ *Salvation in History*, 1967.



JUSTIFICATION AND SALVATION HISTORY IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

Controversy is the breath of life to a German theologian, and mutual discussion is the duty of us all. For, in scholarship as in life, no one can possess truth except by constantly learning it afresh; and no one can learn it afresh without listening to the people who are his companions on the search for that truth. Community does not necessarily mean agreement. For this reason I should now like to join issue with the unusually provocative (and hence so important) article published by Krister Stendahl in the *Harvard Theological Review*, 1963,¹ under the title, 'The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West'. He thinks that the Pauline interpretation which he believes extends from Augustine and the Reformation to Bultmann's existentialist view is on the wrong road. According to Stendahl, the introspective attitude of the west has led to a false stress on Paul's struggle with the Judaistic interpretation of the law and hence to an equally wrong emphasis on the doctrine of justification which grew out of that struggle. The western churches' heightened idea of sin and conscience meant, he believes, an over-valuation of Paul's defence against Judaism, which was temporally conditioned and soon became obsolete. According to Stendahl, the main emphases have been confused in the process. The apostle's polemics assumed the dominating position. But, in fact, neither Paul the Pharisee nor Paul the convert possessed that pronounced awareness of guilt which his later interpreters imputed to him. His message rather centres on a concept of revelation based on salvation history. This can be seen

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 199-215.

Jesus or Lucan and Johannine theology. This means that at present the interpretation of the whole New Testament has become a highly uncertain matter, although the same historical-critical method is used everywhere, even if the ruthlessness with which the method is applied varies. Generally we do not give much thought to this. Scriptural theology has been pushed aside in many quarters by a theology which is guided by the needs of the church or its traditions. The intrinsic value of the bible is universally stressed, but its exposition is regulated and confined by considerations of edification or by the self-understanding which is prevailing at any given moment.

It follows from this that Protestantism is no longer generally in accord with the Reformation any more. The scriptures have ceased to be accounted the basis and tribunal of the church; they are now the documents of its tradition and spiritual devotion, as well as the instruments of its self-reflection and, occasionally, of any necessary self-correction. Practically speaking, the church takes precedence over the scriptures, even when this is not admitted in principle or is dialectically obscured. The Reformation, on the other hand, asserted, undialectically and inexorably, the pre-eminence of the scriptures over the church. In the process we have described, the interpretation of the bible as salvation history enjoys a particular function about which we are seldom clear. A glance at modern Catholicism may be helpful at this point. That the bible and its exegesis have taken on immense importance in the Roman Catholic church is one of the most remarkable features of present-day theology. Yet this process is mainly significant for the church as a whole because the rigidity which its dogmatics have acquired has been relaxed; they have by no means been subjected to fundamental criticism. Ultimately the interpretation of the scriptures based on salvation history actually strengthens the authority of the church, which has now become more elastic but has by no means been reduced to relative importance. Tradition and scripture continue to exist in a dialectical relationship which diminishes many of tradition's rigours, but not its still-prevailing dominance.⁹ To put it bluntly: with salvation history one is always on the safe side. For it allows us to think in terms of a development which, in spite of many false starts and many needful corrections, leads to

⁹ P. Benoit, *Exégèse et Théologie* I-II, Paris, 1961, is characteristic. But counter-tendencies, above all in Germany, must not be overlooked. A recent representative of these is K. Kertelge, *Rechtfertigung bei Paulus. Studien zur Struktur und zum Bedeutungsgehalt des paulinischen Rechtfertigungsbegriffs*, 1967.

growing understanding and ultimately to the goal which the church has before it, a goal whose outline is already to be traced in the church itself.

I have nothing against the phrase salvation history, although it is often used in what seem to me questionable ways; I would even say that it is impossible to understand the bible in general or Paul in particular without the perspective of salvation history. On the other hand, we should not isolate the phrase from the problems associated with it and, like all dangerous phrases, it should be defined as closely as possible. In no case should what we call the divine plan of salvation be absorbed by an immanent evolutionary process whose meaning can be grasped on earth, or which we can control and calculate. This would make the divine and the human interchangeable and would allow the church ultimately to triumph over its Lord, by organizing him instead of listening and obeying. The peace of God passes all understanding, and so does God's plan of salvation. The Stoic may imagine that he can look on at God. This is not open to faith. Thus the nerve of our discussion is exposed when we ask: is salvation history visible, and if so, in what way?

Before we answer this, we must consider the polemical direction which characterizes both Stendahl's thesis and the conceptions of salvation history held by Munck and Cullmann. All three of them attack Bultmann's theology. Interestingly enough, they do so primarily not because of its radical historical criticism but because of its systematic premises. Munck censures Bultmann's dependence on F. C. Baur's doctrines, and Cullmann complains of his exaggerated existentialism; but Stendahl ventures even further. He reproaches his opponent with a drastic 'prolongation' of the western misunderstanding of the Pauline doctrine of justification.¹⁰ In Stendahl, consequently, the antithesis arises between salvation history as the apostle's fundamental position and his doctrine of justification as an early Christian defence against Judaism, conditioned by its time. Whether this view is tenable or not is for the moment unimportant. The remarkable thing is mainly the new position which is being built up here – a position which, if we look back, we can see has long since cast its shadow ahead of it.

Perhaps I may be allowed a personal reminiscence here. My theological youth was most strongly marked by the detachment of 'dialectical' theology from the nineteenth-century idealist view of

¹⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 207.

history, a movement which was supported by the historical criticism which goes under Bultmann's name. On the way to a theology of proclamation we rediscovered that Reformation doctrine of justification which had become largely incomprehensible to our fathers and grandfathers and which had therefore ceased for them to form the centre of the New Testament message. This discovery immunized us deeply against a conception of salvation history which broke in on us in secularized and political form with the Third Reich and its ideology. It will be understandable that as burnt children we are unwilling to add fuel to the fire which at the present day, for the third time in a century, is awakening such general enthusiasm. Our experience has made a theology of history suspect for us from the very outset, whatever the reasons may be which are urged in its support. It determined the liberalism whose faith in progress was finally shattered by the First World War. However erroneously and improperly, it was capable of serving as a shield for Nazi eschatology. We do not want to be called back to the place where our fathers and grandfathers stood a hundred years ago and where they came to grief fifty years later. But can this still be prevented?

If we view the matter dispassionately, we must see that for world-wide Protestantism in general the Reformation only produced the initial spark; apart from that, its influence has faded increasingly. In the English-speaking world, the key-words of law and justification are associated almost inevitably with a legalistic construction. The existentialist interpretation of faith rouses uneasiness because it seems to end in individualism. Finally, the ecumenical movement furthers the tendency to stress what binds rather than what divides, and looks for the same disposition in the New Testament. In this situation, the watchword of an attitude to the scriptures based on salvation history must seem to offer liberation, not only in modern Catholicism but also, and no less, in world-wide Protestantism: it offers the chance to be both progressive and conservative, to bring to the fore what is common ground, while tolerating what still separates us, and in a fallen world to see the church as the guarantor of divine salvation and as the pledge of a divine creation. It is in this mental environment that the alternative between justification and salvation history has taken form today – an alternative which may be of fateful significance for the whole of Christianity. To come to the point at issue itself, we must now ask how far this alternative can really be justified and whether it may be regarded as a clue to where we have to look for the

real centre of Christian theology. Even if this cannot be decided on the basis of Paul's writings alone, he does at least give an answer which may serve as an example.

2. THE KEY-WORDS 'SALVATION HISTORY' IN THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS

As far as I am concerned, the dispute over the question whether Paul develops a concept of salvation history or not¹¹ is not a problem of Pauline theology; it is a specimen of the entanglement of all exegesis in systematic prejudices which we can diminish but never entirely rid ourselves of. Where existence and situation determine, and must determine, every theological statement, perspectives based on salvation history are bound to be passionately rejected. Yet this is to do violence to the texts. It cannot be denied that even the Pauline texts do not merely have an anthropology in view, and it is highly questionable whether anthropology even represents their central concern. One is thinking in terms of salvation history when one divides world history into the epochs of Adam, Abraham, Moses and Christ and sees creation tending towards judgment via fall and redemption. Theology cannot begin and end with the individual where world mission appears as the Christian task pure and simple, and where this task is seen against an apocalyptic background and is described in apocalyptic terms – i.e., when it is derived from the trial-situation presented by the conflict between the creator and his creatures. It is true that the category of the individual is unusually important with Jesus and even more so in Paul and John; and for us it is indispensable, because without this category theology, ideologically speaking, loses its concrete application. But it is both historically and factually quite wrong to make the individual the starting point of Pauline theology¹² even when we are considering Paul's concept of salvation history, which is certainly related to man.¹³

It has always been a characteristic of Pauline interpretation in Germany to fall from one extreme into another and often enough to postulate alternatives which destroy the apostle's dialectical treat-

¹¹ Unsatisfactorily illustrated from Rom. 4 by U. Wilckens, 'Die Rechtfertigung Abrahams nach Römer 4', *Studien zur Theologie der alttestamentlichen Überlieferungen*, 1961, pp. 111–27; G. Klein, 'Römer 4 und die Idee der Heilsgeschichte', *EvTh* 1963, pp. 424–47; U. Wilckens, 'Zu Römer 3, 21–4, 25', *EvTh* 1964, pp. 586–610.

¹² Contrary to Bultmann's view in *History and Eschatology*, 1957, p. 42.

¹³ Bultmann, *Theology I*, p. 269.

ment of the facts. It is no comfort that in the English-speaking countries, for example, something similar came about under different omens. There the church is not infrequently played off against the individual, sacrament against faith, liturgy against *kerygma*, ethics against eschatology, the gospels against Paul and, in the same way, salvation history against the doctrine of justification. It is equally unhelpful to contrast the riches of the Bible with the Reformed stress on the *particula exclusiva*, that is to say, the *solus Christus* and, consequently, to set up *sola gratia*, *sola fide* against *sola scriptura*. Modern man is undoubtedly forgetting more and more how to converse with anyone else, in that he makes the world the object of his schemes and his neighbour the recipient of his proclamations. But the New Testament is the document and sphere of a conversation in which people, all starting from their different respective presuppositions, talk with and to one another. This dialogue must never be levelled down to the point where the differences and contrasts disappear. Still less is it a monologue in which only one voice is heard, or a report where the impressions of the hearer are of decisive importance. Every simplification which forces the primal variety into the already-existing ruts is a sin against the Holy Spirit.

It cannot be seriously disputed that salvation history forms the horizon of Pauline theology. But the significance of this horizon is anything but decided.¹⁴ It could be a component part of a traditional early Christian *Weltanschauung* which Paul took over without reflection, and might then even be an inappropriate framework for his specific proclamation. On the other hand, it could be the key-note of his message or one of its most important aspects.¹⁵ We must therefore inquire what meaning salvation history has for Paul and what function it serves in his theology as a whole. Because this question is also of paramount importance for Stendahl, he sets salvation history thematically over against the doctrine of justification.¹⁶ This does in fact open up the absolutely decisive problem of Pauline interpretation. For all other questions can be fitted into this basic one. It is all

¹⁴ Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, p. 248, asks directly whether salvation history constitutes the 'kernel' of Pauline theology.

¹⁵ M. Barth's view in *Rechtfertigung*, 1969, p. 8; already anticipated by J. Jeremias, 'Justification by Faith', *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 1965, pp. 51-70: pp. 60f.

¹⁶ *Op. cit.*, pp. 209, 211; he even describes Rom. 5.6ff. not only as 'the subsidiary conditional clause in an argument *e majore ad minore*' but as referring mainly to the past.

the more surprising that Stendahl does not make even an approach to an analysis of Paul's statements about salvation history, although it is above all the Epistle to the Romans which would suggest the necessity of such an analysis. Thus Rom. 5.12ff. makes it clear that the apostle does not understand history as a continuous evolutionary process but as the contrast of the two realms of Adam and Christ. Pauline theology unfolds this contrast extensively as the struggle between death and life, sin and salvation, law and gospel. The basis is the apocalyptic scheme of the two successive aeons which is transferred to the present.¹⁷ Apparently Paul viewed his own time as the hour of the Messiah's birth-pangs, in which the new creation emerges from the old world through the Christian proclamation. Spirits, powers and dominions part eschatologically at the crossroads of the gospel. We thus arrive at the dialectic of 'once' and 'now', which is absorbed into anthropology in the form of 'already saved' and 'still tempted'. In the antithesis of spirit and flesh this dialectic determines the cosmos until the parousia of Christ. Christians are drawn into this conflict all their lives. Every day they have through obedience to authenticate their baptismal origin anew. The churches, too, are exposed in the same way to the attacks of nomism and enthusiasm, which threaten the lordship of Christ. The church lives under the sign of the cross, that is to say, given over to death inwardly and outwardly, waiting longingly with the whole of creation for the liberty of the children of God and manifesting the imitation of Jesus through the bearing of his cross.

This means that Paul's view of salvation history does not differ from Augustine's. Salvation history is the battle field of the *civitas dei* and the *civitas terrena*. No conception which disregards this reality and does not, from this starting point, assume a constitutively dialectical form can invoke the authority of the apostle. In Cullmann's words,¹⁸ he thought that Victory Day was just ahead and proclaimed the gospel's triumphant progress throughout the world-wide church. At the same time he urged the Corinthians, and with them the whole of Christendom, not to celebrate this victory with the banquet of the blessed, as if they were members of a mystery religion, but to enter with Christ into the shadow of the cross. For Paul, as for the writer of Revelation, the only people who overcome are the dying, the temp-

¹⁷ On this point see P. Stuhlmacher, 'Erwägungen zum ontologischen Charakter der *κατὰ κτίσιν* bei Paulus', *EvTh*, 1967, pp. 1-35.

¹⁸ *Christ and Time*, rev. ed., 1962, p. 141.

ted, the mocked, the weak – in short, believers. The person who does not share in the carrying of the cross, leaving the things that lie behind, has no part in the church; nor has the man who does not stand in the no-man's land before the gates of this world's permanent camp, repeating Israel's Exodus. He is in truth not a Christian at all, but a member of the old world, whose characteristic is enmity to the cross. No one can take on the likeness of Christ in the birth-pangs of the Messiah without having become a disciple of the one who was crucified. Although the enthusiasts raise their cry of victory, according to Rom. 8.36 believers are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. Measured by human criteria, salvation is fundamentally rooted in disaster. That means that the Pauline proclamation of the reality of salvation history is deeply paradoxical.¹⁹

This paradox is retained when, in Rom. 4.12ff.; 9.6ff., the apostle discusses the problem of the continuity of salvation history as exemplified by Abraham. Paul really does talk about continuity in time and space and does not yet understand the sonship of Abraham in the metaphorical sense which was adopted later. Apparently he finds it important to preserve the fulfilment of the promise to Israel in its character as historical power as well. Thus in Paul the historical and eschatological dimensions do not yawn apart in the sense that they are essentially and *ab initio* different. The eschatological breaks in upon earth in a very real sense, taking root not only in the sacraments, the church and the Christian life, but even in history. Hence its manifestations can be pin-pointed in, for example, baptism, conversion or the birth of the church. The eschatological is neither supra-history nor the inner aspect of a historicity; it is power which changes the old world into a new one and which becomes incarnate in the earthly sphere. For it is corporeality which is the sphere of revelation – inevitably so, since this is the nature of the world and everyday life. Only a complete misunderstanding can make a spiritualist out of Paul, though strangely enough such attempts have repeatedly been made. For him, salvation history has a spatial and temporal dimension, frontiers dividing off the cosmic spheres of power and a cohesion which leads from creation to Christ and the parousia by way of the choosing of Israel and the promise.

But when all this is conceded, so that the idea of incarnation receives its due, dialectic and paradox must not be overlooked. Rom. 4.17ff. depicts Abraham's faith as a relation to that God who reveals

¹⁹ G. Bornkamm, *Paulus*, 1969, p. 157.

himself in history, gives offspring and hence sets faith in the continuity of promise and fulfilment, present and future. We misunderstand the tenor of the whole passage if we lose sight of the fact that faith goes beyond individual existence and situation. It has its concrete place and its particular time, and cannot be detached from the fact that in faith a particular man calls God Lord and Father. At the same time, however, it has a horizon which reaches from creation to parousia, which spans, that is to say, the whole of history. Yet faith must remain separate from a religious philosophy of life or a Christian speculation about history. For its horizons do not give faith its content. They can, on the contrary, be falsely placed and in fact generally are. Abraham does not know the country to which his exodus is to take him. He hears the promise of heirs without understanding how that promise can be fulfilled. What he sees speaks against it. From a human and earthly point of view, Sarah's laughter is completely justified and the expression of a realism which the church ignores at its peril. Sarah's laughter is faith's constant companion. It is not merely heard at the beginning of salvation history; it remains audible even when we look back at its different pages and chapters. For each of these pages and chapters contains, like the bible, the tragi-comedy of broken hopes and realized stupidities, disagreeable developments and vain service, broken existences and triumphant worldliness. Ishmael and Esau belong to it, just as much as Isaac and Jacob. For there is no Christ without Antichrist; there are no apostles without Judas, no prophets without the enthusiasts, no fields ripening to harvest without weeds; and the letters of the Apocalypse have to tell the churches at all times what their Lord has against them.

It is only from a great distance that we can read salvation history without being aware of its catastrophes. But faith must not fall a victim to docetism, must not separate itself from what is human, must not miss the cry of the dying, the despairing, the people at the end of their tether, the erring, the waiting, the complaints of the Psalms and Job's rebellion. Seen at close quarters and from the standpoint of the actors, salvation history generally looks different from what the books which are written about it would like to think. It is the story of Adam and the prodigal son, of the crucified Christ, the sheep without a shepherd, the warring confessions; a story in which faith and superstition cross and recross each other without pause. The man who places himself in its ranks does so hoping against hope, believing that God is constantly calling into being the things that are not, that he

raises the dead, lifts up the fallen, forgives sinners and makes the ungodly the instruments of his grace. The dimension of faith is framed by creation and parousia. Our everyday life, however, is seldom aware of this; it merely hears the context in which it stands preached to it. For Paul, salvation history is therefore exodus under the sign of the Word and in the face of Sarah's justifiable laughter. Its continuity is paradoxical because it can only endure when God's Word, contrary to the earthly realities, creates for itself children and communities of the pure in spirit.²⁰

3. OBSERVATIONS ON PAUL'S DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION

It has rightly been repeatedly noticed that the apostle's message of justification is a fighting doctrine, directed against Judaism. But to go on to say that, since this is so, it holds a subordinate place in Paul's theology, is an assertion which divides modern Protestantism inevitably and finally from the Reformers' interpretation of Paul and hence from the Reformation itself. A breach of this kind may perhaps be unavoidable. But at the same time we ought to realize clearly what is afoot. It is not without irony that it is left to radical historical criticism, as represented by the Bultmann school, to defend the Reformed heritage. It does so in the face of a theology of history which has lost its past revolutionary fire and is now planting conservatively laid-out gardens on the petrified lava. The curious exchange of fronts which is familiar to us from the dispute over the historical Jesus is no less prominent here. The iconoclasts of a former day are becoming orthodox again,²¹ and the custodians of ecclesiastical tradition are turning liberal. The theology of the Word and the theology of history are still in conflict. But the two have exchanged teams. We ought to consider on what side we want to be found in the future. Otherwise we could one day make the discovery that in trying to make the earth turn we were simply being whirled round on a roundabout ourselves. It was looking back that turned Lot's wife into a pillar of salt.

Two questions must be asked and answered if the unique character of the Pauline doctrine of justification is to be clearly recognized.

²⁰ Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, sees the problem clearly, as his chapter on constant and contingency shows, pp. 122ff., as well as his rejection of the scheme of promise and fulfilment, p. 159. But his notion of development does not permit him to bring out the paradox I have stressed above with equal sharpness.

²¹ For an example see E. Jüngel, M. Geiger, *Zwei Reden zum 450. Gedenktag der Reformation*, ThSt 93, 1968.

First, is it, as a fighting doctrine, so conditioned by its time that we must call it obsolete today? Secondly, does it, as Protestants generally suppose, primarily take its bearings from the individual, so that it has to be supplemented or even replaced by a standpoint based on salvation history? Stendahl answers 'yes' to both questions, and I would agree with him that it is impossible to overstress the polemical character of Paul's doctrine of justification. It does not retain its true character if its antitheses are softened or abolished – a process which is already at work in the Pastoral Epistles. It is paralysed if its attacking spear-head is blunted, and for that reason it is only seldom that it has been able to determine theology and the church. For Jews and Greeks alike, Paul was a lone wolf and an alien; and in contemporary Protestantism he is increasingly overshadowed by Peter, because his polemics are at most understood in their historical bearing. This tendency is increased because at the moment both tolerance and neo-positivism consider polemic to be the expression of subjective feelings, and hold up to it the duty of objectivity.

Transferred to the theological sphere, this of course means that the portrait of the benevolent God has more or less pushed out the picture of the judge, and the function of the Holy Spirit is now only viewed as edification, although the New Testament ceaselessly shows him as a polemicist. But can the imitation of Jesus ever cease to be a scandal, even when it is silent? Are not all the revolutionary slogans harmless compared with the message about the raising of the dead? Does the preaching of the forgiveness of sins no longer shock modern man when it touches him personally? Will the crucified Christ which Grünewald painted ever lose its frightfulness? Strangely enough, Christianity has contrived to draw so many pious veils over all this that it has quite ceased to give offence. For Christianity has long told a story of salvation which justifies the institution of the church as the community of 'good' people. The muted colours of our church windows transform the story of the Nazarene into a saint's legend in which the cross is merely an episode, being the transition to the ascension – as if we were dealing with a variation of the Hercules myth. If we want to understand the polemics of the Pauline doctrine of justification, we must remember this development. The doctrine undoubtedly grew up in the course of the anti-Jewish struggle and stands or falls with this antithesis. But the exegete must not make things easy for himself by simply, as historian, noting this incontrovertible fact. If he does, he could equally well call Jesus a pious Jew

who had a memorable fate and left behind him a series of impressive sayings. Our task is to ask: what does the Jewish nomism against which Paul fought really represent? And our answer must be: it represents the community of 'good' people which turns God's promises into their own privileges and God's commandments into the instruments of self-sanctification.²²

The New Testament scholar must not fall a victim to the view of Gentile Christians from the end of the first century onwards; their interest in the Jewish law was purely ethical²³ – apart from that, they allegorized it. The reaction to a law viewed in this light inevitably expresses itself in psychological terms, i.e., in the consciousness of guilt and sin. Since a consciousness of this kind does not in fact play the same part in Paul that it does in the later western world, it would seem necessary to deny the Pauline teaching about the law anthropological depth and to push it into the historical distance. The doctrine of justification is of course affected simultaneously, because the doctrine of the law is its radical spear-head. Such self-contained and logical argumentation merely fails to realize that the apostle did not for a single moment detach the ritual from the ethical law – nor, as Jew, could he possibly do so. The *nomos* is for him, precisely because he was unable to confine it to the moral sphere, power which was part of salvation history and had even cosmic force – a power like sin and death.²⁴ This power leads man astray into the paths of demonstrable piety. It creates the sphere within which man tries to sunder himself from immorality and godlessness, views the history of his fathers' redemption as the guarantee of his own election and claims God's grace as his personal privilege. But Paul calls this attitude to God sin, because these pious claims and works are an attempt to bring God into dependence on us. It is the gospel which, for the first time, lays bare this sin and the true part played by the law which produces it. For the gospel does not begin with subjective feelings of guilt but with the objective fallenness of man, who is his own victim, the victim of the forces of his own world, a state which displays itself in its most sinister form in his reliance on his own goodness.

Now we must consider whether the struggle is really superseded

²² This problem is nicely brought out when T. W. Manson, in *On Paul and John*, 1963, p. 58ff., states that the justification of the ungodly does not apply to 'every sinful Tom, Dick and Harry', because it is the work of Christ to alter man's moral attitude also.

²³ Cf. U. Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständnis des Paulus*, 1968, p. 142.

²⁴ Bultmann, *Theology I*, pp. 259f.

at this point and whether it is a merely anti-Jewish affair. If it were, then Christianity must already have become the company of the poor in spirit which, with the whole of creation, waits for the day of redemption. But then it would no longer be permissible for it to erect the fences of a sacred enclosure round itself. For, unlike the Pharisees, the Zealots and the Qumran community, its Lord did not want to make the pious man more pious still. He set out to go to the tax-collectors and sinners, that is to say, into the world of the ungodly. The pious were, generally speaking, against him and finally crucified him, if what the evangelists tell us is true. Is the story of this Jesus not our story and our reality? On which side does Christianity really stand when it is confronted with Jesus? The fact that we confess him by no means proves that we are his disciples.

We can now draw some preliminary conclusions from what has been said: Paul's doctrine of justification, with the doctrine of the law that belongs to it, is ultimately his interpretation of Christology.²⁵ It proclaims the 'true God and true man' in its way by expressing the fact that the true God joins himself to the ungodly and brings them salvation, as he did through Jesus – the ungodly, but not the Pharisees, the Zealots or the men of Qumran. It proclaims true man by depicting the one who is intolerable to the good people of his time, the one who breaks through their taboos and can only die for them. The Pauline doctrine of justification is entirely and solely Christology, a Christology, indeed, won from Jesus' cross and hence an offensive Christology. Its point is the *ecce homo* presented so that we, confronted with the Nazarene, learn how little our illusions about ourselves and the world can stand up to his reality. But it is this which is the breakthrough to the new creation.

The Gentile Christianity of which Paul was one of the founders saw the apostle's struggle with the Jewish law as obsolete; but it soon became itself the sphere of the *nova lex* and then no longer knew what to do with the Pauline doctrine of justification. Its Christ became the God of the mystery plays, the conqueror through suffering, who makes his believers like himself. He becomes man so that we can become as gods. Protestantism would do well to remember this development. It might then learn that the Pauline doctrine of justification is a protection not only against nomism but also against enthusiasm and mysticism. It calls the church, no less than the synagogue, in the name of Jesus, out of its pious dreams back to earth and to the humanity of

²⁵ G. Bornkamm, *Paulus*, pp. 128f.

the creature. The justification of the sinner is the only path on which God's creature remains before and under God and at the same time part of mankind, so that while he is in this world of ours he is also beneath the open heavens.

But what, then, of salvation history, if the justification of the sinner is the centre, not only of the Pauline message but of the whole Christian proclamation? With that we come to the second question which we raised at the beginning of this part of our essay. If the doctrine of justification holds fast to the Christology which does not turn its gaze away from the one who was crucified, it neither can nor may continue to be interpreted in exclusively individual terms. Protestant theology always circles round the question: how can I find a gracious God? This question retains its abiding rightness. We ought not to throw out the baby with the bath water by pushing this question out of the centre of our concern, for the sake of proclaiming Victory Day. The Jews also expected the final victory down to the very last moment when they defended the temple against the Romans; and they buried their eschatological hopes in its ruins. When we cease to ask, 'How can I find a gracious God?', we find ourselves in that curiously diffused world history which Kierkegaard unmasked with such acid irony. The message of God's victory is only credible, and can only be taken seriously, as long as there are people who take the *absolvo te* seriously and risk living by it. The church can take the burden of faith from no one; each must hazard for himself. Nor does the church save; and to believe out of *fides implicita* is not open to Protestants, although a Protestantism which has lost its proper instincts is everywhere being taken in by this slogan today.

Yet Stendahl and his friends are right in protesting against the individualist curtailment of the Christian message. Here the twentieth century must dissociate itself from the nineteenth. The Pauline doctrine of justification never took its bearings from the individual, although hardly anyone now realizes this. It does not merely talk about the gift of God to the individual. If that were so, the cosmic horizons of Rom. 1.18 - 3.20; 5.12ff.; 8.18ff. and especially chs. 9-11, would be incomprehensible. We should then also have to shut our eyes to the fact that Paul can depict God's righteousness as a power which reaches out towards our lives in order to make them obedient. Salvation never consists in our being given something, however wonderful. Salvation, always, is simply God himself in his presence for us. To be justified means that the creator remains faithful to the creature,

as the father remained faithful to the prodigal son, in spite of guilt, error and ungodliness; it means that he changes the fallen and apostate into new creatures, that in the midst of the world of sin and death he once more raises up and fulfils the promises we have misused. All his separate gifts are pointers towards these self-manifestations of his in a world which has turned away from him. But where he appears, he also meets us as our lord and judge; we experience his gifts, but also the power which lays claim to us, the sovereign rights of the creator to his whole creation.

This means that in justification it is simply the kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus which is at stake. His right to us is our salvation, if he does not let it drop. It will be our misfortune if we resist him. Paul's doctrine of justification is about God's *basileia*. The apostle generally expresses it in anthropological terms because he is concerned that it should determine our everyday lives. God's *basileia* seizes territory wherever we are and will be entirely human. Otherwise it would be illusion. The Christology inherent in the doctrine of justification corresponds to the existence led in the everyday life of the world. Justification is the stigmatization of our worldly existence through the crucified Christ. Through us and in us he simultaneously reaches out towards the world to which we belong. Paul's doctrine of justification means that under the sign of Christ, God becomes Cosmocrator, not merely the Lord of the believing individual or the god of a cult; it is not by chance that the doctrine has its roots in apocalyptic.

That is why Rom. 9-11 can describe God as also reaching out towards unbelieving Israel. He does so in accord with the eschatological law of the revaluation of earthly values, a law revealed in Christ, according to which the first is last and the last first. Israel, too, falls under the justification of the ungodly, not, as the Jews (including Qumran) suppose, the justification of the godly. The doctrine of justification dominates Rom. 9-11 no less than the rest of the epistle.²⁸ It is the key to salvation history, just as, conversely, salvation history forms the historical depth and cosmic breadth of the event of justification. Since creation, God has acted no differently with Jews and Gentiles. His being is the justification of the ungodly and hence the raising of the dead and creation out of nothing. For he acts under the token of the crucified Christ, whom Israel, too, cannot escape. Because this is so, salvation history is not the consummation of, let

²⁸ G. Bornkamm, *Paulus*, p. 160.

alone the substitute for, justification, but its historical depth, i.e., one of its aspects. Neither the scriptures nor the world can be adequately grasped except through belief in the justification of the ungodly. It is impossible to play off justification and salvation history against one another. To do so would be to fall a victim to individualism or ideology; and in either case God would cease to remain for us the creator of the world. Justification and salvation history belong together. But everything depends on the right co-ordination of the two. Just as the church must not take precedence over Christ, but must be Christ-determined without itself determining Christ, so salvation history must not take precedence over justification. It is its sphere. But justification remains the centre, the beginning and the end of salvation history. Otherwise the cross of Jesus would also inevitably lose its central position and then everything would be distorted – anthropology and ecclesiology as well as Christology and soteriology. For our God would then be once more the God of the 'good' and would cease to be, as the Father of Jesus Christ, the God of the ungodly.²⁷

²⁷ I have purposely left my account in its original form, as a lecture for a general audience. We must not merely talk esoterically, especially at the very centre of theology. Moreover, because I adhered strictly to the antithesis of the theme, I was unable to enter in detail into the present German debate about the Pauline doctrine of justification, especially among Bultmann's adherents. The tendency of the essay and its conclusions ought to be enough to show that I still participate in our common heritage. On the other hand, the debate shows that I apparently stand between two fronts in refusing either to subordinate the apostle's doctrine of justification to a pattern of salvation history or to allow it to turn into a mere vehicle for the self-understanding of the believer. I would recognize both as necessary. What I would dispute are the respective emphases which are associated with these aspects. Perhaps it is best to consider the complicated historical and philological problems involved (in which I continue, broadly speaking, to agree with P. Stuhlmacher's book, *Die Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus*, 1966) from the aspect of the basic decisions which have to be made.

These questions are forced inexorably upon us through Hans Conzelmann's essay, 'Die Rechtfertigungslehre des Paulus. Theologie oder Anthropologie?', *EvTh* 28, 1968, pp. 389–404. Even if the alternatives formulated here were already suggested earlier, as Conzelmann says on p. 390, they are still accepted on p. 393 and are identified in sharpened form with the antithesis between mysticism and justification. The apparent presupposition – and it is characteristic of our present situation – is that metaphysics and mysticism can only be avoided through an anthropological approach. My objection to this alternative is that it by-passes the problem and the relevance of Christology. My partners in debate force me to move into the centre with increasing deliberation and decision what was once, if only hesitatingly, touched on in relation to the earthly Jesus. Paul's doctrine of justification is more than a logical conclusion; it is the specific Pauline interpretation of Christology in its relation to man and the world: that is the theme of this essay – in a nutshell, but maintained in all seriousness. His teaching about justification gives a clear definition of what the apostle understands by the lordship of

Christ. I understand all the arguments of his theology from this starting point, and therefore feel bound to judge present-day Pauline interpretation by the degree to which it is able to bring this out. Difficult though it may otherwise be to distinguish those allied in the spirit from those related in the flesh, under this aspect everything becomes clear. Here everyone shows whose child he is.

Friends and opponents must be tested against the question whether they only feel able to talk about the lordship of Christ as a mythological, mystical or metaphysical figure of speech. Precisely that is the kernel of the dispute about whether God's righteousness means in Paul solely and exclusively the gift conferred on us, or whether it also means the power of salvation which reaches out towards us – a meaning which is demonstrable even philologically. I have set up no alternative here, nor can I find any. I have never maintained that the righteousness of God means exclusively or primarily a subjective genitive (unlike Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, p. 398; N. Gäumann, *Taufe und Ethik*, 1967, p. 156). On the contrary, I have called, the *genitivus auctoris*, i.e., the soteriological sense of the phrase, the dominating one. I have never denied that the righteousness of God establishes a relation (contrary to G. Klein, 'Gottes Gerechtigkeit als Thema der neuesten Paulus-Forschung', *VF* 2, 1967, pp. 5f.). It is for that very reason that I so vigorously deny an attributive interpretation (contrary to Gäumann, *op. cit.*, pp. 146, 153). One cannot simply build up a false position in this way, and sound and fury is not enough to solve a genuine problem.

The only real point is whether it is philologically and theologically justifiable to confine the Pauline statements to the gift of salvation and with Conzelmann (*Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, 1968, p. 220) to call the divine righteousness the presupposition but not the goal of our movement. It is this and this alone which I reject. According to my understanding of the apostle, every gift has the character of power. It seems unjust, particularly since I combine the two aspects, to reproach me with stressing the 'power-aspect in isolation' (Conzelmann, 'Rechtfertigungslehre', p. 399), or even to talk about a label 'which can be adopted here or there at will' (*Outline*, p. 219). In his exposition of Paul, Bultmann used the idea of power frankly and unswervingly, and I understand divine righteousness, where it does not merely mean the gift, as being at least the power to achieve salvation. Schlatter finds that the genitive in the phrase 'the righteousness of God' sometimes has the same meaning as, and always a similar bearing to, the genitive in the gospel, the power or the wrath of God. I do not consider this to be a 'philological error' (Conzelmann, *Outline*, p. 215), but rather a philological achievement, and one which can also be justified exegetically. Philological acrimony should not allow us to forget that God here is always seen and proclaimed as active revealer, not merely as the origin or owner of certain properties. Why does no one mention that the phrases about the spirit, the grace, the love and the peace of God also belong to this series and that in them the dialectic of gift and power is indisputable, a dialectic which recurs in the apostle's doctrine of the sacraments and ultimately permits God to remain both his gift to us and our Lord and judge? That I turn God's Word into 'a formal proclamation of power', 'faith into formal submission', 'abandoned by the Word at the decisive moment' and that God becomes *numinosum* (Conzelmann, 'Rechtfertigungslehre', p. 400), or that I have perverted obedience into the attitude of *humilitas* in a *devotio moderna* (Gäumann, *op. cit.*, p. 151), no longer reflects my interpretation but nightmares for which I have neither an explanation nor an answer.

But misunderstandings of this kind do arise when one starts from the alternative between theology and anthropology, reduces faith to self-understanding and ends up in a liberal-Protestant variant of Christ as the cultic deity who brings the true gnosis to his people. Here faith is still threatened by unbelief, but it is no longer

seriously endangered by superstition, and New Testament theology shrinks to a doctrine of faith. There the decisive category is inevitably 'individualization' (Conzelmann, 'Rechtfertigungslehre', pp.401ff.; G. Klein, *op. cit.*, p.11). I, too, have maintained that God's righteousness and grace are verified in the individual. If this destroys 'the objectivity of salvation history' (Conzelmann, 'Rechtfertigungslehre', p.402), that may have its uses polemically speaking, if we are once again forced into the alternative of contrasting universal history and the individual. That God's grace and righteousness relate to the world and intend a new creation, not merely a number of believing individuals, seems to me an irrelinquishable truth if the Christian proclamation is to be the foundation of anything more than merely private piety. I must therefore once more replace the alternatives by a dialectic. The justification of the ungodly certainly in the first place affects, in concrete terms, myself. But the phrase is robbed of its full significance if it does not mean salvation for everyman and for the whole world. For even the ungodly only exist, in a remarkably transsubjective way, in the entanglement of all earthly things in sin and death. Adam takes on concrete form in the individual life. But every individual life, with all its possible differentiations, is, conversely, the representation of Adam and of the individual's world. In the struggle with superstition, faith experiences that righteousness of God which was part of the design before faith arrived at its self-understanding and which does not stop there, because it forces faith to go out in service to the world. Salvation reaches out beyond our experience, which is always incomplete and often enough deceptive. Salvation lies in the fact that Christ becomes our lord; and Christ becomes a god of the mysteries when this lordship is restricted to the individual sphere. I did not talk about the gift in isolation for the sake of using abstract terminology or making a perverse distinction (contrary to G. Klein, *op. cit.*, p.11). I was deeply aware that in the whole of theological history down to the present day the gift has always been isolated from its giver; and that in the gift the Lord who gives himself to us and who reaches out towards us in that gift is pushed into the background. If that is the effect of the Pauline doctrine of justification – and it was already so with the Corinthians and remains so wherever ecclesiology or anthropology move into the centre of theology and obscure the primacy of Christology – then this doctrine is, according to my understanding of it, being deeply misunderstood, both theologically and in its philological and historical sense. For the doctrine is concerned with the one who sets up his kingdom on earth, thereby becoming salvation for all who receive him in faith.²⁸ It is the theological summing-up of a Christological interpretation: Christ rules over his enemies throughout the world and, as the one who was crucified, gives his grace to the ungodly.

²⁸ This is why I do not understand G. Bornkamm's criticism, (*Paulus*, p.156) that the co-ordinate relation of God's righteousness and faith recedes curiously into the background in my writings. The following essay will, I hope, refute this judgment.

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PERSPECTIVES ON PAUL

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