

Association of Hebrew Catholics

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The Gifts and Call of God

As Addressed to the Christian Communities by St. Paul

Epistle to the Romans: Chapters 9 — 11
(Text and Commentary)

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Romans: Chapters 9 — 11

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We strongly recommend this study be complemented by reading the following Appendix:

[Appendix 1: Role of the Jewish People After the Coming of the Messiah](#)

(An Addendum to the contents of this paper.)

This appendix is based on Chapter 10 of "The Mystery of Israel and the Church," Volume 1, "Figure and Fulfillment" by Dr. Lawrence Feingold. The book is highly recommended.

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The Gifts And Call Of God

Preliminary Considerations

General Introduction

All Christians will need to have a very solid grounding in the Hebrew Christian culture of the Sacred Scriptures and in the very specific teaching of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ, if our Faith is to survive the growing onslaught of atheism which has all but overtaken our civilization. In some respects we have been caught napping and are therefore, in fact, not very well prepared. That's the bad news. The good news is that when we embrace God's plan for our renewal and restoration we can turn that situation around. It is going to take a lot of work — but we can do it, if we "get our act together" and take a systematic approach.

One of our first priorities is to re-connect with our Jewish patrimony and rediscover the missing dimension in our spiritual psyche. Jewish people entering the Church have a special contribution to make in this respect. And by that, we do not mean only in terms of just academic matters, but include the whole range of social, family and cultural influences.

Fortunately there is a growing range of excellent literature which reflects the movement of Jewish people into the Church. We offer, here, a modest article which we hope will help any reader understand the profound issues at stake as we rebuild our Jewish membership.

About this article

Our text is St. Paul to the Romans, chapters 9 to 11. Our translation in this particular article is that of Ronald Knox. Our presentation comprises the three chapters from Romans, divided into eight sections. Each of these is accompanied by a commentary by the Scriptural Theologian, Ronald Cox, which has been taken from his book "**It Is Paul Who Writes**". His own introduction to using his book is available at our on-line library. ([Click here to view.](#)) The eight unit headings are as they appear in his book.

Although published now over 50 years ago, and reflecting some different perspectives in Jewish-Christian matters, we consider the work to have much to commend it. Progressively we will annotate and supplement the text, as appropriate, to clarify matters as they arise.

Jewish-Gentile Interface

Readers interested in this topic will find excellent reading on Jewish and Christian web sites. Of particular value are the articles available on the Vatican web site and our international AHC web site. Our article is really just a starting point for what is, in fact, a fascinating subject to pursue.

The three chapters of Romans (9 — 11) are considered to have been a kind of prepared instruction, carried about and used by St. Paul when interacting with rather uninformed objectors who did not know the Scriptures. They reflect an emotional loyalty St. Paul feels for his people and magnificent culture yet show him as surveying the whole of Salvation History with total honesty, integrity and sensitivity.

True to his style, St. Paul tackles matters head-on, and speaks to Jews and Gentiles, each in turn, and with equal candour. He is very much a Jewish rabbi, totally at home in both the political and religious hurley-burley of his times. He does not "mince-words", and for that reason is accepted by some only with considerable difficulty. However, on reading and re-reading his "lesson", it becomes patently clear that he loves his Jewish heritage as much as his new-found Faith in the Messiah. He is passionate about our Lord's teaching reaching out in all directions and being culturally accessible to everyone. His lesson is therefore a gem in its own right, and worthy of our repeated study and reflection. His message is also one of great hope for both Jew and Gentile.

Our Reference Texts

For the preparation of annotations and explanations we have consulted, amongst other works, the following:—

1. The Epistle To The Romans

by W. Sanday, D.D., L.L.D., Litt. D., and
A. C. Headlam, D.D.
(T. and T. Clark, Edinburgh 1895)

2. The Epistle of Paul to the Romans,

by C. H. Dodd,
(Hodder and Stoughton, London 1932)

3. A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans,

by B. M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida.
(U. B. S. USA 1973)

4. Romans

by Eugene H. Maly,
(Veritas Publications, Dublin and
Michael Glazier Inc., Delaware, 1979.)

5. The Mystery of the Church (Volumes I, II, and III)

by Lawrence Feingold,
(The Miriam Press, St. Louis, 2010.)

(Highly recommended set of 3 volumes, available from the AHC international web site.)

Section 1

The Problem of Jewish Unbelief

Romans 9: 1 — 13

I am not deceiving you, I am telling you the truth in Christ's name, with the full assurance of a conscience enlightened by the Holy Spirit, when I tell you of the great sorrow, the continual anguish I feel in my heart, and how it has ever been my wish that I myself might be doomed to separation from Christ, if that would benefit my brethren, my own kinsmen by race. They are Israelites, adopted as God's sons; the visible presence, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the Temple worship, and the promises are their inheritance; the patriarchs belong to them, and theirs is the human stock from which Christ came; Christ, who rules as God over all things, blessed forever. Amen.

And yet it is not as if God's promise has failed of its effect. Not all those who are sprung from Israel are truly Israelites; not all the posterity of Abraham are Abraham's children: 'It is through Isaac,' he was told, 'that your posterity shall be traced.' That is to say, God's sonship is not for all those who are Abraham's children by natural descent; it is only the children given to him as the result of God's promise that are to be counted as his posterity. It was a promise God made, when he said: 'When this season comes round again, I will visit you, and Sara shall have a son.' And not only she, but Rebecca too received a promise, when she bore two sons to the same husband, our father Isaac. They had not yet been born; they had done nothing, good or evil; and already, so that God's purpose might stand out clearly as his own choice, with no action of theirs to account for it, nothing but his will, from whom the call came, she was told: 'The elder is to be the servant of the younger' So it is that we read: 'I have been a friend to Jacob, and an enemy to Esau.'

Commentary

Paul here begins a new section of his letter; for the next three chapters (9 — 11) he discusses the sad fact of Israel's rejection of Jesus^(1.1). The Jewish nation had been in training, during the whole period of their 2,000 years' existence, for the coming of their Redeemer; surely they, first of all other peoples, should have accepted Jesus without question. Did God's plan go astray somewhere? In answering this, Paul explores the mind of God, investigates the subject of human responsibility, and argues in detailed fashion from the words and persons of the Old Testament.

He does not deny the privileged position of the chosen people of God; instead, he lists nine privileges possessed by the Jews, and by no other peoples. They have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (whose name was changed to Israel, and this name became God's own designation of his people) as their patriarchs; God has made covenants with them again and again, first with Abraham, then with Moses and David. He manifested his presence in a miraculous fashion under the form of a shining cloud during the whole forty years of the Exodus; he selected one place on earth, the temple at Jerusalem, where true worship could be offered to him. And finally, the Messiah himself was a Jew; Jesus was born of King David's house in Bethlehem.

Paul begins his argument by investigating God's mode of action in the cases of Abraham and Isaac. He chose one son of each of these patriarchs to be the repository of his blessings. Isaac was chosen, Ishmael rejected; then Jacob was chosen, and Esau rejected^(1.2). These selections were due solely to God's free choice; God picked his man before birth. This shows that a vocation from God is something he gives; man does not earn it.

"Annotations":

Footnote:

1.1. Israel's rejection of Jesus.

Many fine papers and articles discussing just how actual and widespread this rejection really was, are available and easily accessed. Our commentary here is seeking to provide the background to St. Paul's way of seeing and expressing it. The argument, therefore presented here by Ronald Cox, is to help us understand how St. Paul saw it. The Blessed Apostle presents his case as a magnificent act of love, and especially mercy, in which, ultimately Jews and Gentiles, each in turn, are sanctified and renewed. It ends in a Hymn of Praise to God for His magnificent plan of Salvation.

Footnote:

1.2. Jacob Was Chosen and Esau Rejected

Towards the ends of St. Paul's text in Section 1 we read, God saying, "I have been a friend (i.e. loved) Jacob and an enemy of Esau". To this the average reader today would say, "What did Esau do to deserve such treatment?"

We need to understand that this is a very important Hebraic mode of expression. Eugene Maly explains it this way:

"God's hatred of Esau is a way of emphasising his love of Jacob. It indicates a preference that has profound implications which can, ultimately, affect positively the supposed object of hatred. A good parallel is had in Luke 14: 26 where 'hatred' of family members will, in the end, be loved in a new way, in Christ."

Section 2

God's Purpose Served even by Rebels

Romans 9: 14 — 23

What does this mean? That God acts unjustly? That is not to be thought of. 'I will show pity,' he tells Moses, 'on those whom I pity; I will show mercy where I am merciful'; the effect comes, then, from God's mercy, not from man's will, or man's alacrity. Pharaoh, too, is told in scripture: 'This is the very reason why I have made you what you are, so as to give proof, in you, of my power, and to let my name be known all over the earth.' Thus he shows mercy where it is his will, and where it is his will he hardens men's hearts. Hereupon you will ask, 'If that is so, how can he find fault with us, since there is no resisting his will?' Nay, but who are you, friend, to bandy words with God? Is the pot to ask the potter, 'Why have you fashioned me thus?' Is not the potter free to do what he wills with the clay, using the same lump to make two objects, one for noble and one for ignoble use? It may be that God has borne, long and patiently, with those who are the objects of his vengeance, fit only for destruction, meaning to give proof of that vengeance, and display his power at last; meaning also to display, in those who are the objects of his mercy, how rich is the glory he bestows, that glory for which he has destined them.

Commentary

There is no problem to the human mind in God's choosing Isaac and Jacob for his favours; the real difficulty is his justice in rejecting Ishmael and Esau. It is easy to see how the divine plan is carried out by those obedient to him; but how about those who rebel against him? To illustrate this, Paul takes up a third character, the Pharaoh of the Exodus. This Egyptian king impeded God's plan at every turn; after each of the first nine plagues he promised to let Israel go, but when the plague ceased he went back on his word (Exodus 7 — 10). This does not mean that Pharaoh was frustrating God's purpose; unknowingly and unwillingly he was carrying out the divine plan, which is always fulfilled.

Just how this happens is best seen from the trade of pottery making. If the clay is suitable, the potter may produce a superb vessel fit to hold the most expensive perfume; if there is a flaw in the clay, the rejected article is not thrown away; it can serve some ignoble use (some ordinary household function). Pharaoh, the rejected vessel of clay, represents rebellious Israel. But they have not escaped the sovereignty of God; even the hard hearts of unrepentant Israel can be used by God^(2.1.).

"Annotations"

Footnote

2.1. *Even the hard hearts of unrepentant Israel can be used by God*

There can be no doubt that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (See Exodus 7: 14 and 22; 8: 15; and 9: 7). St. Paul is making An interesting connection between Pharaoh's obstinacy in Exodus and the People Israel's refusal to accept the Messiah.

*Eugene Maly points out that Israel did not distinguish, as we do, between God's **permissive will** and **His absolute will**. Thus Pharaoh was permitted, as it were, to harden his heart and thereby advance God's plan of deliverance. Likewise, Israel was permitted to reject the Messiah, in a certain way, though not — as St. Paul will argue — to hold back God's ultimate plan.*

Section 3

God's Mercy to Jew and Gentile

Romans 9: 24 — 33

We are the objects of his mercy; we, whom he has called, Jews and Gentiles alike. That is what he says in the book of Hosea: "Those who were no people of mine, I will call my people; she who was unloved shall be loved. In places where they used to be told, 'You are no people of mine,' they will be called, now, sons of the living God'. And, where Israel is concerned, Isaiah cries out: 'The number of the sons of Israel may be like the sand of the sea, but it is a remnant that will be left; it is a short reckoning that the Lord will make upon earth.' So Isaiah had said earlier on: 'If the Lord of Hosts had not left us a stock to breed from, we should have been like Sodom, we should have gone the way of Gomorrah'."

'What do we conclude, then? Why, that the Gentiles, who never aimed at justifying themselves, attained justification, that justification which comes of faith; whereas the Israelites aimed at a disposition which should justify them, and never reached it. Why was this? Because they hoped to derive their justification from observance, not from faith. They tripped on the stone which trips men's feet; so we read in scripture: 'Behold, I am setting down in Zion one who is a stone to trip men's feet, a boulder to catch them unawares; those who believe in him will not be disappointed.'

Commentary

Alongside the divine plan of rejection there is his plan of election; there are the potter's vessels for noble as well as for ignoble uses. Paul's purpose in this paragraph is to show that the constitution of the Christian Church, the call of both Jew and Gentile, was not an after-thought; it was an integral part of his divine purpose right from the beginning of Jewish history, in Old Testament times.

By his use of the two phrases, 'no people of mine ... unloved,' Hosea foreshadows the call of the heathen nations. The Gentiles with no membership in the chosen people, and outside the influence of God's revealed religion in Old Testament times, now are welcomed into the Christian Church and the friendship of God.

Isaiah is speaking of the Assyrian invasion of the eighth century B.C. (a century later than Hosea). Israel will survive war and exile not as an entire nation but as a chosen few — the saved remnant. She will be partially saved, not totally destroyed as Sodom and Gomorrah were. That is why so many Gentiles and so few Jews make up the Christian Church; God foretold in the Scriptures who would accept and who would reject his Son, who is the stone (our Lord used the same metaphor of himself, Matthew 21: 44) which has tripped the feet of the mass of Israel.

Section 4

Israel's Failure Her Own Fault

Romans 10: 1 — 11

Brethren, they have all the good will of my heart, all my prayers to God, for their salvation. That they are jealous for God's honour, I can testify; but it is with imperfect understanding. They did not recognise God's way of justification, and so they tried to institute a way of their own, instead of submitting to his. Christ has superseded the law, bringing justification to anyone who will believe. The account which Moses gives of that justification which comes from the law, is that a man will find life in its commandments if he observes them. But the justification which comes from faith makes a different claim: 'Do not say, "Who will scale heaven for us?" (as if we had to bring Christ down to earth)', or, 'Who will go down into the depth for us?' (as if we had to bring Christ back from the dead). 'No,' says the scripture, 'the message is close to your hand, it is on your lips, it is in your heart'; meaning by that the message of faith, which we preach. You can find salvation, if you will use your lips to confess that Jesus is the Lord, and your heart to believe that God has raised him up from the dead. The heart has only to believe, if we are to be justified; the lips have only to make confession, if we are to be saved. That is what the scripture says, 'Anyone who believes in him will not be disappointed'.

Commentary

Up to this point Paul has been considering the problem of Israel's unbelief from God's point of view. From the Old Testament history he has shown that God has sovereign power to choose or reject whomever he will: his divine plan is carried out by both the obedient and the rebels. In this paragraph Paul examines the problem from man's point of view. His conclusion is that Israel herself is to blame; her failure to recognise that faith in Christ is the only way to justification is responsible for her exclusion from the Mystical Body of Christ ^(4. 1). The main line of his argument is again from the Old Testament. He uses the wording of Deuteronomy 30: 12 — 14 to show that **the New Testament approach by faith is less difficult than the Old Testament approach by observing the Mosaic law** ^(4. 2). Some Jews thought they had to win God's friendship by great deeds, like spacemen scaling the skies, or magicians bringing back the dead. That is unnecessary, says Paul, because God is not difficult to find; he came down on earth at the Incarnation, and rose from the tomb at the Resurrection. God has presented himself to us, without any effort on our part; all we have to do is to accept him by faith — internal assent of the mind and external profession.

"Annotations"

Footnote:

4.1. Exclusion from the Mystical Body of Christ

In our age of vast numbers of books, articles and opinions about every conceivable matter, it is easy to become confused about any issue if we consult in a haphazard and unstructured way. The relationship between Judaism together with its members and the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church, is illustrated by the following two quotations of Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, and other "Notable Quotations".

Pope St. John Paul II

“The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism, therefore, we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.”

(At the Synagogue of Rome).

Cardinal Ratzinger: Now Pope Benedict XVI

“The faith witnessed in the Bible of the Jews, is for us not a different religion but the foundation of our own faith.”

(The Heritage of Abraham — December 2000)

Notable Quotations

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 839

“When she delves into her own mystery, the Church, the People of God in the New Covenant, discovers her link with the Jewish People, the first to hear the Word of God. The Jewish faith, unlike other non-Christian religions, is already a response to God’s revelation in the Old Covenant. To the Jews ‘belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is in Christ’, (Romans 9: 4) for the gifts and call of God are irrevocable.”

Nostra Aetate, 4 — Pope Paul VI (1965)

“Thus the Church of Christ acknowledges that according to God’s saving design, the beginnings of her faith and her election are found already among the Patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all who believe in Christ — Abraham’s sons according to faith — are included in the same Patriarch’s call, and likewise that the salvation of the Church is mysteriously foreshadowed by the chosen people’s exodus from the land of bondage.”

Eminent Theologian: Fr. Louis Bouyer

“Judeo-Christianity cannot be considered a transitory phase of abolished Christianity, forever surpassed by pagano-Christianity, which would have triumphed over it. The Christian synthesis must always be renewed by renewing its contact with the primary and, in a sense, definitive expression of the Gospel, in the categories and forms of Judaism.

Judeo-Christianity, as Paul and Peter recognised and proclaimed, remains forever the mother form of Christianity, to which all other forms must always have recourse. It is therefore a weakness for the Church that Judeo-Christianity, from which it was born and from which it cannot free itself, no longer subsists in her except in tracings. It can be believed that she will not reach the ultimate stage of her development except by rediscovering it — fully living in her.”

(Quoted in: The Hebrew Catholic, #73, page 13.)

Footnote:

**Extract from *Evangelii Gaudium* Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis,
24 November 2013.**

Relations with Judaism

247. *We hold the Jewish people in special regard because their covenant with God has never been revoked, for “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Romans 11: 29). The Church, which shares with Jews an important part of the sacred Scriptures, looks upon the people of the covenant and their faith as one of the sacred roots of her own Christian identity (cf. Romans 11: 16 — 18). As Christians, we cannot consider Judaism as a foreign religion; nor do we include the Jews among those called to turn from idols and to serve the true God (cf. 1 Thessalonians 1: 9). With them, we believe in the one God who acts in history, and with them we accept his revealed word.*

248. *Dialogue and friendship with the children of Israel are part of the life of Jesus’ disciples. The friendship which has grown between us makes us bitterly and sincerely regret the terrible persecutions which they have endured, and continue to endure, especially those that have involved Christians.*

249. *God continues to work among the people of the Old Covenant and to bring forth treasures of wisdom which flow from their encounter with his word. For this reason, the Church also is enriched when she receives the values of Judaism. While it is true that certain Christian beliefs are unacceptable to Judaism, and that the Church cannot refrain from proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Messiah, there exists as well a rich complementarity which allows us to read the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures together and to help one another to mine the riches of God’s word. We can also share many ethical convictions and a common concern for justice and the development of peoples.*

Footnote:

4.2. The New Testament approach by faith is less difficult than the Old Testament approach by observing Mosaic Law.

The commentator is not reducing the issue of following the Messiah to just whatever is easier. Corruption within the body of senior authorities had led the way to their making impossible demands on the common members of Jewish society. Accepting Yeshua — Jesus — as Messiah enabled one to fulfill the true and original intentions of the Torah, the Law, and thus to rejoice in a beautiful sense of relief and renewed spiritual commitment to the purposes of God. St. Paul, by this message, became a thorn in the side of corrupt teachers of Israel, and following in the steps of Jesus, a champion of those who were the oppressed.

Section 5

The Gospel Has Been Preached Everywhere

Romans 10: 12 — 21

There is no distinction made here between Jew and Gentile; all alike have one Lord, and he has enough and to spare for all those who call upon him. 'Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.' Only, how are they to call upon him until they have learned to believe in him? And how are they to believe in him, until they listen to him? And how can they listen, without a preacher to listen to? And how can there be preachers, unless preachers are sent on their errand? So we read in scripture, 'How welcome is the coming of those who tell of good news.' True, there are some who have not obeyed the call of the gospel; so Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has given us a faithful hearing?' (See how faith comes from hearing; and hearing through Christ's word.) But, tell me, did the news never come to them? Why yes: 'The utterance fills every land, the message reaches the ends of the world.' And, tell me, was not Israel warned of it? Why, there is a saying that goes back to Moses, 'I will make them jealous of a nation that is no nation at all; I will put rivalry between them and a nation which has never learned wisdom.' And Isaiah speaks out boldly, 'Those who never looked for me have found me; I have made myself known to those who never asked for word of me'; and he says of Israel, 'I have stretched out my hands all day to a people that refuses obedience, and cries out against me.'

Commentary

This section is usually understood as a demonstration of the guilt of the Jews. They have no excuse at all, because **the good news of salvation through Christ has been preached, by this time, all over the Mediterranean world**; none of them can say that they have not heard of Christ. Paul's emphasis is on preachers because there were few books in those days; people did not find out about things from reading; it was preaching that was essential in spreading the belief in Christ.

But Mgr. Knox has an entirely different explanation. He holds that Paul is here treating of the call of the Gentiles; the unbelief of the Jews is only mentioned by way of contrast (5.2). Nationalism was so strong among the converts from Judaism that many of them thought the gospel should not be preached to the Gentiles at all; they had completely forgotten our Lord's express command to his followers: 'Preach the gospel to the whole of creation, making disciples of all nations.'

So Paul's objective is to prove that the admission of Gentiles to the Church was foretold in the Old Testament, that God always meant the true Israel (5.3) to have a world-wide diffusion. In support of his claim, he goes right back to Moses; then he quotes king David, the prophet Joel, and his favourite Isaiah (4 times).

"Annotations"

Footnote:

5.1. The good news of salvation through Christ has been preached, by this time, all over the Mediterranean world.

This belief has been held by many Christians down through the centuries. We need to know that St. Paul's approach is to emphasise the beginning of fulfilment in Jesus Messiah. He spoke as a Jew proclaiming the fulfilment of prophecy yet acknowledging that this process is in the state of continuous unfolding: and this began with "the admission of Gentiles to the Church" as Cox writes.

This understanding is crucial if we are to grasp the prophetic element in St. Paul's preaching. He is not attributing blame to all individuals who have not followed the Messiah. He is not even claiming that every single one has had the opportunity to do so, despite what a superficial glance at his letter might suggest.

There are media people today who tell us the Christian message — with all the most sophisticated means imaginable — does not reach even half of one percent. One would be putting one's head in a noose by claiming every individual person received the complete message of Jesus. St. Paul's declaration must be read in the context of unfolding Messianic prophecy.

Footnote

5.2. The unbelief of the Jews is only mentioned by way of contrast.

The translator of the Biblical text, Ronald Knox understands the Hebrew use made by St. Paul using contrast as a means, not so much to condemn rejection of the Messiah by Israel, but to focus on the amazing acceptance of Him by the Gentiles. This is a common Hebraism, used often by Jesus.

Nevertheless, St. Paul does point out how the Jewish leaders rejected the Messiah. Some may suggest that he is being simplistic about the tragic rejection of Jesus. But again, St. Paul makes an issue of it in order to contrast it a little later with the final glorious acceptance of the One they had rejected.

Footnote

5.3. The true Israel

The commentator (Ronald Cox) does not here use this phrase to suggest that the Israel of St. Paul's time was a "false" Israel. He is referring to the comprehensive image of Israel as being open to all humanity, in the fullness of time. That is, he is referring to the Israel of fulfilment.

Appendix to Section 5

Romans 10: 14 — 21 — Commentary

"Inexcusable Perversity"?

We attach a portion of a typical treatment of Romans 9 — 11, from "**The Epistle To The Romans**" by N. P. Williams. Much of that presentation is paraphrased for us to read it as being the way the Jews in St. Paul's day would have understood it. Our rather abrasive title is in fact the last two words of a particular section (10: 14— 21). Similar types of expressions are used effectively by Rabbi Shaul (Paul) not to demean but to judge **a position** taken by Jewish authorities (not the ordinary people) as a means of highlighting the eventual glorious reunification of the whole family of God. Our intention is to demonstrate the robust, straight and tough dialogue which typified a rabbi's treatment of a topic. Here it is the turn of the Jew's to be on the receiving end. Elsewhere the Gentiles also get a "dressing down".

The commentator poses a threefold answer to the problem of Israel's rejection:

First: God is absolute Sovereign of all, and can do what He wills with His own (9: 6 — 29).

Second: It is due to Israel's own deliberate faithlessness (9: 30 — 10: 21).

Thirdly: The problem is finally resolved — the rejection is only:

- a) partial,
- b) temporary.

All Israel will ultimately be saved, (Chapter 11)

The text and notes on Romans 10: 14 — 21 in the Appendix are an explanation of the **second part** of St. Paul's threefold argument above: i.e. Israel's apparent faithlessness. We need to be robust enough to be familiar with how so many Christians view the stand-off position of the Jews.

Remember St. Paul is a Jewish rabbi presenting a particular issue regarding Jesus in a truly Jewish manner and doing so from a position of believing strongly in the eventual, final union of all in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Click here for [Appendix: "Commentary on Romans Chapter 10"](#) (Revised Version)

Any reader uncertain how to read this kind of material may well be helped by referring to our clipping from: "[The Gifts and Calling of God are Irrevocable](#)" (Romans 11: 29).

Section 6

A Believing Remnant Among The Jews

Romans 11: 1 — 10

Tell me, then, has God disowned his people? That is not to be thought of. Why, I am an Israelite myself, descended from Abraham; Benjamin is my tribe. No, God has not disowned the people which, from the first, he recognised as his. Do you not remember what scripture, tells us about Elijah? The complaint, I mean, which he made before God about Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets, and overthrown your altars; I am the only one left, and my life, too, is threatened.' And what does the divine revelation tell him? 'There are seven thousand men I have kept true to myself, with knees that never bowed to Baal.' So it is in our time; a remnant has remained true; grace has chosen it. And if it is due to grace, then it is not due to observance of the law; if it were, grace would be no grace at all. What does it mean, then? Why, that Israel has missed its mark; only this chosen remnant has attained it, while the rest were hardened; so we read in scripture, 'God has numbed their senses, given them unseeing eyes and deaf ears, to this day.' David, too, says, 'Let their feasting be turned into a trap, a snare, a spring to recoil upon them; let their eyes be dim, so that they cannot see, keep their backs bowed down continually.'

Commentary

Paul's first contact with Christianity was the long sermon of Stephen, delivered on the day of his execution by the Jewish leaders. In this speech (Acts 7) Stephen traced the long history of rebellion against God by Israel; but there were always some true to the Lord, such as Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David. And this is the doctrine put forward here by Paul: there are Jews in the Christian Church ^(6.1.), true followers of the Master. Peter and Paul, Mary the mother of Jesus, many bishops and missionaries engaged in spreading the faith, are members of the chosen race.

The doctrine of the Remnant, a percentage of the nation remaining true to the Lord, is developed in the Old Testament especially in the writings of Isaiah. He used it to explain God's providence in the Babylonian exile; the exiles were the elect of God, they represented the true Israel. The teaching first appears in scripture in the story of Elias (ninth century B.C.). As he fled from the wrath of Ahab and Jezebel, he complained to God that he was the only true worshipper left; but God told him there were 7,000 others who had not followed the idolatrous ways of the Jewish leaders; they were the remnant who remained true to the Lord.

"Annotations"

Footnote

6.1 There are Jews in the Christian Church

There are indeed very many well-informed Jews who are enthusiastic, highly active Christians. The commentary names the earliest such people. However, the trickle of Jews entering the Church has continued and even grown in recent decades. This is an interesting phenomenon, given the general, colossal abandonment of the Church, during these decades, by its former Gentile members.

Section 7

The Church Not Meant For Gentiles Only

Romans 11: 11 — 24

Tell me, then, have they stumbled so as to fall altogether? God forbid; the result of their false step has been to bring the Gentiles salvation, and the result of that must be to rouse the Jews to emulate them. Why then, if their false step has enriched the world, if the Gentiles have been enriched by their default, what must we expect, when it is made good? (I am speaking now to you Gentiles.) As long as my apostolate is to the Gentiles, I mean to make much of my office, in the hope of stirring up my own flesh and blood to emulation, and saving some of them. If the losing of them has meant a world reconciled to God, what can the winning of them mean, but life risen from the dead?

When the first loaf is consecrated, the whole batch is consecrated with it; so, when the root is consecrated, the branches are consecrated too. The branches have been thinned out, and you, a wild olive, have been grafted in among them; share, with them, the root and the richness of the true olive. That is no reason why you should boast yourself better than the branches; remember, in your mood of boastfulness, that you owe life to the root, not the root to you. 'Branches were cut away,' you will tell me, 'so that I might be grafted in.' True enough, but it was for want of faith that they were cut away, and it is only faith that keeps you where you are; you have no reason for pride, rather for fear; God was unforgiving with the branches that were native to the tree, what if he should find occasion to be unforgiving with you too? There is graciousness, then, in God, and there is also severity. His severity is for those who have fallen away, his graciousness is for you, only so long as you continue in his grace; if not, you too shall be pruned away. Just so they too will be grafted in, if they do not continue in their unbelief; to graft them in afresh is not beyond God's power. Indeed, it was against nature when you were grafted on to the true olive's stock, you, who were native to the wild olive; it will be all the easier for him to graft these natural branches on to their own parent stock.

Commentary

Up to this point Paul has been explaining the rejection of the Jews for the benefit of Jewish converts; now he is prophesying the return of the Jews, so as to keep the Gentile Christians in their place (7.1). Jewish Christians were a minority at Rome; there was danger of their being cold-shouldered by the Gentile majority. Probably Peter, the apostle of the Roman church, had asked Paul, as the champion of Gentile Christians, to put the Gentiles in their place, restore peace between the two communities, and make them live together in unity.

Paul reminds the Gentiles that the gospel was preached to them only when the Jews rejected the Christian missionaries; they should be grateful to the Jews for this opportunity of salvation. Will not this fact stir up the Jews to emulate the Gentiles, and eventually enter the Christian Church? Such a conclusion to history would be a wonderful surprise, something like Lazarus coming back from the grave (that seems to be the meaning of the disputed phrase, 'life risen from the dead').

In order to make it clear that the Gentiles are not to regard the temporary rejection of Israel (7.2) as a compliment arranged for their personal benefit, Paul uses one of his best-known illustrations, that of an olive tree; instead of lording it over the Jews in arrogant fashion, the Gentiles should be humble and filled with a salutary fear of divine punishment.

Our Lord likened Israel to a fig-tree (Luke 13: 6—9); in Isaiah and the Psalms the image of a vine is used; in Hosea and Jeremiah we find Paul's figure of an olive tree. In the Mediterranean world the cultivated olive is the most familiar and widespread of all trees; it is the main source of cooking oil. Paul pictures a graft of wild branches on to a cultivated ('true olive') tree; this is contrary to normal procedure. And so is the Gentile influx into the Church; the Jews by all rights should have been the heirs to the Messianic promises made to the patriarchs (the root of the tree).

"Annotations"

Footnotes:

7.1. To keep the Gentile Christians in their Place

In true rabbinic style, St. Paul has "pulled no punches" giving his verdict on the actions of Israel. Now it is the turn of the Gentile members to also get a "talking to".

7.2. The temporary rejection of Israel

St. Paul's logic is fascinating, if also complex. He uses rabbinic comparison again to suggest it will be easier to bring the Jews back into the Church than it was to open it to the Gentiles.

Section 8

Final Conversion of the Jewish Race

Romans 11: 25 — 36

I must not fail, brethren, to make this revelation known to you; or else you might have too good a conceit of yourselves. Hardness has fallen upon a part of Israel, but only until the tale of the Gentile nations is complete; then the whole of Israel will find salvation, as we read in scripture: 'A deliverer shall come from Zion, to rid Jacob of his unfaithfulness; and this shall, be the fulfilment of my covenant with them, when I take away their sins.' In the preaching of the gospel, God rejects them, to make room for you; but in his elective purpose he still welcomes them, for the sake of their fathers; God does not repent of the gifts he makes, or of the calls he issues. You were once rebels, until through their rebellion you obtained pardon; they are rebels now, obtaining pardon for you, only to be pardoned in their turn. Thus God has abandoned all men to their rebellion, only to include them all in his pardon. O depth of God's riches, his wisdom, and his knowledge) How inscrutable are his judgments, how undiscoverable his ways! 'Who has ever understood the Lord's thoughts, or been his counsellor? Whoever was the first to give, and so earned his favours?' All things find in him their origin, their impulse, and their goal; to him be glory throughout all ages, Amen.

Commentary

Our Lord concluded his discourse in the temple on the Tuesday in Holy Week with these words: 'Believe me, you shall see nothing of me henceforward, until the time when you will be saying, "Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord." 'This seems to have been the revelation on which Paul bases his statement of the ultimate conversion of Israel. It was the unbelief of Israel that he announced to the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 2) as the obstacle in the way of the Second Coming. And it is generally understood in tradition that the end of the world will follow shortly on the conversion of the Jews. Probably the reason for Elijah not undergoing death is so that he can come back before the end of time and convert the Jews (Mt. 1: 10 — 12). To do so there must be a Jewish nation still existing at the end of the world^(8.1); this would seem to be the reason for the continued existence of Israel as a nation, despite all the vicissitudes of its history.

The entry of Israel into the Christian fold will be the final demonstration of God's mercy and wisdom; then it will be seen that the mystery of God's dealings with his chosen people was due to man's limited knowledge, not to any failure in divine Providence. All creation will fall on its knees in praise of the Trinity.

"Annotations"

Footnote:

8.1. There must be a Jewish nation still existing at the end of the world

The reference here to the on-going existence of the People Israel, wherever they are, in the world, with their religious practice and culture, is significant. It is widely held that Judaism remains a pre-eminent custodian of the Law (Torah) and the Prophets, which in Christian belief represents in itself, paradoxically, a powerful witness to the coming of the Messiah and His redemptive role. There we must let things rest until the Messiah returns in glory.

See our paper "[Role of the Jewish People After the Coming of the Messiah.](#)"

Appendix 2

Romans 10: 14 — 21

(From: "**The Epistle To The Romans**")

By N. P. Williams published as part of —
"A New Commentary On Holy Scripture",
S.P.C.K., London 1928

Note: *The commentator is using the Revised Version (R.V.) of the Bible, less commonly used today. At the conclusion of this article we attach the New American Bible rendition for comparison.*

Introduction

The first thirteen verses of this chapter have exhibited Israel's rejection as due to Israel's own fault, in ignoring God's revealed way of salvation and insisting on pursuing its own way. The last eight verses are a piece of highly compressed dialogue with the Jewish objector, who endeavours to find excuses for his nation. As before, an extended paraphrase will be the best commentary (missing logical connections are supplied in italics:

Verse 14 — 21

14. JEWISH OBJECTOR: "Calling upon the name of" (that is, offering worship: and prayer to) Jesus implies Faith in Him: Faith implies having heard a message about Him: the hearing of a message implies the existence of an authoritative body of preachers,

15a. enjoying a divine mission. *And no such divinely commissioned body exists: therefore the Jews have not had a fair chance of hearing about the Messiahship and Resurrection of Jesus, and cannot reasonably be censured for not "calling upon his name."*

ST. PAUL: *Your last statement is quite divorced from fact. There is a divinely commissioned body of preachers (namely, the Christian Apostles, prophets, and teachers),*

15b. as Isaiah foretold, in the words "How beautiful are the feet," etc. (Isaiah 52: 7)

Continued on the next page

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16a. JEWISH OBJECTOR: Well, after all, it is the case that not all Israelites have yielded allegiance to the message of salvation: and this suggests that there must have been some flaw in the arrangements for conveying the message to them.

ST. PAUL: *It suggests nothing of the kind. Israel is quite perverse enough to reject a divine message which has been clearly laid before it.*

16b. Witness, again, the words of Isaiah, *who complains of a similar perversity in his own day*: "Lord, who hath had faith in the hearing of us?" (Isaiah 53¹).

17. *quite admit that this quotation supports your preliminary contention, that "Faith," implies "hearing," and "hearing" presupposes the existence of an authoritative message about the Messiah.*

18. But when you go on to suggest, **Perhaps Israel has not heard**, *you are saying what is patently absurd : for the divine message and the authoritative body of preachers actually exist, and the preachers have by this time carried the message all over the world, as the Psalmist predicted: "Their sound went out into all the earth," etc.*

19. I understand you to suggest again, Perhaps, *owing to some defect in the presentation of the message, Israel did not properly understand it. But that is even "more absurd — the idea that Israel, the chosen people, which for centuries had enjoyed the benefits of divine revelation, could not have "understood" a further revelation! At any rate, thousands of Gentiles understood well enough. And this, too — the wilful blindness of the Jews and the spiritual receptivity of Gentiles, who might have been expected to be "void of understanding" in the things of God — was predicted in the Scriptures: at the very beginning of the nation's history Moses warns it, "I will provoke you to jealousy . . ." etc. (Deuteronomy 32: 21):*

20. and, at a later date, Isaiah puts the same point in even more daring language, saying with regard to the Gentiles, "I was found of them that sought me not . . ." etc. (65: 2), with regard to Israel, "All the day long" etc." (65: 2).

Conclusion

Conclusion, implied but not expressed: "All your shifts are useless; Israel's rejection is due to its own inexcusable perversity.

(In the study "**The Gifts and the Call of God**," readers will become aware of St. Paul's upbraiding of his Gentile listeners when it is their turn to be addressed. Both Jews and Gentiles listened to him with bated breath and took his comments very seriously.)

Romans 10: 14 — 21

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- 14** **6** But how can they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how can they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone to preach?
- 15** And how can people preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring (the) good news!" **7**
- 16** But not everyone has heeded the good news; for Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what was heard from us?"
- 17** Thus faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.
- 18** But I ask, did they not hear? Certainly they did; for "Their voice has gone forth to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."
- 19** But I ask, did not Israel understand? First Moses says: "I will make you jealous of those who are not a nation; with a senseless nation I will make you angry."
- 20** Then Isaiah speaks boldly and says: "I was found (by) those who were not seeking me; I revealed myself to those who were not asking for me."
- 21** But regarding Israel he says, "All day long I stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contentious people."

6 [14-21] The gospel has been sufficiently proclaimed to Israel, and Israel has adequately understood God's plan for the messianic age, which would see the gospel brought to the uttermost parts of the earth. As often in the past, Israel has not accepted the prophetic message; cf. [≡](#) Acts 7:51-53.

7 [15] How beautiful are the feet of those who bring [the] good news: in Semitic fashion, the parts of the body that bring the messenger with welcome news are praised; cf. [≡](#) Luke 11:27.

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