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## Paul, Black Theology and Hermeneutics

In his now classic work, *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism*, Franz Cumont wrote:

... it is a fault common to all scholars, to all imbued with book learning, that they are better acquainted with the opinions of ancient authors than with the sentiments of their contemporaries and that they prefer to live in the past rather than in the world surrounding them.<sup>1</sup>

If one takes Cumont's statement as being somewhat reflective of the truth it would seem justified then to use the insights and results of critical, biblico-historical research and theological thinking to further illuminate the world and problems of contemporary man; to use the insights and "opinions" of the past to enlighten the present. What can one say, or for that matter, what does the biblical witness say, if anything, about the contemporary problems of: Racism; the position of women in the world; the economic and international balances of power, etc.? If, for example, it says nothing about "racism" per se, but still witnesses, one might contend, to new possibilities for existence; what are the elements or means of, the hermeneutic? That is, what contemporary analogues or terms does one use to produce an effective "translation"? Can, for example, Paul and *his* view of: the world, life, and Christian experience, help us at all in our contemporary life-situation vis-a-vis, let us say, Racism?

Our task, then, is one of hermeneutics. Hermeneutic comes from the Greek *Hermeneuein* meaning to "translate" or to "interpret." Hermeneutics, then, deals with "the possibility and validity of finding contemporary meaning in ancient texts."<sup>2</sup> This "translation" or "interpretation" of ancient texts obviously presupposes a preunderstanding. A preunderstanding that determines the kinds of questions one asks of the texts. What is involved here concerns:

... the fundamental problem of whether it is possible to put an ancient text (the Bible) at the basis of an affirmation of faith designed to be understood, and taken seriously, by modern man. Can a past event, and the text to which it gave birth, have any real significance for my life now? That is the fundamental question about the possibility of current meaning for the Christian faith... For unless the Biblical text and the kind of reality to which it points, can in fact give meaning to life in the present age, then the need for the Christian faith, to say nothing of Christian theology, has been seriously compromised, if not eliminated. The Hermeneutical question, therefore, concerns itself with the possibility of Christian faith and theology in the modern world.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Franz Valery Marie Cumont, *The Oriental Religions In Roman Paganism* (Chicago, Open Court Pub. Co., 1911), p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>P ul J. Achtemeier, *An Introduction to The New Hermeneutic* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

One preunderstanding is that given by the Black theologians and the Black social situation in America. The hermeneutic does presuppose preunderstanding but it does not take preunderstanding for granted. Rather, it enters into dialogue with the ancient text which in this instance is the New Testament, specifically Paul, in order to evaluate, elaborate and deepen this understanding in the light of the Christian faith.

Few, with all due respect to those who have been writing in the realm of Christianity and Ethics or even in the efforts to construct a "Black Theology," have yet attempted a hermeneutic or "translation" to illumine the problem of racism. Few have yet looked at racism and given a totally satisfying answer to the very simple question: why? This is not meant to imply that the aspects illuminated here will be "totally satisfying," or that they will be a comprehensive solution to this complex, multifaceted, human problem. But it is meant to suggest that Paul's view of man and his world might be very instructive and, in some instances, might provide us with some answers.

The problem is that those writing have not gone behind the "ad hoc" to ask the fundamental question: "why?" It would seem, too, that they have been rather wanting in scientific, biblical exegesis and in their handling of historical material critically. Hopefully, and in sincere and honest humility, some small contribution might be made via our suggestions here. First, the materials must be dealt with strictly, carefully, and scientifically. Second, the original must be distinguished from the "translation" of it; that is, we must distinguish what it *says* from what we *interpret* it to say. This distinction is vitally important. It is where, one might suggest, most slip up methodologically — confusing into a veritable jumble or *mélange*: biblical exegesis, historical criticism and modern-day or contemporary application and interpretation.

The purpose here is to contribute to the "growing edge of contemporary discussion" in Black Theology but from the vantage point of New Testament Studies; that is, from the perspective of how a critical handling of historical materials and a New Testament hermeneutic might better delineate the problems and contribute to the discussion within the context of biblical theology. Thus, the purview is the contemporary black social situation but the point of departure is the illuminations that might possibly be provided from a New Testament hermeneutic.

The area of Black Theological studies per se was born so recently that it is difficult to establish this present approach within "its locus in past scholarship and its horizon" since it has no precedents. Black Theology, one might even say, is in its neo-natal stage. An approach and hermeneutic then from a strictly New Testament point of view could be an extremely significant ingredient for growth in this "child's" formula; both as to methodology employed and future directions of translation and interpretation.

Through a contribution from the New Testament perspective, one's hermeneutic, "translation," or use of past perspectives to illuminate

present perspectives would be grounded on solid, historical evidence dealt with critically. What one could say or use, one would use but where the evidence is open to question as to its precise interpretation or meaning one could unabashedly state that and yet still keep his argument intact, integral, clear and honest. This type of precision — and the kind of insights gained from New Testament Studies we believe would be quite complementary and able to contribute substantially to the current efforts to construct a Black Theology. No one has yet approached Black Theology from just this perspective. Our own efforts here will undoubtedly require in future, careful and even more precise refining. But perhaps a direction and a level will have been pointed out. No one yet has attempted in any way in Black Theology to consciously exploit Paul's viewpoints on man, the world and man's existence in that world to illuminate the "suffering oppression in a white man's land" that Cleage speaks of. In that respect Paul's potential has not been fully appreciated, if appreciated at all, because the potential of Paul's world-view has not been seen as useful to Black Theology.

This then is a very real prospect. To make use of or to translate Paul's view of *Hamartia*, "Sin," as a cosmic power by means of the contemporary analogue: "Racism" as that cosmic power. Black theologians like Cleage and Cone have "used" the New Testament in their hermeneutic but, we would suggest, not as creatively as they might have, thereby underestimating (and in the case of Cleage, rejecting altogether!) the resources available in Pauline theology. A significant prospect and contribution appears possible to use then in the very doing of hermeneutics — by using Paul's understanding; by applying his expression of the problem of Sin and Law in *Romans 7* to the contemporary problem of man's struggle with individual and institutional racism. Why man's individual aims and the very good and productive purposes of his "creations" — his systems and institutions — become perverted can be greatly illuminated by Paul's view of Sin or "racism" as a cosmic power penetrating all the components of the universe. For Paul, Sin is a power not a person's *individual* sins or deeds. Although this latter is precisely the sense in which we today conceive of "sin," it is not so for Paul. Still, the paradox that is so essential to Paul's thinking must be borne in mind; namely, that while Sin is a power that perverts human existence by enslaving man, this fact does not abrogate nor vitiate man's responsibility. Sin is a power that enslaves; yet, man is responsible and accountable. This is the paradox in Paul's thought.

For Paul, one could say that man as an individual is good but when he gets involved in and deals with the structures and values of this world — since they are permeated and perverted by the "power" Sin — he is torn in two directions. Individuals then might be very good but when they get into the systems, the structures, the values — the *nomos* — of "this world" their intentions become, almost inexplicably, twisted and perverted. "Sin," having perverted the *nomos*, keeps them from doing the

right thing. This tension between knowing the right and doing the right is reflected by Paul in *Romans 7*.

The relationship of Racism to American social institutions has been illuminated by William Loren Katz, William Grier, Price Cobbs, Kenneth Clark, Ralph Ellison and a host of others. Carmichael and Hamilton in their book *Black Power* delineated the distinction between institutional and individual racism. The Kerner Commission characterized racism as corrupting our institutions. In doing so the Kerner Commission in effect empirically verified what Carmichael and Hamilton had earlier argued.

One can see then from these and other works the various attempts to illumine the very subtle and slippery phenomenon, Racism. Having recognized the validity of Carmichael and Hamilton's designations of racism as a sort of Cerberus — one head being individual racism and the other institutional racism — one is still puzzled by the myriad solutions. One author advocates the assumption and exercise of power (Clark, *Dark Ghetto*; Carmichael and Hamilton, *Black Power*) while another offers effort on the part of individuals as a solution (Silberman, *Crisis in Black and White*; Clark, *op cit.*). Still another says, realizing the psychological damage done, the answer lies in rejecting the "white is superior, black is inferior" syndrome (Silberman, *op cit.*; Grier and Cobbs, *Black Rage*). Another argues as a solution the simple recognition by Whites that Negroes exist and are human like they (Ellison, *The Invisible Man*).

Grier and Cobbs, while aware of the brutality visited upon Blacks by the systems and institutions of society seem, in the main, concerned with individual or attitudinal Racism. This concern is reflected while at the same time unwittingly demonstrating Paul's potential for interpreting Racism as a cosmic power. This is seen when Grier and Cobbs speaking in terms of the comos say: "For black and white alike, the air of this nation is perfused with the idea of white supremacy and everyone grows to manhood under this influence."<sup>4</sup> Still, they seem primarily concerned with racial "prejudice," and therefore with individual rather than institutional Racism. Eldridge Cleaver in his analysis (*Soul on Ice*) says that blacks "desire to break the ofays' power over us." Looking again to the prospects and possibilities that Paul offers for clarifying and understanding this phenomenon, we see that Racism seems to be here defined by Cleaver as the power of the ofay; that is, the power of the white man under Sin or Racism. After Cleaver, who writes of the loss of white heroes being due to a global exploitation that is "rooted in the myth of white supremacy," one can observe an historical transition; that is, earlier, in such writers as DuBois, Ellison, and even in Grier and Cobbs the accent is on individual racism, "prejudice." The solutions proffered suggested that each and every American — individually — had to change. By the time Carmichael and Hamilton write there is a notice-

<sup>4</sup>William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 166-167.

able historical shift. The accent or stress is now on the need to change society's systems and institutions; in this vein Kenneth Clark, Carmichael and Hamilton and others advocate the necessity of "power." Eldridge Cleaver too displays this historical shift of emphasis when he speaks of the myth of white supremacy being the *basis* for the institutional savagery and oppression of society's systems. "Colonialism," "imperialism" and "domestic exploitation" are seen as "rooted in" the myth of white supremacy. Using Paul's conception one could say they are seen as rooted in the "deception" Sin practices on man (cf. *Romans 7:11*). Sin, Racism, using the myth of white supremacy to pervert man's institutions and societal systems — the *nomoi* — deceives man.

On the theological side, the attempts to illumine and understand Racism — to precise, define, grasp this phenomenon — are represented by the life and works of Martin Luther King, Jr., as well as the works of James Cone, Albert Cleage and Joseph R. Washington.

All King's books deal with individual and institutional racism although he never explicitly speaks in these specific terms of the distinction. But, in effect, he does admit to the distinction when he speaks of the need for structural change in America's domestic and foreign policies as well as a change in attitudes. For example, King recognizes these two types of racism when in the appendix, as throughout the book *Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community?*, he singles out the systems or institutions of: education, employment and housing as badly in need of redefinition and reorganization of priorities. But the question is if these systems or institutions have been misguided or perverted into perpetuating the evil of segregation — Why? How? How does one explain the sincere and well-meaning people as King maintains they are, who nonetheless destroy others? Paul, we would suggest provides an answer.

Joseph R. Washington in *The Politics of God* wonders why it is that whites make no conscious decision to hate Black people but do so nonetheless. Why? How? Who then is culpable? Paul's understanding of Sin and Law and his expression and explanation of it in *Romans 7*, we would suggest, speaks directly to Washington's dilemma of how this unintended but nonetheless actualized, irrational hatred comes about.

In his *Black Theology and Black Power*, James Cone states:

I am not suggesting that the New Testament language and its theological interpretation in the history of Western Christianity are no longer useful for black people in America. Rather, I am saying that there is a real need for a radical approach which takes the suffering of black people seriously.<sup>5</sup>

We would suggest that when he speaks of men being "controlled by evil powers that would make them slaves and the demonic forces of racism . . .,"<sup>6</sup> Paul might be very useful in better understanding this

<sup>5</sup> James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969), pp. 49-50.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

phenomenon and thus contribute to that "radical approach" Cone calls for.

Albert Cleage's arguments against Paul notwithstanding, does recognize the individual and institutional aspects of racism. Speaking about organizations, neighborhoods and Black Power he says:

Even if you could organize your block or your neighborhood you might get a new streetlight or an extra garbage pickup, but you could not touch the real problem of Black powerlessness. Your block and your neighborhood suffer as a part of the institutional racism that oppresses all Black people everywhere. We are oppressed by impersonal white institutions with power.<sup>7</sup>

In the Introduction to *Black Christian Nationalism*, Cleage poses several questions as he sees them that Black Theology wants to know about. One of these questions is:

What is the nature of man as affected by white racism and the Black experience? Is the white man a devil or a beast? If not, how can we explain his bestial behavior?<sup>8</sup>

Recognizing Cleage's intense dislike for Paul, nonetheless Paul's concept of Sin and Law as seen in *Romans 7*, we submit, provides an answer to this query.

At bottom, all these attempts then accept *implicitly* Carmichael and Hamilton's distinction of Institutional and Individual Racism. The difficulty lies in this dialectical nature of racism; that is, in its individual and cosmic aspects. Since this phenomenon, racism, realizes itself in *both* these dimensions the problem that arises is how one maintains the tension or reality between these two in an illumination of racism. How does one maintain and yet attempt to understand both expressions in illumining racism? Most writers grasp only one side of this dialectic and as a result accent one, either individual *or* institutional racism, at the expense of the other. Paul, we suggest, and his conception of Sin can resolve this difficulty because it can maintain the dual aspects of individual racism and institutional racism.

Given the religious-historical traditions of "Sin" and "Law," and Paul's understanding of these concepts, current definitions conceiving of "Sin" as individual deeds and "Law" as specific legislation are much too narrowly conceived and much too limited to encompass Paul's categories. Without doubt, then, we feel that Black Theology has something to say but it is our opinion that the perspective of New Testament Studies, and particularly Paul, can help it to say it better.

In the suggestions such as those presented here — the ramifications of *any* human problem being phenomenally complex — one cannot hope to cover all the areas nor hope to deal even adequately with those that are covered. Perhaps, the most that can be hoped for is the throwing off of a few sparks that will illumine, if only for a few seconds, dark corners

<sup>7</sup>Albert Cleage, *Black Christian Nationalism* (New York: William Morrow & Company, Inc., 1972), p. 49.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, XVI.

and directions that demand further thought, research, and reflection. Furthermore, it was not our *aim* here to say anything really new or startling; yet, hopefully, that has happened in some instances. Although one should try never to "exegete the obvious," it should be remembered that very often the most significant impact and insights come from the things we have heard before. Bringing our own experience to testify, how often could each of us witness to the fact that he or she has been "revolutionized by the obvious?"

"It happens time and again to all of us that we need to clarify the truth that is to be translated into action and to translate into action the truth that has been clarified. . . ."<sup>9</sup>

It is sincerely hoped that some clarification and some translation might be effected through what is suggested here.

## ROMANS 7

### A. "Hamartia" and "Nomos" in Pauline Theology

Understanding the relationship between Sin and the Law is of major importance in Pauline theology. For the Jew the Law was the Old Testament and the Torah. He could wear his *tephelim* proudly because it designated him outwardly as a follower of the law and the law was something in which he could take pride; something in which he could "boast." For the devout Jew the law symbolized everything — his culture and history; his covenant with God; his institutions; his very being itself. Paul concedes all this and in his concession he states unequivocally: "the commandment is holy and just and good" (Rom. 7:12). But then comes his proviso: Sin, Paul says, through the law (Rom. 7: 11) deceives man into thinking that he himself can attain life.<sup>10</sup> For Paul "redemption is simultaneously liberation from the Law and from its function as that which evokes sin."<sup>11</sup>

For Paul too the Law is the tradition of Israel in its totality. It is "the historically given legal demands, cultic and ritual as well as ethical."<sup>12</sup> But what, in Paul's understanding, is demanded of man is not a self-justifying striving; a striving therefore contingent upon "works of the Law" in which man might boast; rather, what is demanded of man is an obedience contingent upon "faith" so that man does not seek nor strive to justify himself by "works" done in obedience to Law, but is justified by faith. Therefore man has no basis on which to "boast." "But Paul goes much further still. He says not only that man can not achieve salvation by works of the Law, but also that he is not even *intended* to do so (cf. Rom. 3: 20; Gal. 2: 16)."<sup>13</sup> The Law was given to lead

<sup>9</sup> Ernst Roseman, *Jesus Means Freedom* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970), p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, Vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner), 1955, p. 248.

<sup>11</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Vol. I *Theological Dictionary of The New Testament* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 313.

<sup>12</sup> Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 260.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

man to life, but because of Sin leads instead to death.<sup>14</sup> For Paul justification by works and justification by faith are mutually exclusive because "Christ is the end of the law, that everyone who has faith may be justified" (Rom. 10: 4).<sup>15</sup> Man's attempt to save himself by keeping the law, by "works," only leads man into sin. The attempt, the striving, the effort itself is sin.

It is the insight which Paul has achieved into the nature of sin that determines his teaching on the Law. This embraces two insights. One is the insight that sin is man's self-powered striving to undergird his own existence in forgetfulness of his creaturely existence, to procure his salvation by his own strength, that striving which finds its extreme expression in 'boasting' and 'trusting' in the flesh'. The other is the insight that man is always a sinner, that fallen into the power of sin, he is always already involved in a falsely oriented understanding of his existence.<sup>16</sup>

. . . the Law brings to light that man is sinful, whether it be that his sinful desire leads him to transgression of the Law or that desire disguises itself in zeal for keeping the Law.<sup>17</sup>

For Paul Sin is not seen as individual deeds or transgressions. Thus he does not speak of forgiveness of sins, but of God "destroying" Sin (Rom. 6: 6, 14). Sin is conceived as a personified power; a ruling power — with man as its slave.<sup>18</sup> Paul speaks of Sin as having entered into the world (Rom. 5: 12); as having dwelled in (Rom. 7: 17, 20) and enslaved man (Rom. 6: 6, 17 ff.). But man, in the understanding of Paul, is nonetheless responsible, culpable; because although sold under sin (Rom. 7: 14) man places himself at sin's disposal (Rom. 6:

<sup>14</sup> Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp. 121-122.

<sup>15</sup> Bultmann, *loc. cit.* cf. also Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 12, 17, 20. On p. 20 Bornkamm states: "As in Philippians and Romans, its [Galatians] subject is that in sending Christ into the world God made an end of the Jewish way of salvation, righteousness on the basis of the Law, and inaugurated universal salvation on the sole basis of righteousness deriving from faith."

<sup>16</sup> Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 264. cf. also Bornkamm, *Paul*, 46 where of Gal. 2: 11-21 he says: "According to Paul's account, Peter's inconsistency was tantamount to a denial of the truth that men are justified not by doing what the Law commands, but solely through faith in Christ, because his second attitude made clear that, for himself and Jewish Christians, the prescriptions of the Jewish Law were obligatory, thus forcing Gentile Christians, too, to submit to Jewish customs. For Paul, any relapse into legality could only mean that faith based on Christ alone was declared to be sin, and Christ an agent of sin. In reality, however, sin consisted in harking back to the Law which Christ's death on the cross had nullified, and in abandoning the new life which he made possible."

<sup>17</sup> Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 265. cf. also Sanday and Headlam (I.C.C.) *Epistle to the Romans*, 188.

<sup>18</sup> Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 133, 151. When Paul does speak of forgiveness of sins he is generally quoting as in Rom 4: 7f. cf. on this point Bornkamm, *Paul*, 151; Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul*, 135-136; Conzelmann, *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, 327. In the theology of Paul, sin itself appears most often as a cosmic power which enslaves man. Bornkamm, representative of a consensus of scholars on this point says: "significantly, sin practically always occurs in the singular and is spoken of as a power embodied in a person." One can certainly speak of a consensus among scholars that sin in Paul is conceived of as a cosmic power. cf. Conzelmann, *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament*, 194; Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* 244-245, 249; Bornkamm, *Paul* 133; Schoeps, *Paul in the Light of Jewish Religious History* 184-185; Schlier, *Principalities and Powers in the New Testament* 31-32; Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* 23-24; Nock, *St. Paul* 212; Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* 42; Stacey, *The Pauline View of Man* 162; Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, V.I., 311; Spivey and Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament* 329.



13) and receives wages from Sin (Rom. 6: 23) in payment for his obedience to sin's rule. In the understanding of Paul man is culpable because "as created by the Lord and owned by him, the Christian together with his body and its members is released to serve the ends of righteousness and appointed to life (Rom. 6: 12-23),"<sup>19</sup> but man serves instead Sin with its resultant: death. Sin is also seen as a personified power when Paul speaks of its having been once dead but revived and of Sin's having "used" the Law to cause man to covet; that is, Sin by means of Law rouses in man desire and by so doing deceives man and kills him (Rom. 7: 8, 11, 13).<sup>20</sup>

In reference to Paul's understanding of Sin and Law Bornkamm observes that the letter to the Romans is polemical in tone because it is directed at the Jews' conception of salvation:

In a way the Jew symbolizes man in his highest potentialities; he represents the "religious man" whom the Law tells what God requires of him, who appeals to the special statute granted him in the plan of salvation, and who refuses to admit that he has failed to measure up to God's claim on him and is in consequence abandoned to sin and death. As contrasted with this man who prides himself on being religious, Paul expounds his message, for Jew and Gentile alike, about the Law and about grace proffered to all who believe in Christ.<sup>21</sup>

In Paul's view Sin issues forth in man's life as an active, dynamic, enslaving power.<sup>22</sup> In contemporary terms Sin would be called not an individual deed or act but a "style of life". *Hamartia* (Sin) using *Nomos* (Law) causes man to desire; to struggle and strive to justify his "self" and his life by means of his "works". In (Rom. 7: 7ff). Paul says the relationship of Sin and Law is such that "sin managed to turn the divine, commandment against itself and into an instrument for my (man's) own self-assertion".<sup>23</sup> Sin is not merely revealed as such by *nomos* but actually functions, *works*, by means of the commandment.<sup>24</sup> Still, Paul emphasizes: the *nomos* is good. Even though it is conscripted, impressed into service as an ally of sin; still, the *nomos* itself is blameless. It is "holy, just and good".<sup>25</sup> In fact it functions still, even while being "used" by Sin, in behalf of God. It serves not to diminish Sin but to show all the more what Sin is. *Nomos* (Law) shows *Hamartia* (Sin) "in the plenitude of its power to destroy (7: 13)".<sup>26</sup> "Even if indirectly and in a paradoxical way, by the very denying of life, instead of opening up accounts to it, the *Nomos* remained in the service of the divine will to save".<sup>27</sup> For Paul neither the person strictly, rigorously observing the Law nor the person flagrantly transgressing the Law, be he Jew or

<sup>19</sup> Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 131.

<sup>20</sup> Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 245-249. cf. also Furnish, *op. cit.*, 116; Cozelmann, *op. cit.*, 232, 234.

<sup>21</sup> Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 95; 123.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>24</sup> Furnish, *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> cf. Cozelmann, *op. cit.*, 229.

<sup>26</sup> Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 127. cf. Furnish, *op. cit.*, 140-141.

<sup>27</sup> Bornkamm, *loc. cit.*

Gentile, could find the way to God because for Paul it was a matter of grace. These strivings signify "works" and the possibility of "boasting". For Paul the means is now not *nomos* but grace; the points of reference are now not "works" but Christ and faith.<sup>28</sup> "To cancel the power of evil and death the Law has no avail (Rom. 8: 3). Actually, it only sets its seal on it and establishes it. As a means of salvation it has been abolished; Christ is the end of the Law (Rom. 10: 4)".<sup>29</sup>

Man in Paul's view repeatedly fails to realize in his strivings: life. Man seeks life but finds death.<sup>30</sup> Man repeatedly fails to realize he cannot "achieve" life; he cannot "do" anything to attain salvation. Life, love and grace are gifts. Gifts are by their very nature "received" — freely given — not earned or "achieved" so that one might proudly boast of his achievement.

For Paul sin is, in a word "boasting". This "boasting" is not simply identified with "conceit" or "egotism" in the relatively superficial psychological sense, although it also manifests itself as conceit in relationships with others (e.g. I Cor. 4: 6). Rather, it refers to man's turning away from God "to the creation and to one's own strength". Sin (boasting) thus means "a misconstruing of the human situation", a refusal to recognize that life is a gift from God (I Cor. 4: 7). Hence, Paul bids his readers not to boast in men (e.g. I Cor. 1: 29; 3: 21) or "in your flesh" (Gal. 6: 13), but only "in the Lord" (I Cor. 1: 31; II Cor. 10: 17-18) or "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6: 14).<sup>31</sup>

In Paul's view the condemnation of the Jews stemmed not from the fact that they failed to keep the commandments of God. Some kept the commandments and some did not. They were condemned because they attempted to use the Law to "justify" themselves; to exalt themselves over against their fellow man.<sup>32</sup> The Law became the symbol and means of all in which they might "boast" before God. Bultmann puts it this way: "The attitude of sinful self-reliance finds its extreme expression in man's 'boasting'. It is characteristic both of the Jew, who boasts of God and the Torah (Rom. 2: 17, 23), and of the Greek, who boasts of his

<sup>28</sup> Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 128, 137; Furnish, *op. cit.* 193-194.

<sup>29</sup> Bornkamm, *op. cit.*, 134. Conzelmann in his *Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (p. 235) says of Rom 7: 7-25: "The account ends in a lament (v. 24), followed immediately by thanksgiving (v. 25a; cf. 8: 1ff). The result is that the doctrine of the end of the law in Christ is not antinomian. Indeed, it presupposes the validity and holiness of the law. In faith, what the law intends comes into effect (Rom. 3: 28-30)."

<sup>30</sup> cf. Furnish, *op. cit.*, 142; Conzelmann 226 f.

<sup>31</sup> Furnish, *op. cit.*, 137-138, cf. also p. 150: "Grace points to the initiative and power of God as the one who "gives" righteousness and to man (in his helplessness, sinfulness, and enmity) as the receiver. But the law seems to presuppose that man is in his own right an "achiever," and it may lead him to suppose that by his performance of the works which the law commends, he is himself enabled to win the verdict of "righteousness" from God.

This criticism of the law has its basis in Paul's insight that reliance on "the flesh," the orientation of one's life in terms of the values, goals, and possibilities of "this world," only drives one ever further away from God, in relationship to whom true life is found. Man's alienation from God and "boasting" in the flesh is the essence of his sin, and since the law encourages reliance on "worldly" accomplishment, the law itself becomes sin's agent."

<sup>32</sup> D. J. Doughty, "The Situation of Man In the World." Unpublished Notes On The Theology of Paul, p. 4.

wisdom (I Cor. 1: 19-31). It is also a natural tendency of man in general to compare himself with others in order to have his 'boast' thereby (Gal. 6: 4).<sup>33</sup>

The fundamental premise of Paul is that *all* men — without exception — are under the power of sin; and what's more man is not even aware of his sad situation. Paul asserts, admittedly in mythological language, that Sin has "deceived" man and led man to believe that he is destined for life when he is actually destined for death and destruction (Rom. 7: 7-12).<sup>34</sup> Spivey and Smith in their *Anatomy of the New Testament* say this of the Pauline conception of Sin as seen from the letter to the Romans:

Paul clearly does not regard sin as personal wickedness or individual transgression resulting from the ill will of single persons. Although he indicates that men are responsible for their sin and do not sin inevitably or by nature, he is quite aware of the suprapersonal character of evil among the human race. Specifically he traces the origin of this evil or sin to Adam (Rom. 5: 12-21; cf. I Cor. 15: 45 ff). Moreover, he can refer to bondage of the creation to decay (8: 21) or to the present evil age (Gal. 1: 4) without ever mentioning him, Paul speaks of sin as an external power that can enslave man (chap. 6) and describes its insidious attack upon man through the law (chap. 7). Yet in the light of his specific references to Adam we may maintain that his understanding of the corporate character of sins owes much to that strand of Jewish thought which laid responsibility for the corrupt state of humanity at Adam's doorstep (cf. especially IV Ezra 7: 116-126 and II Baruch 54: 15-19).

In summary, Paul's conception of sin has two foci, which remain in paradoxical and unresolved tension with one another. Man sins willingly but inevitably. Paul can never speak of sin in such a way as to relieve mankind as a whole, and indeed the individual, of responsibility for it. Yet he would by no means subscribe to a purely personal or individual concept of sin.<sup>35</sup>

Man is deceived by Sin in such a way that even that which he regards to be "holy, just and good" becomes the means by which Sin leads him into death. Once enslaved by Sin, however, what man needs according to Paul — contrary to the Greek view that man's basic problem is ignorance — is not a teacher who brings him knowledge but a "Redeemer" who destroys the power of Sin and brings him freedom.<sup>36</sup>

Sin then for Paul quite clearly is a power; a power that perverts human existence,<sup>37</sup> and the only solution Paul sees is another power able to

<sup>33</sup> Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 242. cf. also 240 infra — 241: "Arrogance which in the Jewish world takes the form of zeal for fulfilling the Torah and of pride over one's accomplishments in doing so and over Israel's titles to honor appears in the Hellenistic world as a striving after wisdom and as pride in knowledge and pneumatic endowment."

<sup>34</sup> Doughty, *op. cit.*, 5.

<sup>35</sup> Spivey and Smith, *Anatomy of the New Testament* (New York: MacMillan, 1969), 328-329.

<sup>36</sup> Doughty, *op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> According to Dibelius (*Geisterwelt in Glauben des Paulus*) Sin is described in Romans 6 and 7 as the "most harmful" enemy to man: "a tangibly active, personal power: (p. 119). Unlike Death in Rom 5: 12f. which is seen as the ruler of this Age; Sin is conceived as a "personal despot." This Dibelius contends is clearly shown in Rom. 6: 6, 12 and 13.

He argues that one must recognize the distinctive manner of ruling. Rom. 5:17

void or destroy the power of Sin and free man. In this way "man is 'bought free' from his previous slavery; but even so, he nevertheless does not belong to himself; for there is for man no absolute belonging-to-one's-self, but belonging to God or 'the Lord' is man's freedom — namely, freedom from . . . sin (Rom. 6: 15ff.; 7: 5f)."<sup>38</sup>

. . . the mythological notions of the spirit powers and Satan do not serve the purpose of cosmological speculation nor a need to explain terrifying or gruesome phenomena or to relieve men of responsibility and guilt. When Paul speaks of the event by which death came into the world he takes recourse not to the devil, as Wis. 2: 24 does, but to Adam's sin (Rom. 5: 12f). Though Death does appear in the mythological role of the 'last enemy', I Cor. 15: 26, yet in 15: 56 it is 'sin' that is the 'sting of death.' It is out of man's deeds that death grows as their fruit. Paul may indeed speak in naive mythology of the battle of the spirit powers against Christ or of his battle against them (I Cor. 2: 6-8; 15: 24-26). In reality he is thereby only expressing a certain understanding of existence. The spirit powers represent the reality into which man is placed as one full of conflicts and struggle, a reality which threatens and tempts. Thus, through these mythological conceptions the insight is indirectly expressed that man does not have his life in his hand as if he were his own lord, but that he is constantly confronted with the decision of choosing his lord.<sup>39</sup>

depicts death as the ruler of this world; according to Rom. 6:12 Sin should not rule "in your mortal bodies" (Revised Standard Version rendering). "A great distinction" exists, Dibelius feels, between the two (p. 123. cf. also in his statement on p. 122: "... die Art dieser Sundenherrschaft mit der Herrschaft des Todes — 1 Kor. 15, Rom. 5 — nicht verglichen werden kann.")

If these spheres of rule are as mutually exclusive as Dibelius seems to argue for how then does one explain in Rom. 7:24 the phrase: "... this body of death"; or Rom. 8-10: "... your bodies are dead because of Sin."? Then too the apocalyptic structure of thought — of which Paul would seem to be a part, even though he may at times reinterpret it — sees "this age" as being evil or under the power of wickedness, sin, or iniquity and not *solely* under the power of Death. Thus, it would appear that Dibelius' absolute "distinction" of these realms of rule does not seem justified. Also, Qumran would seem to show that this exclusivity is not well-founded. But of course this latter source for comparative study, it must be remembered, was not available to Dibelius. Finally, the text itself does not appear to make as *absolute* a distinction between the two as Dibelius' argument would seem to warrant. Rom. 5:12 in particular depicts death as a *consequence* of Sin (so too does Rom. 7:13). This then would seem to make *Sin* the over-all cosmic power rather than making Sin and Death two equal powers, as Dibelius implies, differentiated only in and by their spheres of influence; namely, Death ruling "this Age" and Sin ruling "within man."

Dibelius contends that since Sin's locus is in man the concept of "possession" as seen in the gospels could be a helpful analogy. One can, therefore, "describe Sin as a demon." But it must be remembered, he warns, that Paul did not conceive of Sin as "simply" a demon and therefore there is no firm boundary in his descriptions between the picture, or description, and the reality (p. 122). Dibelius feels that with this proviso firmly in mind one can then assert a personification of Sin also in Rom. 3:9 where all Jews and Greeks are seen to be "under sin"; and in Gal. 3:22 as well.

For Dibelius Romans 6 and 7 give one the points of departure for an intensification of the first century belief in spirits. He considers Paul's view of Sin and Death as demons operating in a "psychological" framework, "paved the way" for understanding the dark powers that threaten man not as coming from without but from within man himself (p. 124). Again, in reference to this last point, one must conclude that had the documents from Qumran been available to him a scholar as perceptive as Dibelius would have seen that Paul was not unique nor did he "pave the way." In regard to demons and powers, since they were part of his "weltanschauung," Paul simply was a man of his time. Dibelius himself, on this point, notes that beliefs in angels, devils and demons is something the apostolic period shared with other periods (p. 192).

<sup>38</sup> Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 244.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 258-259.

According to Paul then all men stand under the power of sin; that is all men are enslaved by Sin. In the worldview of Paul, Sin appears on the scene as an active cosmic power which deceives man and leads him into death (Rom. 7: 7-13). Sin deceives man by leading him to believe that he can somehow achieve authentic life by his own strength and resources through the world and the things of the world. And, in spite of the fact that in the depths of his being he knows that authentic life can never be created by human striving but can only be received as a gift, man allows himself to be deceived and is therefore without excuse. Man's vain attempt to create and secure his own life by manipulation of his world leads him into direct contradiction with the world by which he now becomes enslaved.<sup>40</sup> He is led into contradiction with his fellow man from whom he has become separated in his striving to assert his own life. He is led into contradiction with even himself because his striving leads not to freedom and life but rather to slavery and death (Rom. 7: 13-25). It is in this sense then that Sin is portrayed as a cosmic power which enslaves man; alienates him from his world; separates him from his fellow man and leads him into servitude and destruction.

For Paul the Christian has become free from the power of Sin (Rom. 6: 7) through the salvation event of Jesus Christ. If the Christian has become free from Sin, he then no longer attempts to create his own life through the world and the things of the world. If the Christian has become free from Sin he is also free from the Law (Rom. 7: 4ff.). Because, in the broadest sense, the "law" refers to the ways and means by which man attempts to secure his own salvation. We have seen how, according to Paul, Sin uses the law to deceive man and lead him into death.

Paul was at one with all the devout of the Old Testament in believing that, in its original intention, the Law was God's call to and sign of salvation and life (Rom. 2:6ff.; 7:10): it was there to be obeyed. Applying to all, not just to Jews, it was summarized in the Decalogue and the command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Rom. 7:7; 13:9; Gal. 5:14). While Paul never abandoned this basic conviction, he was led to see what became all—important to himself personally, what he expressed in a more profound and radical way than did any Jew or Greek before him, and what no other theologian of primitive Christianity repeated after him, namely, that this same holy, righteous, and good Law (Rom. 7:12, 16) was in fact powerless to give salvation and life.<sup>41</sup>

But Paul believes that man now knows, however, that salvation comes to him only as a gift from God; that he is free from the law. He is free

<sup>40</sup> cf. Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 254ff cf. also Doughty, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> Bornkamm, *Paul*, 121-122. August Strobel writing on the conception of sin in New Testament times (*Erkenntnis und Bekenntnis der Sünde in Neutestamentlichen Zeit*) says that for Paul the concept of Sin is almost always used absolutely; that is, without a more precise definition (*op. cit.*, 48 infra-49). What this really means is no more clear than his statement about statistics (what statistics?) showing hamartia as the most comprehensive and most neutral concept. Just what precisely Strobel means by: "comprehensive" and "most neutral" or the "reality of Sin" is not clear (p. 49). But

from the vain attempt to win his own salvation. He is free from concern about his own life. The Christian has therefore a new relationship with himself. He is free from concern about himself. As a result, for the first time he has become free for the real demand of God — the demand of love (cf. Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:6).<sup>42</sup>

### SUMMARY

In conclusion then one can maintain that Paul does not say "man" or man's "inner being" is corrupt.<sup>43</sup> One cannot derive from Paul a doctrine of man's perverted nature. For Paul Sin is a power not a person's individual sins or deeds. Although this latter is precisely the sense in which we today conceive of "sin"; it is not so for Paul. Still, the paradox that is so essential to Paul's thinking must be borne in mind; namely that while Sin is a power that perverts human existence by enslaving man, this fact does not abrogate nor vitiate man's responsibility. Sin is a power that enslaves; yet, man is responsible and accountable. This is the paradox in Paul's thought.

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Strobel is of the opinion that Paul speaks of Sin as an "autonomous power": (selbständigen Grosse) because he works from the reality of God's judgment as expressed in Rom. 2:15 (p. 49). How the one relates to the other he does not make clear.

While defending Paul against any accusation of speaking imprecisely, apparently because Paul uses the *precise* example of Adam, Strobel himself remains guilty of imprecision. He speaks first of Sin as an "autonomous power" and then, in effect, says that it is not. He sees Sin not as attributable to Satan or some "metaphysical anti-god" but exclusively as the fateful deed of man." (p. 49). This is patently a contradiction; incapable of substantiation from Rom. 7 where Paul says very clearly that man sins but it is because of this thing without and within him called: Sin. Unfortunately, throughout his treatment Strobel uses such imprecise and obfuscating phrases as: "the knowledge of Sin through the law... is grounded on the empirical present"; (p. 50) and "the radical sinfulness of men." (p. 50). What is meant by the "empirical" present or the "radical" sinfulness of man?

Strobel's sentiments and thinking are, perhaps, best revealed when he says such things as:

"Dass das Bekenntnis eigener sundiger Verlorenheit so spontan geschieht, halten wir fest. Es ist bei dem Christen Paulus nicht mehr Sache des Kults, sondern — wie bei Luther — eighen lebendige Erfahrung. Vielleicht ist diesem Punkt trotz gewisser Unterschieden des Denkens die Einheit mit Luther am grossten und im Entscheidenden gewahrt." (p. 51).

Then, having taken issue with Kuhn for citing parallels to Paul in Qumran, he also rejects Lohmeyer's contention that Sin for Paul was a "metaphysical reality." (p. 52)

<sup>42</sup>In a comparison between Paul's conception of the Law and that of Qumran Herbert Braun argues that Paul and Qumran are distinct because Qumran's allegiance is to the Torah (*Gesammelte Studien zum Neuen Testament und Seiner Umwelt*, 112-115). Braun contends that the concept of salvation in the one is quite distinct from the other. Paul conceives of God's act of salvation in Christ as freeing one from the Torah which is seen as deathly. Qumran, oriented to the Torah views it as a decisive help to salvation (p. 116. cf. also 113). Braun, citing a host of examples, notes that in Qumran: "die terminologie, in der die Sunde bekannt wird ist ausserst mannigfaltig. Der Beter spricht von seiner Sunde (p. 103, footnote 9) und von seinen Sunde (p. 104, footnote 10) ... befand sich im Gebiet der Bosheit (p. 104, footnote 26) ... unter view Verwirrungen ... Er lebt im Dienst der Sunde (p. 105, footnote 50); ein verkehrter Geist herrscht in ihm (p. 105, footnote 51). Die Sunde ist eine den Menschen knechtende Macht (p. 105, 116)."

Although his study and comparisons are useful Braun unfortunately tries to make it seem as though Paul has some greater and even deeper perception and expression of grace than Qumran (cf. op. cit., p. 116). This feature makes his attempt seem at times more akin to apologetics than religious-historical investigation.

<sup>43</sup>cf. Bornkamm, Paul 124; 126. Even this respected scholar remarks: "Thus man's will, and not sin itself conceived as an objective reality, is the cause of sin!" (p. 124).

For Paul one could say that man as an individual is good but when he gets involved in and deals with the structures and values of this world — since they are permeated and perverted by the “power” Sin — he is torn in two directions. Individuals then might be very good but when they get into the systems, the structures, the values — the *nomos* — of “this world” their intentions become, almost inexplicably, twisted and perverted. “Sin”, having perverted the *nomos*, keeps them from doing the right thing. This tension between knowing the right and doing the right is reflected by Paul in Romans 7.

For Paul, when one lives in the new age and walks according to the Spirit there is no law. This is the point he tries to make the Galatians understand. In the new age law is not needed. It is only needed in this age that is under Sin.

The reason, then, that man shall not, must not, be “rightwised” by works of the Law is that he must not be allowed to imagine that he is able to procure his salvation by his own strength; for he can find his salvation only when he understands himself in his dependence upon God the creator.<sup>44</sup>

For Paul, what delivers man is not the law — *nomos* — but the new act of God: the Christ. Whether then man fulfills the law or not is not the point because there must and can be no basis for boasting.<sup>45</sup>

Now, however, that the “righteousness” of God is revealed “apart from law” (Rom. 3: 21), the cover is also removed from the law and the “Law as the power of death over sinful mankind is revealed. The prison that now is opened (Gal. 3: 22 f.) releases sinners subjected to death. God speaks the word of grace to them by representing them with his “righteousness”. That means at the same time that he does not let them die their own death but lets them die with Christ, dying to the law and the world in order to live for him (Gal. 3: 19 f.; Rom. 5: 8 f.; 6: 5 f. and others).<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Bultmann, *op. cit.*, 264.

<sup>45</sup>I am indebted to my teacher, L. K. K. Dey, for several of the insights contained in these “conclusions.”

<sup>46</sup>Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 63. Eduard Grafe, the last scholar to be mentioned in this treatment of *harmartia* and *nomos* in Pauline theology, wrote a little treatise in 1893 on Paul’s teaching on the law. (*Die Paulinische Lehre von Gesetz*) In it Grafe stated that “*nomos* with or without the article signifies for Paul the Old Testament revelation of God’s will.” (p. 9) Later research, it would seem, has shown this definition to be somewhat narrow. In Romans 7 alone Paul does not seem to operate with this univocal understanding of *nomos*. In reference to Romans 7 and Paul’s understanding and teaching on the law Grafe makes several highly problematic statements. Statements, it might be added, that were echoed by others after him. He speaks of Paul’s realizing that the Law was not the way to righteousness in terms of desperation or as a last resort. Paul, he says, turned from the Law after “a painful experience” and “vain attempts to fulfill the Law.” (p. 13) As several scholars after him, so Grafe seems to have forgotten Paul’s own apodictic declaration in Philippians 3: 6 that as to righteousness under the law, he was “blameless.” Grafe also speaks of the “absolute sinfulness” of man, which coupled with his vain attempts with Sin leads to the outcry in Rom. 7: 24 (p. 17) Again, this is not substantiated by the text itself. Paul in Rom. 7: 17 does not lay the blame, so to speak, on the “absolute sinfulness” of man but on the power, Sin! He, in fact, nowhere speaks of the “absolute” sinfulness of *man* cf. also on this point, the very telling article by Krister Stendahl “The Apostle Paul and the Intropective Conscience of the West”; and P. Feine “Der Ursprung de Sunde nach Paulus” (written in 1899 and an excellent article even though written in 1899 and an

The all-important concern then is this new act of God in Christ. Recalling an ancient Roman liturgy one could aptly say: "per ipsum et cum ipso et in ipso". For Paul God destroys the power of Sin because Christ is the end of the nomos.

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excellent article even though written fifty years before the discovery of the Qumran literature.

Grafe, though, does state as he sees it Paul's answer to the question: 'what is the purpose of the Law or why has God promulgated the Law?' In light of the Christ-event Paul gives what Grafe correctly terms to be even for a Jew, a rather astonishing answer: the divinely-willed purpose of the Law is, as experience teaches, it serves to incite and increase Sin. (p. 16).

