THE APOSTLE PAUL AND THE INTROSPECTIVE CONSCIENCE OF THE WEST *

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To Henry J. Cadbury, octogenarian

IN the history of Western Christianity — and hence, to a large extent, in the history of Western culture — the Apostle Paul has been hailed as a hero of the introspective conscience. Here was the man who grappled with the problem "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do . . ." (Rom. 7:19). His insights as to a solution of this dilemma have recently been more or less identified, for example, with what Jung referred to as the Individuation Process;[1] but this is only a contemporary twist to the traditional Western way of reading the Pauline letters as documents of human consciousness.

Twenty-five years ago Henry J. Cadbury wrote a stimulating study, "The Peril of Modernizing Jesus" (1937). That book and that very title is a good summary of one of the most important insights of biblical studies in the 20th century. It has ramifications far beyond the field of theology and biblical exegesis. It questions the often tacit presupposition that man remains basically the same through the ages. There is little point in affirming or denying such a presupposition in general terms — much would depend on what the foggy word "basically" could mean. But both

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[1] D. Cox, *Jung and St. Paul: A Study of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith and Its Relation to the Concept of Individuation* (1959). — Attention should also be drawn to the discussion in *The American Psychologist* (1960), 301–4, 713–16, initiated by O. H. Mowrer's article "'Sin,' the Lesser of Two Evils"; cf. also the Symposium of W. H. Clark, O. H. Mowrer, A. Ellis, Ch. Curran and E. J. Shoben, Jr., on "The Role of the Concept of Sin in Psychotherapy," *Journal of Counseling Psychology* 7 (1960), 185–201. — For an unusually perceptive and careful attempt to deal with historical material from a psychoanalytical point of view, see Erik H. Erikson, *Young Man Luther* (1958). Not only the abundance but also the "Western" nature of the Luther material makes such an attempt more reasonable than when it is applied to Paul, who, as Erikson remarks, remains "in the twilight of biblical psychology" (p. 94).

the historian and the theologian, both the psychologist and the average reader of the Bible, are well advised to assess how this hypothesis of contemporaneity affects their thinking, and their interpretation of ancient writings.

This problem becomes acute when one tries to picture the function and the manifestation of introspection in the life and writings of the Apostle Paul. It is the more acute since it is exactly at this point that Western interpreters have found the common denominator between Paul and the experiences of man, since Paul's statements about "justification by faith" have been hailed as the answer to the problem which faces the ruthlessly honest man in his practice of introspection. Especially in Protestant Christianity — which, however, at this point has its roots in Augustine and in the piety of the Middle Ages — the Pauline awareness of sin has been interpreted in the light of Luther's struggle with his conscience. But it is exactly at that point that we can discern the most drastic difference between Luther and Paul, between the 16th and the 1st century, and, perhaps, between Eastern and Western Christianity.

A fresh look at the Pauline writings themselves shows that Paul was equipped with what in our eyes must be called a rather "robust" conscience.[2] In Phil. 3 Paul speaks most fully about his life before his Christian calling, and there is no indication that he had had any difficulty in fulfilling the Law. On the contrary, he can say that he had been "flawless" as to the righteousness required by the Law (v.6). His encounter with Jesus Christ — at Damascus, according to Acts 9:1–9 — has not changed this fact. It was not to him a restoration of a plagued conscience; when he says that he now forgets what is behind him (Phil. 3:13), he does not think about the shortcomings in his obedience to the Law, but about his glorious achievements as a righteous Jew,

[2] The actual meaning of the Greek word *syneidesis*, usually translated "conscience," is a complex linguistic problem, see C. A. Pierce, *Conscience in The New Testament* (1955). — The more general problem dealt with in this lecture is closer to the problem to which P. Althaus draws attention in his *Paulus und Luther über den Menschen* (1951), cf. the critique by F. Büchsel, *Theologische Blätter* 17 (1938), 306–11. — B. Reicke, *The Disobedient Spirits and Christian Baptism* (1946), 174–82, gives the meaning "loyalty" in 1 Peter 3:21, cf. *idem*, "Syneidesis in Röm. 2:15," *Theologische Zeitschrift* 12 (1956), 157–61. — See also C. Spicq, *Revue Biblique* 47 (1938), 50–80, and J. Dupont, *Studia Hellenistica* 5 (1948), 119–53.

achievements which he nevertheless now has learned to consider as "refuse" in the light of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah.

The impossibility of keeping the whole Law is a decisive point in Paul's argumentation in Rom. 2:17–3:20 (cf. 2:1ff.); and also in Gal. 3:10–12 this impossibility is the background for Paul's arguments in favor of a salvation which is open to both Jews and Gentiles in Christ. These and similar Pauline statements have led many interpreters to accuse Paul of misunderstanding or deliberately distorting the Jewish view of Law and Salvation.[3] It is pointed out that for the Jew the Law did not require a static or pedantic perfectionism but supposed a covenant relationship in which there was room for forgiveness and repentance and where God applied the Measure of Grace. Hence Paul should have been wrong in ruling out the Law on the basis that Israel could not achieve the perfect obedience which the Law required. What is forgotten in such a critique of Paul — which is conditioned by the later Western problem of a conscience troubled by the demands of the Law — is that these statements about the impossibility of fulfilling the Law stand side by side with the one just mentioned: "I was blameless as to righteousness — of the Law, that is" (Phil. 3:6). So Paul speaks about his subjective conscience — in full accordance with his Jewish training. But Rom. 2–3 deals with something very different. The actual transgressions in Israel — as a people, not in each and every individual — show that the Jews are not better than the Gentiles, in spite of circumcision and the proud possession of the Law. The "advantage" of the Jews is that they have been entrusted with the Words of God and this advantage cannot be revoked by their disobedience (Rom. 3:1ff.), but for the rest they have no edge on salvation. The Law has not helped. They stand before God as guilty as the Gentiles, and even more so (2:9). All this is said in the light of the new avenue of salvation, which has been opened in Christ, an avenue which is equally open to Jews and Gentiles, since it is not based on the Law, in which the very distinction between the two rests. In such a situation, says Paul, the old covenant, even with its provision

[3] See esp. G. F. Moore, *Judaism*, vol. III (1930), 151. — H. J. Schoeps, *Paul* (1961), 213–18, voices the same criticism from the anachronistic point of modern Old Testament interpretation as carried out by M. Buber and others. Cf., however, M. Buber, *Two Types of Faith* (1951), 46–50.

for forgiveness and grace, is not a valid alternative any more. The only *metanoia* (repentance/conversion) and the only grace which counts is the one now available in Messiah Jesus. Once this has been seen, it appears that Paul's references to the impossibility of fulfilling the Law is part of a theological and theoretical scriptural argument about the relation between Jews and Gentiles. Judging from Paul's own writings, there is no indication that he had "experienced it in his own conscience" during his time as a Pharisee. It is also striking to note that Paul never urges Jews to find in Christ the answer to the anguish of a plagued conscience.

If that is the case regarding *Paul the Pharisee*, it is, as we shall see, even more important to note that we look in vain for any evidence that *Paul the Christian* has suffered under the burden of conscience concerning personal shortcomings which he would label "sins." The famous formula "simul justus et peccator" — at the same time righteous and sinner — as a description of the status of the Christian may have some foundation in the Pauline writings, but this formula cannot be substantiated as the center of Paul's conscious attitude toward his personal sins. Apparently, Paul did not have the type of introspective conscience which such a formula seems to presuppose.[4] This is probably one of the reasons why "forgiveness" is the term for salvation which is used least of all in the Pauline writings.[5]

It is most helpful to compare these observations concerning Paul with the great hero of what has been called "Pauline Christianity," i.e., with Martin Luther. In him we find the problem of late medieval piety and theology. Luther's inner struggles presuppose the developed system of Penance and Indulgence, and it

[4] For a penetrating analysis of the original meaning of this formula in Luther's theology, and its relation to the Pauline writings, see W. Joest, "Paulus und das lutherische Simul Justus et Peccator," *Kerygma und Dogma* 1 (1956), 270–321. — See also R. Bring, "Die paulinische Begründung der lutherischen Theologie," *Luthertum* 17 (1955), 18–43; and *idem*, *Commentary on Galatians* (1961); H. Pohlmann, "Hat Luther Paulus entdeckt?" *Studien der Luther-Akademie* N. F. 7 (1949). — For a perceptive view of the role of Luther's conscience, see A. Siirala, *Gottes Gebot bei Martin Luther* (1956), 282 ff.

[5] There is actually no use of the term in the undisputed Pauline epistles; it is found as an apposition in Eph. 1:7 and Col. 1:14; cf. the O. T. quotation in Rom. 4:7, where Paul's own preference for "justification" is clear from the context, and the similar term "remission" in Rom 3:25. — Cf. my articles "Sünde und Schuld" and "Sündenvergebung," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 6 (1962), 484–89, and 511–13, with a discussion of the absence of a common word for "guilt."

is significant that his famous 95 theses take their point of departure from the problem of forgiveness of sins as seen within the framework of Penance: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said: 'Repent (*penitentiam agite*) . . . ,' he wanted the whole life of the faithful to be a repentance (or: penance)."

When the period of the European mission had come to an end, the theological and practical center of Penance shifted from Baptism, administered once and for all, to the ever repeated Mass, and already this subtle change in the architecture of the Christian life contributed to a more acute introspection.[6] The manuals for self-examination among the Irish monks and missionaries became a treasured legacy in wide circles of Western Christianity. The Black Death may have been significant in the development of the climate of faith and life. Penetrating self-examination reached a hitherto unknown intensity. For those who took this practice seriously — and they were more numerous than many Protestants are accustomed to think — the pressure was great. It is as one of those — and for them — that Luther carries out his mission as a great pioneer. It is in response to *their* question, "How can I find a gracious God?" that Paul's words about a justification in Christ by faith, and without the works of the Law, appears as the liberating and saving answer. Luther's unrelenting honesty, even to the gates of hell (cf. especially his *De servo arbitrio*, "On the Bondage of the Will"), his refusal to accept the wise and sound consolation from his spiritual directors, these make him into a Christopher Columbus in the world of faith, who finds new and good land on the other side of what was thought to be the abyss.

In these matters Luther was a truly Augustinian monk, since Augustine may well have been one of the first to express the dilemma of the introspective conscience. It has always been a puzzling fact that Paul meant so relatively little for the thinking of the Church during the first 350 years of its history. To be sure, he is honored and quoted but — in the theological perspective of the West — it seems that Paul's great insight into justification

[6] For this change and its effect on Christology, see G. H. Williams, "The Sacramental Presuppositions of Anselm's Cur deus homo," *Church History* 26 (1957), 245–74.

by faith was forgotten.[7] It is, however, with Augustine that we find an interpretation of Paul which makes use of what to us is the deeper layer in the thought of the great Apostle. A decisive reason for this state of affairs may well have been that up to the time of Augustine the Church was by and large under the impression that Paul dealt with those issues with which he actually deals: 1) What happens to the Law (the Torah, the actual Law of Moses, not the principle of legalism) when the Messiah has come?[8] — 2) What are the ramifications of the Messiah's arrival for the relation between Jews and Gentiles? For Paul had not arrived at his view of the Law by testing and pondering its effect upon his conscience; it was his grappling with the question about the place of the Gentiles in the Church and in the plan of God, with the problem Jew/Gentiles or Jewish Christians/Gentile Christians,[9] which had driven him to that interpretation of the Law which was to become his in a unique way.[10] These observations agree well with the manner in which both Paul himself and the Acts of the Apostles describe his "conversion" as a call to become the Apostle to and of the Gentiles. This was the task for which he — in the manner of the prophets of old — had been earmarked by God from his mother's womb (Gal. 1:15, cf. Acts 9:15).[11] There is not — as

[7] For early Pauline interpretation see K. Staab, *Pauluskommentare aus der griechischen Kirche* (1933); V. E. Hasler, *Gesetz und Evangelium in der alten Kirche bis Origenes* (1953); E. Aleith, *Paulusverständnis in der alten Kirche* (1937); P. G. Verweijs, *Evangelium und Gesetz in der ältesten Christenheit bis auf Marcion* (1960); now also U. Wickert, "Die Persönlichkeit des Paulus in den Paulus kommentaren Theodors von Mopsuestia," *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 53 (1962), 51–66. For Paul and conscience in relation to Gnosticism, see F. F. Sagnard, *Clément d'Alexandrie, Extraits de Théodote* (1948), 247–49, and R. M. Grant's observations in *Journal of Theological Studies* 7 (1956), 310 f.

[8] For the Jewish background to this problem as the one relevant to Paul, see W. D. Davies, *Torah in the Messianic Age and/or the Age to Come* (1952); also H. J. Schoeps, *op. cit.*, 174, with reference to the talmudic tractate Sanhedrin 98a.

[9] It is significant that the contrast in Paul is between Jews and Gentiles, or Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, but never between Jews and Gentile Christians; see G. Bornkamm, "Gesetz und Natur: Röm 2:14–16," *Studien zu Antike und Urchristentum* (1959), 93–118; cf. J. N. Sevenster, *Paul and Seneca* (1961), 96.

[10] A. Schweitzer was certainly right when he recognized that Paul's teaching about justification by faith had such a limited function in Paul's theology and could not be considered the center of his total view. "The doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore a subsidiary crater. . . ." *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (1931), 225.

[11] J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (1959), ch. 1; see also H. G. Wood, "The Conversion of St. Paul. Its Nature, Antecedents and Consequences," *New Testament Studies* 1 (1954/55), 276–82; and U. Wilckens, "Die Bekehrung

we usually think — first a conversion, and then a call to apostleship; there is only the call to the work among the Gentiles. Hence, it is quite natural that at least one of the centers of gravity in Paul's thought should be how to define the place for Gentiles in the Church, according to the plan of God. Rom. 9–11 is not an appendix to chs. 1–8, but the climax of the letter.

This problem was, however, not a live one after the end of the first century, when Christianity for all practical purposes had a non-Jewish constituency. Yet it was not until Augustine that the Pauline thought about the Law and Justification was applied in a consistent and grand style to a more general and timeless human problem. In that connection we remember that Augustine has often been called "the first modern man." While this is an obvious generalization, it may contain a fair amount of truth. His *Confessiones* are the first great document in the history of the introspective conscience. The Augustinian line leads into the Middle Ages and reaches its climax in the penitential struggle of an Augustinian monk, Martin Luther, and in his interpretation of Paul.[12]

Judging at least from a superficial survey of the preaching of the Churches of the East from olden times to the present, it is striking how their homiletical tradition is either one of doxology or meditative mysticism or exhortation — but it does not deal with the plagued conscience in the way in which one came to do so in the Western Churches.

The problem we are trying to isolate could be expressed in hermeneutical terms somewhat like this: The Reformers' interpretation of Paul rests on an analogism when Pauline statements about Faith and Works, Law and Gospel, Jews and Gentiles are

des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 56 (1959), 273–93.

[12] For the Augustinian interpretation see A. F. W. Lekkerkerker, *Römer 7 und Römer 9 bei Augustin* (1942); cf. Ph. Platz, "Der Römerbrief in der Gnadenlehre Augustins," *Cassiciacum* 5 (1938); also J. Stelzenberger, *Conscientia bei Augustin* (1959); and *idem*, "Conscientia in der ost-westlichen Spannung der patristischen Theologie," *Tübinger Theologische Quartalschrift* 141 (1961), 174–205. — For the Greek background, see O. Seel, "Zur Vorgeschichte des Gewissensbegriffes im altgriechischen Denken," *Festschrift F. Dornseiff* (1953), 291–319. For a broad and instructive survey, which substantiates our view in many respects — but reads the biblical material differently — see H. Jaeger, "L'examen de conscience dans les religions non-chrétiennes et avant le christianisme," *Numen* 6 (1959), 175–233.

read in the framework of late medieval piety. The Law, the Torah, with its specific requirements of circumcision and food restrictions becomes a general principle of "legalism" in religious matters. Where Paul was concerned about the possibility for Gentiles to be included in the messianic community, his statements are now read as answers to the quest for assurance about man's salvation out of a common human predicament.

This shift in the frame of reference affects the interpretation at many points. A good illustration can be seen in what Luther calls the Second Use of the Law, i.e., its function as a Tutor or Schoolmaster unto Christ. The crucial passage for this understanding of the Law is Gal. 3:24, a passage which the King James Version — in unconscious accord with Western tradition — renders: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster (R.V. and A.S.V.: tutor) to bring us unto Christ," but which the Revised Standard Version translates more adequately: "So that the law was our cutodian until Christ came." [12a] In his extensive argument for the possibility of Gentiles becoming Christians without circumcision etc., Paul states that the Law had not come in until 430 years after the promise to Abraham, and that it was meant to have validity only up to the time of the Messiah (Gal. 3:15–22). Hence, its function was to serve as a Custodian for the Jews until that time. Once the Messiah had come, and once the faith in Him — not "faith" as a general religious attitude — was available as the decisive ground for salvation, the Law had done its duty as a custodian for the Jews, or as a waiting room with strong locks (vv. 22f.) Hence, it is clear that Paul's problem is how to explain why there is no reason to impose the Law on the Gentiles, who now, in God's good Messianic time, have become partakers in the fulfillment of the promises to Abraham (v. 29).

In the common interpretation of Western Christianity, the matter looks very different. One could even say that Paul's argument has been reversed into saying the opposite to his original intention. Now the Law is the Tutor *unto* Christ. Nobody can attain a true faith in Christ unless his self-righteousness has been crushed by the Law. The function of the Second Use of the Law

[12a] Cf. my article on Gal. 3:24 in *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 18–19 (1953–54), 161–73.

is to make man see his desperate need for a Savior. In such an interpretation, we note how Paul's distinction between Jews and Gentiles is gone. "*Our* Tutor/Custodian" is now a statement applied to man in general, not "our" in the sense of "I, Paul, and my fellow Jews." Furthermore, the Law is not any more the Law of Moses which requires circumcision etc., and which has become obsolete when faith in the Messiah is a live option — it is the moral imperative as such, in the form of the will of God. And finally, Paul's argument that the Gentiles must not, and should not come to Christ *via* the Law, i.e., *via* circumcision etc., has turned into a statement according to which all men must come to Christ with consciences properly convicted by the Law and its insatiable requirements for righteousness. So drastic is the re-interpretation once the original framework of "Jews and Gentiles" is lost, and the Western problems of conscience become its unchallenged and self-evident substitute.

Thus, the radical difference between a Paul and a Luther at this one point has considerable ramification for the reading of the actual texts. And the line of Luther appears to be the obvious one. This is true not only among those who find themselves more or less dogmatically bound by the confessions of the Reformation. It is equally true about the average student of "all the great books" in a College course, or the agnostic Westerner in general. It is also true in serious New Testament exegesis. Thus, R. Bultmann — in spite of his great familiarity with the history of religions in early Christian times — finds the nucleus of Pauline thought in the problem of "boasting," [13] i.e., in man's need to be utterly convicted in his conscience.[14] Paul's self-understanding in these matters is the existential, and hence, ever valid center of Pauline theology. Such an interpretation is an even more drastic translation and an even more far-reaching generalization of the original Pauline material than that found in the Reformers. But it is worth noting that it is achieved in the prolongation of the same line. This is more obvious since Bultmann makes, candidly and openly, the statement that his existential hermeneutic rests on

[13] R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. I. (1951), 242 f.

[14] C. H. Dodd feels the difficulty in such an interpretation, but ends up with placing Paul's overcoming of his boasting somewhat later in his career, "The Mind of Paul," *New Testament Studies* (1953), 67–128.

the presupposition that man is essentially the same through the ages, and that this continuity in the human self-consciousness is the common denominator between the New Testament and any age of human history. This presupposition is stated with the force of an a priori truth.[15]

What in Bultmann rests on a clearly stated hermeneutic principle plays, however, its subtle and distorting role in historians who do not give account of their presuppositions but work within an unquestioned Western framework. P. Volz, in his comprehensive study of Jewish eschatology, uses man's knowledge of his individual salvation in its relation to a troubled conscience as one of the "trenches" in his reconstruction of the Jewish background to the New Testament.[16] But when it comes to the crucial question and he wants to find a passage which would substantiate that this was a conscious problem in those generations of Judaism, he can find only one example in the whole Rabbinic literature which perhaps could illustrate an attitude of a troubled conscience (bBer. 28b).[17]

To be sure, no one could ever deny that *hamartia*, "sin," is a crucial word in Paul's terminology, especially in his epistle to the Romans. Rom. 1–3 sets out to show that all — both Jews and Gentiles — have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God (3:19, cf. v. 23). Rom. 3:21–8:39 demonstrates how and in what sense this tragic fact is changed by the arrival of the Messiah.

It is much harder to gage how Paul subjectively experienced the power of sin in his life and, more specifically, how and in what sense he was conscious of actual sins. One point is clear. The Sin with capital S in Paul's past was that he had persecuted the Church of God. This climax of his dedicated obedience to his

[15] Bultmann, *ibm.* vol. 2 (1955), 251; cf. *idem*, "The Problem of Hermeneutics," *Essays Philosophical and Theological* (1955), 234–61.

[16] Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter* (1934), 111 ff.

[17] Cf. also how F. Büchsel, who repeats this view in highly biased language, admits the lack of evidence for such an attitude: the Pharisee "vacillated between an overbearing confidence in his good works, which made him blind to his sinfulness, and a desperate anxiety before the wrath of God, *which, however, manifests itself only seldom*" (italics mine), *Theologisches Wörterbuch z. N. T.* (ed. G. Kittel), vol. 3 (1938), 935. — The examples, often quoted, from 4 Ezra 3–4 and 7–8 deal primarily with the historical theodicy and not with the individual conscience.

Jewish faith (Gal. 1:13, Phil. 3:6) was the shameful deed which made him the least worthy of apostleship (1 Cor. 15:9). This motif, which is elaborated dramatically by the author of the Acts of the Apostles (chs. 9, 22 and 26), is well grounded in Paul's own epistles. Similarly, when 1 Timothy states on Paul's account that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am number one" (1:15), this is not an expression of contrition in the present tense, but refers to how Paul in his ignorance had been a blaspheming and violent persecutor, before God in his mercy and grace had revealed to him his true Messiah and made Paul an Apostle and a prototype of sinners' salvation (1:12–16).[18]

Nevertheless, Paul knew that he had made up for this terrible Sin of persecuting the Church, as he says in so many words in 1 Cor. 15:10: ". . . his grace toward me was not in vain; on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me."

This his call to Apostleship has the same pattern as the more thematic statement that Christ died for us godless ones, while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:6–11). We note how that statement is only the subsidiary conditional clause in an argument *e majore ad minus*: If now God was so good and powerful that he could justify weak and sinful and rebellious men, how much easier must it not be for him to give in due time the ultimate salvation to those whom he already has justified. Hence, the words about the sinful, the weak and the rebellious have not present-tense meaning, but refer to the past, which is gloriously and gracefully blotted out, as was Paul's enmity to Jesus Christ and his Church.

What then about Paul's consciousness of sins after his conversion? His letters indicate with great clarity that he did not hold to the view that man was free from sin after baptism. His pastoral admonitions show that he had much patience with the sins and weaknesses of Christians. But does he ever intimate that he is aware of any sins of his own which would trouble his conscience? It is actually easier to find statements to the contrary. The tone in Acts 23:1, "Brethren, I have lived before God in all good conscience up to this day" (cf. 24:16), prevails also through-

[18] This theme is elaborated further in the Epistle of Barnabas 5:9, where *all* the Apostles are called "iniquitous above all sin," with a reference to Mk. 2:17.

out his letters. Even if we take due note of the fact that the major part of Paul's correspondence contains an apology for his Apostolic ministry — hence it is the antipode to Augustine's Confessions from the point of view of form — the conspicuous absence of references to an actual consciousness of being a sinner is surprising. To be sure, Paul is aware of a struggle with his "body" (1 Cor. 9:27), but we note that the tone is one of confidence, not of a plagued conscience.

In Rom. 9:1 and 2 Cor. 1:12 he witnesses to his good conscience. This tone reaches its highest pitch in 2 Cor. 5:10f.: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each one may receive the retribution for what he has done while in his body, either good or evil. Aware, therefore, of the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade men, but to God it is clear [what we are]; and I hope that it is clear also to your conscience." Here, with the day of reckoning before his eyes, Paul says that the Lord has approved of him, and he hopes that the Corinthians shall have an equally positive impression of him, and of his success in pleasing the Lord (5:9). This robust conscience is not shaken but strengthened by his awareness of a final judgment which has not come yet. And when he writes about the tensions between himself and Apollos and other teachers, he states that "I have nothing on my conscience" (1 Cor. 4:4; N.E.B. — literally "I know nothing with me"; the verb is of the same stem as the word for conscience); to be sure, he adds that this does not settle the case, since "the Lord is my judge," but it is clear from the context that Paul is in little doubt about the final verdict. His warning against a premature verdict is not a plea out of humility or fear, but a plea to the Corinthians not to be too rash in a negative evaluation of Paul.

Thus, we look in vain for a statement in which Paul would speak about himself as an actual sinner. When he speaks about his conscience, he witnesses to his good conscience before men and God. On the other hand, Paul often speaks about his *weakness*, not only ironically as in 2 Cor. 11:21f. In 2 Cor. 12 we find the proudly humble words, "But He said to me: 'My grace is sufficient to you, for the power is fulfilled in weakness.' I will the more gladly boast of my weakness, that the power of Christ may

rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (vv. 9–10). The weakness which Paul here refers to is clearly without any relation to his sin or his conscience. The "thorn in the flesh" (v. 7) was presumably some physical handicap — some have guessed at epilepsy — which interfered with his effectiveness and, what was more important, with his apostolic authority, as we can see from Gal. 4:13, cf. 1. Cor. 11:30. Sickness was seen as a sign of insufficient spiritual endowment. But there is no indication that Paul ever thought of this and other "weaknesses" as sins for which he was responsible. They were caused by the Enemy or the enemies. His weakness became for him an important facet in his identification with the work of Christ, who had been "crucified in weakness" (2 Cor. 13:4; cf. also 4:10 and Col. 1:24). — In the passage from Rom. 5, mentioned above, we find the only use of the word "weak" as a synonym to "sinner," but there these words helped to describe primarily the power of justification as a past act (and the New English Bible consequently renders it by "powerless"). This is the more clear since the third synonym is "enemy" (v. 10), and points to Paul's past when he had been the enemy of Christ.

Yet there is one Pauline text which the reader must have wondered why we have left unconsidered, especially since it is the passage we mentioned in the beginning as the proof text for Paul's deep insights into the human predicament: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do" (Rom. 7:19). What could witness more directly to a deep and sensitive introspective conscience? While much attention has been given to the question whether Paul here speaks about a pre-Christian or Christian experience of his, or about man in general, little attention has been drawn to the fact that Paul here is involved in an argument about the Law; he is not primarily concerned about man's or his own cloven ego or predicament.[19] The diatribe style of the chapter helps us to see what Paul is doing. In vv. 7–12 he

[19] The confusion caused by psychological interpretations, and the centrality of the Law in Rom. 7, was seen in the epoch-making study by W. G. Kümmel, *Römer 7 und die Bekehrung des Paulus* (1929); cf. C. L. Mitton, *Expository Times* 65 (1953/54), 78–81; 99–103; 132–135; and E. Ellwein, *Kerygma und Dogma* 1 (1955), 247–68.

works out an answer to the semi-rhetorical question: "Is the Law sin?" The answer reads: "Thus the Law is holy, just, and good." This leads to the equally rhetorical question: "Is it then this good (Law) which brought death to me?", and the answer is summarized in v.25b: "So then, I myself serve the Law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the Law of Sin" (i.e., the Law "weakened by sin" [8:3] leads to death, just as a medicine which is good in itself can cause death to a patient whose organism [flesh] cannot take it).

Such an analysis of the formal structure of Rom. 7 shows that Paul is here involved in an interpretation of the Law, a defense for the holiness and goodness of the Law. In vv. 13–25 he carries out this defense by making a distinction between the Law as such and the Sin (and the Flesh) which has to assume the whole responsibility for the fatal outcome. It is most striking that the "I", the *ego*, is not simply identified with Sin and Flesh. The observation that "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want to do is what I do" does not lead directly over to the exclamation: "Wretched man that I am . . .!", but, on the contrary, to the statement, "Now if I do what I do not want, *then it is not I who do it*, but the sin which dwells in me." The argument is one of acquittal of the ego, not one of utter contrition. Such a line of thought would be impossible if Paul's intention were to describe man's predicament. In Rom. 1–3 the human impasse has been argued, and here every possible excuse has been carefully ruled out. In Rom. 7 the issue is rather to show how in some sense "I gladly agree with the Law of God as far as my inner man is concerned" (v. 22); or, as in v. 25, "I serve the Law of God."

All this makes sense only if the anthropological references in Rom. 7 are seen as means for a very special argument about the holiness and goodness of the Law. The possibility of a distinction between the good Law and the bad Sin is based on the rather trivial observation that every man knows that there is a difference between what he ought to do and what he does. This distinction makes it possible for Paul to blame Sin and Flesh, and to rescue the Law as a good gift of God. "If I now do what I do not want, I agree with the Law [and recognize] that it is good" (v. 16). That is all, but that is what should be proven.

Unfortunately — or fortunately — Paul happened to express this supporting argument so well that what to him and his contemporaries was a common sense observation appeared to later interpreters to be a most penetrating insight into the nature of man and into the nature of sin. This could happen easily once the problem about the nature and intention of God's Law was not any more as relevant a problem in the sense in which Paul grappled with it. The question about the Law became the incidental framework around the golden truth of Pauline anthropology. This is what happens when one approaches Paul with the Western question of an introspective conscience. This Western interpretation reaches its climax when it appears that even, or especially, the will of man is the center of depravation. And yet, in Rom. 7 Paul had said about that will: "The will (to do the good) is there . . ." (v. 18).

What we have called the Western interpretation has left its mark even in the field of textual reconstruction in this chapter in Romans. In Moffatt's translation of the New Testament the climax of the whole argument about the Law (v. 25b, see above) is placed before the words "wretched man that I am . . ." Such a rearrangement — without any basis in the manuscripts[20] — wants to make this exclamation the dramatic climax of the whole chapter, so that it is quite clear to the reader that Paul here gives the answer to the great problem of human existence. But by such arrangements the structure of Paul's argumentation is destroyed. What was a digression is elevated to the main factor. It should not be denied that Paul is deeply aware of the precarious situation of man in this world, where even the holy Law of God does not help — it actually leads to death. Hence his outburst. But there is no indication that this awareness is related to a subjective conscience struggle. If that were the case, he would have spoken of the "body of sin," but he says "body of death" (v. 25; cf. 1 Cor. 15:56). What dominates this chapter is a theological concern and the awareness that there is a positive solution available here and now by the Holy Spirit about which he speaks in ch. 8. We should not

[20] In a similar fashion even the standard Greek text of the New Testament (the Nestle edition) indicates that ch. 7 should end with the exclamation in v. 25a, and ch. 8 begin already with v. 25b. But the New English Bible retains v. 25b as the concluding sentence in ch. 7.

read a trembling and introspective conscience into a text which is so anxious to put the blame on Sin, and that in such a way that not only the Law but the will and mind of man are declared good and are found to be on the side of God.

We may have wasted too much time in trying to demonstrate a fact well known in human history — and especially in the history of religions: that sayings which originally meant one thing later on were interpreted to mean something else, something which was felt to be more relevant to human conditions of later times.

And yet, if our analysis is on the whole correct, it points to a major question in the history of mankind. We should venture to suggest that the West for centuries has wrongly surmised that the biblical writers were grappling with problems which no doubt are ours, but which never entered their consciousness.

For the historian this is of great significance. It could of course always be argued that these ancients unconsciously were up against the same problems as we are — man being the same through the ages. But the historian is rightly anxious to stress the value of having an adequate picture of what these people actually thought that they were saying. He will always be suspicious of any "modernizing," whether it be for apologetic, doctrinal, or psychological purposes.

The theologian would be quite willing to accept and appreciate the obvious deepening of religious and human insight which has taken place in Western thought, and which reached a theological climax with Luther — and a secular climax with Freud. He could perhaps argue that this Western interpretation and transformation of Pauline thought is a valid and glorious process of theological development. He could even claim that such a development was fostered by elements implicit in the New Testament, and especially in Paul.

The framework of "Sacred History" which we have found to be that of Pauline Theology (cf. our comments on Gal. 3:24 above) opens up a new perspective for systematic theology and practical theology. The Pauline *ephapax* ("once for all", Rom. 6:10) cannot be translated fully and only into something repeated in the life of every individual believer. For Gentiles the Law is

not the Schoolmaster who leads to Christ; or it is that only by analogy and a secondary one at that. We find ourselves in the new situation where the faith in the Messiah Jesus gives us the right to be called Children of God (1 Jn. 3:1). By way of analogy, one could of course say that in some sense every man has a "legalistic Jew" in his heart. But that *is* an analogy, and should not be smuggled into the texts as their primary or explicit meaning in Paul. If that is done, something happens to the joy and humility of Gentile Christianity.

Thus, the theologian would note that the Pauline original should not be indentified with such interpretations. He would try to find ways by which the church — also in the West — could do more justice to other elements of the Pauline original than those catering to the problems raised by introspection. He would be suspicious of a teaching and a preaching which pretended that the only door into the church was that of evermore introspective awareness of sin and guilt. For it appears that the Apostle Paul was a rather good Christian, and yet he seems to have had little such awareness. We note how the biblical original functions as a critique of inherited presuppositions and an incentive to new thought.[21] Few things are more liberating and creative in modern theology than a clear distinction between the "original" and the "translation" in any age, our own included.

[21] For a fuller treatment of these issues, see my article "Biblical Theology" in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 1 (1962), 418–32.