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PAUL'S CONVERSION AND THE DEVELOPMENT  
OF HIS VIEW OF THE LAW\*

There is not the slightest doubt about the immense significance of Paul's Damascus experience. It changed Paul's life and turned a persecutor into a missionary. Jesus Christ became and remained the centre of Paul's existence.

It is another question, however, to what extent Paul's *theology* was conceived soon after the call experience.<sup>1</sup> Was Paul's peculiar view of the law as found in Galatians or in Romans an immediate consequence of his Christophany? That is at least a very common view.<sup>2</sup> Paul's call experience resulted, it is held, in his making immediately a sharp contrast between 'works of righteousness' and 'righteousness by faith'. In his Damascus experience Paul perceived that Christ was the end of the law and God's judgment 'upon all human accomplishment and boasting'.<sup>3</sup> It is also commonly held that that experience made Paul regard the law as a 'spur to sin', from which the death and resurrection of Christ had liberated the believers.<sup>4</sup>

In short, there is, to-day no less than fifty years ago, the temptation to take the view that Paul was converted to Paulinism - if I may so phrase it - rather than the much more probable one that his break with the Jewish law, and the rise of his own peculiar and highly developed system of beliefs, were the product of many years with their unfolding experiences.<sup>5</sup>

The common view has not gone totally unchallenged. Some scholars have held that Paul first adopted a more ordinary Hellenistic Jewish Christian attitude toward the law and that his attitude developed in a more radical direction only a good deal later.<sup>6</sup> Evidence for this has been found in the absence of any criticisms of the law in 1 Thessalonians, and in the fact that Paul uses 'justification' language only in quite specific polemical situations.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is universally recognized that Paul's teaching on the law is a most intricate piece of theology. Some find that teaching self-contradictory, while others prefer to speak of dialectic and paradoxes.<sup>7</sup> For the moment, the point is simply that on any count Paul is *difficult*.<sup>8</sup> Typically, more than

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one scholar has declared that Paul's theology of the law is nonsense if interpreted in any of the standard ways rather than in some special fashion proposed by the writer in question.<sup>9</sup> Even if Paul's thought on the law is viewed in terms of dialectic, it still seems *too complex* to have originated all at once.

Paul is also *different* from all other early Christians in his theology of the law, as far as we know.<sup>10</sup> Can this really have been the case right from the beginning? Until the notorious incident at Antioch (Gal 2. 11 ff.) Paul worked as a missionary of the Antiochian congregation, for quite some time apparently as the junior partner of Barnabas.<sup>11</sup> The Antiochian incident indicates that Barnabas for one did not share Paul's way of thinking in sharp contrasts. When Paul set forth his ideas in public, he had to part ways with Barnabas and Antioch. This seems to indicate that at the time of the incident Paul had gone through - or perhaps was in the process of going through - a development which led into something new and distinctive.

It is reasonable to assume that until the time of the incident Paul had more or less shared the general Antiochian view of the law, mediated to the congregation by the 'Hellenists' who had left Jerusalem after the death of Stephen.<sup>12</sup> Quite likely the Christians persecuted by Paul had been of the Hellenist brand.<sup>13</sup> Paul's ire was kindled by their liberal attitude toward the law. It is only natural if he, as a result of his conversion experience, adopted that very attitude - whatever it was. The problem is that we do not really know. In the course of this paper, a hypothesis about the Hellenists will emerge.

Some such overall hypothesis as that just sketched commends itself on general grounds: because of the nature of Paul's statements on the law on one hand and his relation to the congregation in Antioch on the other. Whether this view can find support in Paul's comments on his conversion remains to be seen.<sup>14</sup>

I should mention at the outset that I do *not* posit a theological development from Galatians to Romans as is increasingly done today.<sup>15</sup> The reason is that I find each letter beset with internal tensions. This is especially true of Romans. A case in point is the discrepancy between Romans 9 and Romans 11 regarding the election and destiny of Israel.<sup>16</sup> The assumption of a development from the negative Galatians to the allegedly positive Romans is of no help here, for the shocking identification of Israel with Ishmael in Romans 9 is in line with Galatians 4. If the positive view of the salvation of Israel in Romans 11 testifies to a development, then that development had to take place between the writing of Romans 9 and Romans 11,<sup>17</sup> or perhaps between Rom 11. 10 and Rom 11. 11.<sup>18</sup> On the whole, there is in Romans a change of emphasis in comparison with Galatians, but both letters testify to an ongoing struggle with the same basic

problems that defy solution. Such development as I assume must instead have taken place in the tunnel period *before* the extant letters with the possible exception of 1 Thessalonians (in case that letter really turns out to be as early as AD 41).<sup>19</sup>

## GALATIANS 1. 11-17

Let us turn to the 'call' passages. In Gal 1. 11-17, Paul says that the revelation of Christ meant two things to him: 1) a break with a glorious Jewish past, 2) a call to apostolic proclamation among *Gentiles* (v. 16).<sup>20</sup> The final clause in verse 16 does not merely express God's eternal purpose with Paul.<sup>21</sup> Paul indicates clearly that this purpose was revealed to him in his Christophany: in his call vision his gospel was 'taught' to him (v. 12), and this gospel is something that makes Paul liable to the accusation that he 'pleases men' (v. 10). This can only refer to the relaxation of the law in the Gentile mission. Soon after Paul refers indeed to this gospel of his as 'the gospel I preach *among Gentiles*' (2. 2).

Paul thus refers to a connection between his call vision and his work among Gentiles. Presumably the Christians persecuted by him were already engaged in such a mission, which was an important reason for Paul to persecute them.

It is noteworthy that still in Galatians (5. 11, 6. 12) Paul establishes a connection between *neglect of circumcision* and *persecution*. 'If I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?' The Judaizers would compel the Galatians to be circumcised 'in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ'. To practise circumcision can be a means of avoiding persecution. That implies that neglect of circumcision can incur persecution. This, too, might indicate that admission of Gentile converts without circumcision (and the full observance which was to go with circumcision, cf. Gal 5. 3) was an important motive when Paul was persecuting Christians.<sup>22</sup> The vision of Christ caused him to see the matter in a new light.

It is interesting that Paul uses in Gal 1. 13 the word 'Ιουδαϊσμός. The word has connotations of such *practices* as separated Jew from Gentile. Correspondingly, in 2. 14 Peter's return to the observance of table regulations is called 'living like a Jew' (Ιουδαϊκῶς ζῆν, Ιουδαίσειν). Nowhere else does Paul use these derivatives of 'Ιουδαίος. The fact that he does so here confirms that the emphasis lies on 'particularly Jewish' *practices*. The mention of 'the traditions of the fathers' (v. 14) amounts to the same thing. Practices rather than doctrines are in focus.

While Paul thus uses in Galatians I words referring to the separation of Jew and Gentile, another type of vocabulary is conspicuously *absent* in

the passage – the *justification* terminology.<sup>23</sup> This is so despite the fact that in the central part of the letter Paul attacks the Judaizing trend in Galatia by elaborating his message about justification by faith rather than by works of the law. The fact that he introduces this terminology, not in the account of his call but in his description of the Antiochian incident (2. 16 f.), may contain a historical hint. Perhaps it was in Antioch around AD 50 that Paul emerged as a preacher of justification by faith, rather than on the Damascus road in the thirties.<sup>24</sup> In view of the total absence of justification terminology in Gal 1. 11–17 one should *not* claim that Paul in this passage *grounds* his gospel of justification *sola gratia* and *sola fide* without works of the law in his call experience.<sup>25</sup>

It is plausible to understand the 'gospel' which Paul here refers to in a more limited sense: it is the gospel that does not require *circumcision* of Gentile converts (nor, by implication, observance of the 'ritual' Torah, such as the food laws).

The main issue at stake in Galatia was circumcision. Paul tells about his past in order to prevent the Galatians from subjecting themselves to the rite. The neglect of circumcision is envisaged in the allegation that Paul pleases men (1. 10). This leads Paul to state that his gospel is not according to human standards (v. 11). In the very next chapter Paul tells how he set forth the gospel proclaimed by him among Gentiles (2. 2) before the Jerusalem leaders. As the reference to Titus (2. 3) shows, the issue at stake was circumcision. The acceptance of Paul's gospel by the 'pillars' became visible in the fact that Titus was *not circumcised*. Paul defended the freedom of his congregations before the Jerusalem authorities. The question was whether anything should be 'added' to what Paul was practising among Gentiles (2. 6). None of this refers to theological doctrines. Paul's gospel which he received in his conversion is, in 2. 7, termed τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς ἀκροβυστίας, the gospel free from circumcision and meant for the uncircumcised. It is distinct from the Jerusalem εὐαγγέλιον τῆς περιτομῆς, 'the gospel of circumcision'.

As a result of his encounter with Christ, then, Paul was forced to admit that Gentiles could be accepted *without circumcision*. At least this is what the call passage in Galatians 1 suggests.<sup>26</sup> To be sure, it is not clear *a priori* that the passage faithfully reflects Paul's *original* understanding of the event which took place some twenty years before he dictated Galatians.<sup>27</sup> With the possibility of hindsight in view, the *lack* of justification language appears even more striking. On the other hand, it is reasonable to assume that Paul really was conscious of his call to Gentile mission – albeit on a minor scale – from the beginning. Precisely in the polemical context of Galatians it was important to Paul not to give a testimony that 'would have received an easy repudiation from his opponents'.<sup>28</sup> Had the truth been different, had he first belonged to the preachers of the 'gospel of

circumcision', it would have served no purpose to 'invent' an early awareness of the mission to the Gentiles.

PHILIPPIANS 3. 2-11

In Philippians 3, the context is as follows. Jewish Christian missionaries have infiltrated the Philippian church. They underline the significance of *circumcision*. Paul reacts strongly, calling them 'dogs' and pouring scorn on their zeal for circumcision. They are *κατατομή* (v. 2), whereas 'we', the non-observant Christians, are the (true) 'circumcision' (v. 3). As in Galatia, the issue at stake seems to be whether Gentile converts should be circumcised.

To refute the claims of his opponents, Paul turns to a rehearsal of his Pharisaic past, listing his 'fleshly' advantages which were no less than those of his present rivals. He alludes briefly to his conversion which changed everything, turning all gain to loss. Paul then gives a short description of his Christian existence which has grown out of his conversion, setting it up as an example to be imitated by the Philippians. Any supposed advantages, such as circumcision, that tempt one to rely on 'flesh' are to be regarded as 'rubbish' in comparison with the union with Christ. Verses 8-11 thus do not directly describe Paul's call experience. They interpret it in the light of his 'knowledge of Christ'.

In verse 9, Paul contrasts his own righteousness which comes from the law with that which comes through faith in Christ. It is usual to find here a contrast between two attitudes: righteousness is either based on man's *achievement*, or it is regarded as God's free *gift*.<sup>29</sup> It is thought that in his Pharisaic past Paul shared the achievement ideal. Because of his encounter with Christ he gave it up and accepted righteousness as a gift.

In view of this question, it is striking that the four first 'fleshly' advantages listed by Paul are such as were allotted to him *without any of his own doing*, by grace alone, as it were: circumcision as an infant, Jewish birth, belonging to the tribe of Benjamin and to the Hebrew race.

The remaining three items betray the earnestness of Paul's efforts. When Paul mentions the 'righteousness according to the law' in verse 6, he says that he was *blameless* (*ἀμεμπτος*) with regard to it. This is *sanctification* language rather than soteriological terminology, as Paul's use of *ἀμεμπτος* elsewhere shows. Verse 6 does not, in itself, suggest the image of a pious man trying to obtain salvation through his efforts and achievements, any more than does Luke's depiction of Zachariah and Elizabeth as 'righteous' (*δίκαιοι*) before the Lord, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless (*ἀμεμπτοι*) (Luke 1. 6). The picture conveyed is that of a pious man obediently fulfilling the duties prescribed *by God* in his law. It is verse 6a alone that introduces a different nuance: Paul's

fervent zeal led him to persecute those who posed a threat to the inherited values. He took his loyalty to God's law extremely seriously.

We will postpone for a moment the treatment of verse 9, in which Paul returns to righteousness terminology. Verses 4-8 may indicate that Paul realized from the first that the *covenant privileges* listed by him were 'loss' in the light of his encounter with Christ. Paul then perceived right at the beginning that *what separated Jew from Gentile* was loss not gain.

In verse 3 Paul denies the Judaizers (and Jews) the right to appeal to their circumcision: 'We are the (true) circumcision.' Correspondingly, he begins the list of his unreal advantages by emphatically putting circumcision at the top of the list. This fits the view that the acceptance of *uncircumcised* Gentiles into the congregation had been the main bone of contention between Paul and those persecuted by him. Galatians 1 shows that Paul's call experience entailed his assurance of being now sent to the Gentiles. Philippians 3 reveals the other side of the coin: one could only become an apostle to Gentiles *if one gave up the Jewish covenantal privileges* - pride in one's Jewish origin, one's zeal for the law and blameless observance of it. Most concretely, one could only be an apostle to Gentiles if one *dropped the demand of circumcision* and other 'ritual' stipulations, among which the *kosher* laws were most conspicuous. Yet one could - and probably had to - esteem 'circumcision' in a spiritualized sense as Paul does here (v. 3).

But what about verse 9 with its contrast between the two righteousnesses? The usual view is that in this verse Paul 'grounds the antithesis of justification by works of the law and justification through faith *in his conversion experience*'.<sup>30</sup>

But does he really? Does he not rather *interpret* his experience *in retrospect* in terms of the said contrast? The participle clause *μη έχων ἐμὴν δικαιοσύνην* etc. in verse 9 stands out in its context. Syntactically, the comment is parenthetical.<sup>31</sup> An interpretation couched in 'juridical' vocabulary interrupts a description of Paul's Christian existence which is given in 'participationist' terms.<sup>32</sup> 'In order that I may gain Christ and be found in him' finds its natural sequel in verse 10: 'that I may know him and the power of his resurrection . . .' Such observations are anything but conclusive, but they do indicate that the possibility of *hindsight* is greater in this passage than in Galatians 1. Verse 9 may well introduce second thoughts on the significance of the Damascus experience.<sup>33</sup>

As regards the train of thought in the passage, there is something strained in the contrast between the two righteousnesses. Francis Watson correctly notes that

the way of life summed up in 3.5f cannot simply be subsumed under the heading of 'achievement', for obedience to the law is here said to take place as a response to the privileges given by God to Israel . . . What Paul renounces according to Phil. 3.7ff is his

whole covenant-status as a Jew, which includes reliance on the divine gifts bestowed uniquely on Israel as well as the confirmation of those gifts by his own obedience.<sup>34</sup>

The step taken by Paul in verse 9 is, then, an extremely bold one. Not only does he call the covenantal privileges given by God 'rubbish' in verse 8. He ends up by calling such righteousness as is pursued in obedience to God's covenantal law his (Paul's) *own* righteousness which stands *in contrast to God's*. The shift from God-given privileges to fleshly signs of one's 'own' righteousness is striking. After all, it was not Paul's - or any other Jew's - 'own' invention that he should obey the Giver of the law. Paul's own special effort is only visible in his adherence to the Pharisees and, above all, in his persecution of the Christians, and it might have been logical to ascribe *that* part of the story to Paul's misguided effort at righteousness. Paul does *not*, however, separate this part from the rest. He disqualifies *all* the items listed as 'rubbish'.

What Paul in effect renounces in the passage is not human achievement, but the biblical covenant. Of course he cannot admit that this is what his actual position implies. Had Paul argued in Phil 3 in a straightforward way, however, he ought to have said something like this in verse 9: 'not having the righteousness connected with God's ancient *covenant with Israel*, but the righteousness connected with the *Christ event*'.

A similar shift takes place in Romans 9-10. Paul starts by listing Israel's special privileges (Rom 9. 4 f.) to which he later (Rom 11. 29) refers as irrevocable 'gifts of grace' (*χαρίσματα*). Nevertheless, in Rom 9. 6 ff. Paul in effect *denies* the Jewish covenant with all its privileges.<sup>35</sup> For good measure, he suggests in 10. 3 that clinging to the (God-given) privileges amounts to Israel's 'own' (*idia*) righteousness - despite what he is going to assert in Rom 11. 26 ff. Romans 9-11 testifies in a moving way to Paul's wrestling with an impossible task, his attempting to 'square the circle'.<sup>36</sup> He tries to hold together two incompatible convictions: 1) God has made with Israel an irrevocable covenant and given Israel his law which invites the people to a certain kind of righteous life, and 2) this righteousness is not true righteousness, as it is not based on faith in Jesus.<sup>37</sup> This dilemma figures in Phil 3 as well.

Phil 3. 9 (from *μη ἔχω* onwards) is formally loosely attached to its context and summarizes the content of verses 4-6 in an unexpected way which is, however, paralleled in Romans 9-10. This suggests that Phil 3. 9 may well contain an idea which was *not* yet present in Paul's mind at the time of his call.

#### PAUL AND JEWISH 'SOTERIOLOGY'

My reluctance to take Phil 3. 9 as a straightforward reference to an 'achievement' soteriology which Paul first shared but then consciously gave up,

stems partly from my understanding of the Jewish religion. I join the ranks of those who doubt the assertion that post-Biblical Judaism was a man-centred achievement religion which invited its adherents to earn the favour of God by doing meritorious works of the law.<sup>38</sup> Of course, Judaism embraced different currents, and the traditional Christian description may suit some of them. Indeed, one might be tempted to conclude from Paul's account of his extraordinary zeal that *he* was a person who strove for accomplishments. It would not follow that everybody else was as well.

An average Jew observed the law because he held it to embody God's will. As part of a larger scheme this observance did have 'soteriological' significance, to use a Christian term not quite satisfactory in this connection. But observance of the law can hardly be said to have been the *ground* of Israel's salvation. It was man's response to what God had done.<sup>39</sup>

In Galatia (and Philippi?) the 'Judaizers' wanted to make the Gentile converts fit into the classical Jewish scheme as proselytes. They might have pointed out that Abraham the patriarch displayed faith in his uncircumcised state, but was nevertheless circumcised later on. From the Jewish point of view, the demand of circumcision must be construed as an effort to take God's word seriously.

From a *Gentile* point of view the situation may have seemed rather different. A Gentile had not grown up in a milieu where observance was normal. Observance of the Jewish law could have exposed him to derision from his neighbours, and circumcision might have endangered his life. He could easily have felt circumcision and observance to be a 'work' or an 'achievement' in a negative sense (from our point of view). Paul perceived this. From this Gentile perspective, I submit, he came to stress that the Judaizers represented indeed a principle of 'works'. This opened the way for contrasting Judaism and the new faith in such a manner that the former appears as a religion of works and achievements and the latter as a religion of grace, a contrast that does less than justice to actual Judaism. I am *not* saying that Paul was ignorant of his past religion or that he intentionally distorted it.<sup>40</sup> Paul writes in a conflict setting. If he, in the heat of the debate, did full justice to the form of life he had surrendered, he would be a singular figure in religious history.

Some scholars deny that Paul intended to portray Judaism as a religion of merits and achievement which could be contrasted with Christianity as the religion of grace. What he did intend was to oppose two ways of life to each other: one based on God's ancient covenant with Israel, the other on the plan he realized in Jesus Christ.<sup>41</sup> If this is what Paul intended – and the interpretation has many advantages – then Paul did not communicate his message too clearly. For undoubtedly most readers do get from a long series of passages (of which Romans 4 is the most prominent) the impression that Judaism is based on human efforts as opposed to Paul's new faith. It



is difficult to avoid the impression that Paul at least often speaks as if grace were limited to Christianity.<sup>42</sup>

And yet when one reads Paul's letters as a whole it becomes clear that both divine grace *and* human effort are emphasized. Faith is, from one point of view, a human activity which is absolutely necessary for salvation, a strenuous human response to grace, as the description of Abraham's heroic trust in Romans 4. 17 ff. shows.<sup>43</sup> A life in obedience is expected of a Christian no less than of a Jew. Such observations make one wonder whether Paul really posited a sharp contrast between Jewish and Christian religion in terms of achievement vs. a gift *right at the beginning*. Could it not be that this contrast, for which Paul is the only spokesman in the New Testament,<sup>44</sup> is a late development, somehow due to the conflicts in which Paul became engaged?

#### THE LAW AND THE DEATH OF JESUS

According to many interpreters, Paul's call experience immediately resulted in a negative attitude toward the law, for it now became clear to Paul that the law had functioned as a destructive power.<sup>45</sup> It had condemned God's Son to death. When God vindicated Jesus, he thereby annulled the law. A law that pronounces a curse over God's Messiah (Deut 21.23, cited in Gal 3. 13) must be wrong.

This construction is untenable, however.<sup>46</sup> 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us' (Gal 3. 13) is a statement embedded in Paul's argument against the Judaizers, in which it has a subsidiary place.<sup>47</sup> The curse terminology never reappears in Paul's writings; it is conspicuously absent in his references to his call. This fact alone makes it difficult to think of Gal 3. 13 as a reference to the ground and origin of Paul's thought on the law.<sup>48</sup>

Paul never says what his interpreters claim: that the law was the *cause* of Jesus' death. Paul does not indicate that Jesus was killed because of his allegedly critical attitude toward the law. On the contrary, Jesus was 'a servant of circumcision' (Rom 15. 8) and, therefore, himself 'under the law' (Gal 4. 4).<sup>49</sup> In 1 Cor 2 the crucifixion is attributed to cosmic powers (which do not include the Torah) rather than to zealous legalists.

#### LAW AND SIN

It is also held that Paul's call experience revealed to him that the law leads only to sin and condemnation, for his own zeal for the law had led him to the sin of attacking God's church.<sup>50</sup> But Paul never hints at the connection between law and sin in connection with his conversion or his person. The assertion that sin is increased or even brought about by the law crops up

in conjunction with a more *theoretical* dilemma: if the law does not lead to salvation, *why did God give it* in the first place? It is the problem of the purpose of the law that leads Paul to connect law and sin, as Gal 3. 19 shows: 'Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions . . .' The dynamics of Paul's grappling with this problem has been beautifully analyzed by E. P. Sanders: there is a momentum towards more and more negative statements from Galatians to Romans 6 until there is a recoil in Romans 7.<sup>51</sup> Paul never refers to his pre-Christian activities in this connection. Perhaps he realized what his expositors do not always realize: that his fanaticism for the law was not a fault of the law itself.

#### THE HELLENISTS AND THE LAW

I have assumed that as a result of his conversion, Paul adopted in essence the view of the law of those Hellenistic Jewish Christians he had persecuted. It is time to sketch a hypothesis about that view.<sup>52</sup>

It is commonly held that the group around Stephen took up Jesus' critique of the law which was by-passed by the 'Hebrews' and transmitted it to Paul.<sup>53</sup> But Paul does not show acquaintance of critical sayings of the law in his debates about the law (with the exception of the love command which is neither very critical of the law nor a strong candidate for being a genuine word of Jesus; Rom 14. 14, the statement about impurity, is not introduced as a quotation either).<sup>54</sup> Moreover, it is becoming increasingly doubtful whether Jesus really took a critical attitude toward the law.<sup>55</sup> Finally, it is questionable whether Luke had much reliable material concerning Stephen.

To cut a long story short: the one issue that seems to establish a connection between Jesus and Stephen is the issue of the *temple*.<sup>56</sup> Again, what connects Paul with the Hellenists is the issue of *Gentiles* and the terms of their inclusion in the congregation. The two issues are not unrelated. Some scholars even assume that the Hellenists had admitted Gentiles in Jerusalem.<sup>57</sup> The other possibility is that they accepted uncircumcised Gentiles after having left Jerusalem. The giving up of the demand of circumcision resulted apparently from empirical experience: Gentiles displayed gifts of the Spirit in their uncircumcised state. To be sure, Luke connects this experiential logic with Peter who follows it in the house of Cornelius and defends it at the apostolic council. But Paul, too, hints at the testimony of the pneumatic experiences in Gal 2. 8, 3. 2, and the assumption that 'action preceded theology' when circumcision-free Gentile mission arose<sup>58</sup> is not spun out of thin air.

But the experience of the Spirit and the eschatological consciousness was something that united the Hellenists with the Hebrews. There must

have been some other reason for the *differences* in the conduct of the two groups. Why did one group draw different conclusions from the common experience? Why did precisely the Hellenists turn to Gentiles?

One thinks here of the Dispersion background of the Hellenists, above all of the various 'spiritualizing' tendencies. Take the Alexandrian allegorizers.<sup>59</sup> These people who are relatively mildly rebuked by Philo had stopped observing certain commandments, since they had grasped their symbolic meaning. Philo largely shares their interpretation of the law on the theoretical level. What keeps him from following their practice is loyalty to other people and concern for his own reputation. The case of Philo shows how great pressure toward a liberal understanding of circumcision and other comparable precepts was exerted on the most loyal Jew who took the concerns of his Gentile environment at all seriously. Not that these problems would have been unknown in Palestine either.

It may be conjectured that the experience of the Hellenists among non-Jews had prepared them for the decision to give up those parts of the law that offended would-be converts and could be given a symbolic interpretation. The pneumatic experience of fraternal unity in Christ<sup>60</sup> and of the dawn of the new age then encouraged them to overstep the borderline before which Philo, for all his theoretical liberalism, made halt.

Interestingly enough, the liberal Philo shows an animosity against apostates – not the allegorizers, to be sure, but those who participate in a pagan cult – to the point of strongly supporting their execution.<sup>61</sup> If a Philo had such mixed feelings, it is easy to understand that both a liberal practice and a deadly opposition to it could arise in the Hellenistic synagogues in Jerusalem.

But once the 'spiritualizing' tendencies are recognized as a possible stimulus for the conduct of the Hellenists, the possibility is opened up that they may have had theological arguments at hand for their new course of action. Taking up a suggestion by Gerhard Sellin,<sup>62</sup> I propose that such traces of a 'spiritual' reinterpretation of ritual stipulations as can be found in Paul's letters betray the influence of the Hellenists which was felt in Antioch. They thus represent Paul's early stance soon after his conversion.

Paul's talk about the law is characterized by a *mixture* of negative and positive elements, and it has always surpassed the power of scholars to do justice to both sides. Perhaps the tensions are easier to understand if they can be seen as tensions between Paul's Antiochian heritage and new ideas he developed later. When Paul finds a new solution to a problem, he does not necessarily discard the old one. Rather, the old and the new live side by side (witness, once more, Romans 9 and Romans 11).

As possible traces of 'Hellenist' influence in Paul I would cite the following:

–the spiritual interpretation of circumcision in Phil 3. 3 – in connection

with Paul's allusion to his conversion! 'We are the circumcision rather than those who mutilate their flesh!'

- the ethical interpretation of circumcision in Rom 2. 25 ff.: it is the circumcision of the heart that really counts.
- the baptismal proclamation 'there is neither Jew nor Greek' in Gal 3. 28
- the statement that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts, but the keeping of God's *commandments* (1 Cor 7. 19)
- the summing up of the law in the love command (Gal 5. 14, Rom 13. 8 ff.)
- the reference to Christians as God's temple (1 Cor 3. 16, 6. 19)
- the talk of the living sacrifice and the *λογικὴ λατρεία* in Rom 12. 1
- perhaps even the Gentiles of Rom 2. 15 who do by nature what the law requires, thereby playing havoc with Paul's argument in the larger context.

Scholars have looked for traces of the Hellenist in every corner of the New Testament from Matthew to Revelation. Yet most of this Pauline evidence has been ignored, although most of it figures in Bultmann's 'kerygma of the Hellenistic church'.<sup>63</sup> The reason is that this evidence does not quite fit the standard picture of Stephen and his circle as radical critics of the law. But once we abstain from taking this view as a self-evident starting point, those more positive statements gleaned from Paul's writings commend themselves. I suggest that the Hellenists displayed a liberal attitude toward parts of the law, which they reinterpreted in spiritual or ethical terms. This attitude did *not*, however, amount to hostility.<sup>64</sup> Even so, the stance of the Hellenists was radical enough within the spectrum of Judaism to arouse the anger of Paul, and not of him alone. But when Paul was overcome by his Damascus road experience, he accepted this reinterpretation of the law and understood that he was called to preach the gospel of uncircumcision to Gentiles. In his writings this old relatively peaceful attitude toward the law shows through most clearly in 1 Thessalonians.

In other letters Paul does put forward trenchant criticisms of the law, going further than any other New Testament writer. This happens mostly in conflict settings, in which the conditions of the admission of Gentiles are at least one of the main issues. This suggests that the radical developments in Paul's complex view of the law are in one way or other due to his missionary experience and the conflicts he became involved in because of this mission. An analysis of the relationship between these conflicts and Paul's statements on the law in Galatians and Romans is an urgent desideratum, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

## CONCLUSION

General considerations about the nature of Paul's theology of the law and the historical context of his mission suggest that that theology was not complete with his conversion. 'Athene jumped armed and in full vigour out of the head of Zeus. Paul's theology was not born that way.'<sup>65</sup> 'The practice was here the mother of the theory.'<sup>66</sup> This view is fully compatible with Paul's own statements about his call.

Paul's theological problems were not definitively solved in a flash right at the beginning of his Christian career. On the contrary, he continued to grapple with the perennial and often insoluble dilemma of how to relate new experience to sacred tradition in ever new ways to the very end of his mission.

## NOTES

[1] No distinction will be made in this paper between 'call' and 'conversion'. Of course Paul did not convert from one religion to another, but it is correct to speak of a 'stress experience' that led to a 'reversal or transvaluation of values' which is most conveniently referred to as 'conversion'; cf. J. G. Gager, 'Some Notes on Paul's Conversion', *NTS* 27 (1981) 699-700. Paul himself stresses the transvaluation aspect in Phil 3, whereas in Gal 1 he depicts the event more as a 'call'. We will see that the call to a task more or less coincided with the conversion event.

[2] Cf. S. Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (WUNT, 2. Reihe 4: Tübingen, 1984<sup>2</sup>) 269 and the literature referred to in 269 n. 1; P. Stuhlmacher, *Versöhnung, Gesetz und Gerechtigkeit* (Göttingen, 1981) 89-91; U. Luck, 'Die Bekehrung des Paulus und das paulinische Evangelium', *ZNW* 76 (1985) 200-1; Chr. Dietzfelbinger, *Die Berufung des Paulus als Ursprung seiner Theologie* (WMANT 58: Neukirchen, 1985) 95-147.

[3] R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York, 1951-5) 188.

[4] Kim, *Origin*, 53, 280-1.

[5] M. S. Enslin, *The Ethics of Paul* (New York/London, 1930) 11-12.

[6] W. Wrede, *Paulus* (Halle, 1904) 84; G. Strecker, *Eschaton und Historie* (Göttingen, 1979) 230-1; U. Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit und Christusgegenwart* (GTA 24: Göttingen, 1986<sup>2</sup>) 100 ff.; S. Schulz, 'Der frühe und der späte Paulus', *ThZ* 41 (1985) 230-1.

[7] See H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (WUNT 29: Tübingen, 1983) 1-15.

[8] So even Kim, *Origin*, 346.

[9] See Räisänen, *Paul*, 3 f. with n. 29, with reference to Conzelmann, O'Neill, and Bring.

[10] Räisänen, *Paul*, 203-28.

[11] Cf. Räisänen, *Paul*, 253 f.

[12] Cf. Bultmann, *Theology*, 187: Paul 'was won to the Christian faith by the kerygma of the Hellenistic Church'. I do not understand why Gager, 'Note', 702 rejects Bultmann's statement, after having himself stressed (699) the significance of the 'intense emotional bond . . . between the subject and the object of the anger' (which Paul showed in his activities as a persecutor).

[13] *Contra* Strecker, *Eschaton*, 231; Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit*, 99-100. For my perception of the 'Hellenists' see 'The Hellenists' - a Bridge Between Jesus and Paul?', in: H. Räisänen, *The Torah and Christ* (Publications of the Finnish Exegetical Society 45: Helsinki 1986) 242-306. This collection of articles is best available from the publisher (address: Neitsytpolku 1b, 00140 Helsinki).

[14] In a polemical postscript Kim, *Origin*, 345 ff. calls me to task for not exegeting the 'call' passages in *Paul and the Law*. I hope that this paper will serve to fill that gap in my argument. For a fuller treatment which includes a detailed reply to Kim's allegations see my article 'Paul's Call Experience and His Later View of the Law', in: *The Torah and Christ*, 55-92.

- [15] H. Hübner, *Das Gesetz bei Paulus* (FRLANT 119: Göttingen, 1980<sup>3</sup>); U. Wilckens, 'Zur Entwicklung des paulinischen Gesetzesverständnisses', *NTS* 28 (1982) 154-90; R. Jewett, 'The Law and the Coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Romans', *Interpretation* 39 (1985) 342.
- [16] See H. Räisänen, 'Römer 9-11, Analyse eines geistigen Ringens', in: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II, 25, 4 (forthcoming in 1987).
- [17] Cf. e.g. N. Walter, 'Zur Interpretation von Römer 9-11', *ZThK* 81 (1984) 176.
- [18] Cf. B. Noack, 'Current and Backwater in the Epistle to the Romans', *Studia Theologica* 19 (1965) 165-6.
- [19] The thesis of G. Lüdemann, *Paulus, der Heidenapostel I* (FRLANT 123: Göttingen, 1980); Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit*, 255 n. 33.
- [20] Strecker, *Eschaton*, 235.
- [21] *Contra* G. S. Duncan, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (MNTC: London, 1944) 28; A. Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (ThHK 9: Berlin, 1979<sup>4</sup>) 61. J. Dupont, 'The Conversion of Paul, and its Influence on his Understanding of Salvation by Faith', in: *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Fs. F. F. Bruce, Grand Rapids, 1970) 193, also denies that the injunction to evangelize the Gentiles was given to Paul 'explicitly' at the time of his conversion experience; he is followed by Gager, art. cit. 698. But Dupont adds that Paul was 'none the less convinced that his call to the apostleship of the Gentiles was bound up with the experience of Damascus' which implied more than the recognition that Jesus was the Messiah.
- [22] See the discussion of Gal 5. 11, 6. 12; 1 Thess 2. 16; 2 Cor 11. 24 in E. P. Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia, 1983) 190 f. It would seem that the same kind of laxity with regard to the 'ritual' Torah in the context of the Gentile mission later brought on Paul himself the punishment of thirty-nine stripes which, then, does *not* prove that Paul's critique of the law followed immediately from his Damascus experience; *contra* Stuhlmacher, *Versöhnung*, 91.
- [23] Cf. Strecker, *Eschaton*, 235-6.
- [24] The significance of the Antiochian incident is underlined by J. D. G. Dunn, 'The New Perspective on Paul', *BJRL* 65 (1983) 103-18. Some of Dunn's conclusions are adventurous, however; cf. H. Räisänen, 'Galatians 2.16 and Paul's Break with Judaism', *NTS* 31 (1985) 543-53 = *The Torah and Christ* (n. 13) 168-84.
- [25] *Contra* Kim, *Origin* (n. 2) 352.
- [26] Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, 'Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law (Galatians 3. 10-14)', *NTS* 31 (1985) 537.
- [27] F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles* (SNTS MS: Cambridge, 1986), 30, maintains that Gal 1. 16 'cannot be safely used as evidence for Paul's self-understanding at the time of his conversion'. 'All we know of Paul's conversion is how he chose to understand it in polemical contexts many years later.' I will suggest below (cf. n. 33) that this *caveat* is more pertinent to Phil 3.
- [28] Kim, *Origin*, 58 f.
- [29] See e.g. F. W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC: London, 1959) 106; J. Ernst, *Der Brief an die Philipper* (RNT: Regensburg, 1974) 98.
- [30] Kim, *Origin*, 352.
- [31] Cf. Strecker, *Eschaton*, 237; Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit*, 98.
- [32] Cf. Strecker, *Eschaton*, 237; Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit*, 98.
- [33] Cf. Strecker, *Eschaton*, 237. On the likelihood that, in general, conversion accounts tend to describe the convert's *present* 'which he legitimates through his retrospective creation of a past and a self', see the interesting article by Paula Fredriksen, 'Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions and the Retrospective Self', *JThS* 37 (1986) 3-34, esp. the conclusion 33-4. A comparison of Augustine's account of his own conversion in the *Confessions* with descriptions of it in his earlier works unmasks that well-known account as 'a theological reinterpretation of a past event', as 'a disguised description of where he stands in the present as much as an ostensible description of what occurred in the past' (24).
- [34] Watson, *Paul*, 78.
- [35] H. Hübner, *Gottes Ich und Israel* (FRLANT 136: Göttingen, 1984), 15-24, shows that Rom 9. 6-13 implies that the ethnic Israel was never elected.
- [36] Walter, 'Zur Interpretation', 173, 176.

- [37] This is an aspect of Paul's 'problem of conflicting convictions which can be better asserted than explained: salvation is by faith; God's promise to Israel is irrevocable'. Sanders, *Law*, 198.
- [38] See Räisänen, *Paul* (n. 7) 162-91, but also the refinements in *Torah* (n. 13) 77-85.
- [39] Kim alleges that I display an 'overconfidence' in E. P. Sanders' work on Judaism (*Origin*, 348-9). As he appeals to J. Neusner's critique of Sanders in *HR* 18 (1978) 177-91, it is perhaps worth repeating that Neusner explicitly admits that Sanders' perception of Judaism as 'covenantal nomism' is 'wholly sound' (177-8, cf. 180). See now also J. Neusner, *Major Trends in Formative Judaism III* (Brown Judaic Studies 99, Providence 1985) 31-2.
- [40] I have never claimed that I know 'the Judaism of Paul's day better than Paul himself' (Kim, *Origin*, 347) nor attributed to Paul 'schlichte Unkenntnis des jüdischen Glaubens'; *contra* H. Weder, 'Gesetz und Sünde: Gedanken zu einem qualitativen Sprung im Denken des Paulus', *NTS* 31 (1985) 359, 372 n. 7.
- [41] E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London, 1977) 551-2; *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* (n. 22) 46-7; Watson, *Paul*, 78.
- [42] Cf. Räisänen, *Torah* 82 where my discussion in *Paul and the Law* 171-2 is slightly modified.
- [43] Watson, *Paul*, 140. [44] Räisänen, *Paul* 191-8.
- [45] Thus e.g. Kim, *Origin*, 274; Stuhlmacher, *Versöhnung*, 182, 185, 194-6; Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia, 1984<sup>2</sup>) 185-6, 261; Dietzfelbinger, *Berufung*, 96 ff.; Luck, 'Bekehrung', 200, 202.
- [46] It is too rash to conclude that Jesus' manner of death alone would have conveyed to Paul the Pharisee the message that Jesus must have been cursed by the law. To be sure, the statement about 'a hanged man' (Deut 21. 23) was generally applied to victims of crucifixion in Paul's time. But it was not a standard Pharisaic doctrine that those crucified must be cursed by God. Too many Jews, including Pharisees, had been crucified because of their dedication to the people of Israel, to the temple and the law. A crucified Messiah was an offence - not, however, because he was cursed, but because he was weak (1 Cor 1. 22 f.). See the detailed discussion in G. Friedrich, *Die Verkündigung des Todes Jesu im Neuen Testament* (BThS 6: Neukirchen, 1982) 122 ff.; cf. also Fredriksen, 'Paul' 11-13.
- [47] Sanders, *Law*, 25; cf. Friedrich, *Verkündigung*, 130; Dupont, 'Conversion', 188. P. Stuhlmacher objects that the setting of the argument about Deut 21. 23 in the Galatian conflict does not rule out an early Jerusalemite origin. He refers to Acts 5. 30, 10. 39, and concludes that Deut 21. 22 f. was quite early applied to the death of Christ; already the earliest congregation had to meet the Jewish allegation that the Crucified one was accused. 'Sühne oder Versöhnung', in: *Die Mitte des Neuen Testaments* (Fs. E. Schweizer, Göttingen, 1983) 305-6. Even if this be granted (although I have some hesitation about taking Luke's allusions to Deut 21. 22 as a clear testimony on the contents of the earliest preaching) it does *not* follow that this use of Deut 21 would automatically lead to the notion of the abrogation of the law. Certainly there is no hint to that effect in Acts 5. 30; 10. 39. But if Paul did get Gal 3. 13 as a ready-made reply to a Jewish charge, the point is that 'the Christians who developed the argument probably did not themselves reject the law': see Sanders, *Law*, 25-6. If Paul, before his conversion, held to the view that, as a victim of crucifixion, Jesus was accused, then he must have learnt in his Damascus road experience that this happened *for a divine purpose*. The idea of *abrogatio legis* does not automatically follow. If, however, *Paul* drew that conclusion, one would expect him to make the connection clear in an explicit way. If that argument truly stood behind his rejection of the law, 'he has concealed the fact' (Sanders, *Law*, 26).
- [48] Sanders, *Law*, 25-6; Dunn, 'Works' 537 agrees.
- [49] Wrede, *Paulus*, 83.
- [50] Thus e.g. Kim, *Origin*, 280 f., 287, 345-6; for a critique see Räisänen, *Torah*, 85-7.
- [51] Sanders, *Law*, 65-91 (see p. 85 for a summary).
- [52] For a fuller treatment see Räisänen, *Torah*, 288-95.
- [53] E.g. M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul* (London, 1983) 29.
- [54] Räisänen, *Torah*, 213-5, 234-5, 254-7.
- [55] See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London, 1985) 245-69.
- [56] On 'Jesus and the Temple' see Sanders, *Jesus*, 61-76.
- [57] G. Klein, Review of E. Haenchen, *Die Apostelgeschichte*, *ZKG* 68 (1957) 368; A. J. M. Wedderburn, 'Paul and the Law', *SJTh* 38 (1985) 621.

- [58] J. Jervell, *Luke and the People of God* (Minneapolis, 1972) 136; cf. S. G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts* (MS SNTS 23, Cambridge, 1973) 152.
- [59] Philo, *Migr. Abr.* 89-93; cf. Räisänen, *Paul*, 35.
- [60] For the centrality of the *ἐν χριστῷ*-conception and its pre-Pauline baptismal setting see Schnelle, *Gerechtigkeit*, 106 ff.
- [61] Philo, *Spec. leg.* I, 54-57, 316; cf. I. Heinemann, *Philons griechische und jüdische Bildung* (Breslau, 1932) 223 ff.
- [62] G. Sellin, 'Ergänzende Antwort auf: H. Räisänen, The "Hellenists" - a Bridge Between Jesus and Paul?', presented to the 'Jesus and Paul' seminar group in the SNTS Meeting in Trondheim, August 1985 (manuscript).
- [63] R. Bultmann, *Theology*, 75, 85, 100, 115 f., 118.
- [64] Contrast U. Wilckens' talk of the immediate 'antinomian consequences' of Paul's gospel: 'Die Bekehrung des Paulus als religionsgeschichtliches Problem', *ZThK* 56 (1959) 276 f., 279 f. See now, however, U. Wilckens, 'Christologie und Anthropologie im Zusammenhang der paulinischen Rechtfertigungslehre', *ZNW* 67 (1976) 68-72.
- [65] Wrede, *Paulus*, 79; approvingly quoted by Schnelle, op. cit. (n. 6), 173 n. 159, 222 n. 618.
- [66] Wrede, *Paulus*, 84: 'Die Praxis war hier die Mutter der Theorie, nicht umgekehrt, wenn auch die Praxis bereits eine Entwertung der Satzungen voraussetzt.'