

## [photocopie]

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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 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. This is probably one of the reasons why “forgiveness” is the term for salvation which is used least of all in the Pauline writings.

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 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. 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 by faith was forgotten. 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?—2) What are the rami-

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