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WHAT IS THE GOSPEL?

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What is the Gospel? This would seem to be a simple and straightforward question. But there is reason to approach answering it with care and caution. This is due to the extremely important role that the Gospel plays. It is the heart and life-giving force of the Christian faith. It identifies what is Christian. It is the Christian identity principle. As such it exerts a norming influence on the theological enterprise. Therefore, it behooves one who pursues theology to pause and ponder just what this Gospel is.

In this essay we will work with the following hypothesis: *the Gospel defined formally is the telling of the story of Jesus and its significance*. This is the formal structure of the Gospel. Its material content answers two derivative questions: "what is the story of Jesus?" and "what is this story's significance?" The material content of the Gospel—the actual story of Jesus and its existential import—is the object of theological study in general and of this essay in particular.

THE TASK OF THEOLOGY AND THE TASK OF THIS ESSAY

The task of theology is one of making the content of the Gospel explicit. This process of explication follows two complementary routes, one critical

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and one evangelical. *Critical explication* entails the historical and critical analysis of the basic Christian symbols, especially the Bible, in order to determine just what the story of Jesus is and how its significance is perceived. It also asks philosophical questions regarding the truth or falsity of Christian claims. *Evangelical explication* expands upon the meaning of Christian symbols, drawing out implications for our understanding of the world in which we live and for edifying our lives. Both forms of explication begin with the originary and compact symbolization of the Christian Gospel as found in Scripture while going two different but complementary directions.

The Gospel, it appears to me, involves both a message with specific content as well as a mode of sharing and hearing the message. It is first an experience, then a reflection upon that experience, followed by a sharing of that experience, followed by subsequent experience, reflection, sharing, and so forth. The biblical symbols present the Gospel in the midst of this movement but at a comparatively early stage relative to the total time elapsed since the generative events themselves. We find ourselves as theologians today still thinking somewhere in the midst of this movement, looking back to the originary experience and its primitive symbolization as well as forward to constructive possibilities. Our immediate task will be to identify the material content of the Gospel and its originary symbolization so that it in turn can serve to identify what is Christian about the theological thinking in which we are presently engaged.

This means turning to the New Testament. In this article we will ask about the possible origin of the substantive term, 'the Gospel', and conclude that it must have originated among Hellenistic Christians who, upon hearing the story of Jesus, interpreted it as good news. We will then turn to the confessional and kerygmatic presentations of the Gospel in the New Testament, arguing that both the news about Jesus and the commitment to Jesus' significance belong inextricably together. Finally, when we spell out just what this significance is, we will explicate the Gospel as good news in terms of (1) new creation, (2) justification, and (3) proclamation.

THE GOSPEL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

"The beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." These are the "once upon a time" words with which Mark opens his telling of the story of Jesus. Because the word 'Gospel' (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον) means good news, we take it that by 'Gospel' Mark means the story or the report or the good news regarding the events surrounding the ministry of this man, Jesus. The structure of Mark's Gospel is that of a narrative, a story, a history, an announcement of something that happened. It is our thesis here that the Gos-

pel in its originary form is the story of Jesus Christ first told by those who experienced it, by those whose own personal stories overlapped with and whose life plots were decisively altered by their encounter with the Son of God.

The phrase "the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Ἰησου χριστοῦ), however, is grammatically ambiguous. The reference to Jesus Christ in the genitive case can mean either the good news "about" Jesus Christ or the good news taught or delivered "by" Jesus Christ. Indeed in the Gospel according to Matthew the term τὸ εὐαγγέλιον is clearly used in this second way, wherein the teachings by Jesus are dubbed "the Gospel of the Kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35). Jesus according to Matthew announces and ushers in the Kingdom, but he himself is not the Gospel. It is our contention here that following both Mark and Paul the Christian church eventually identified Jesus Christ with the Gospel itself, so that the Gospel became not simply the repetition of what Jesus taught but the story that tells who Jesus is. According to Mark, the story tells us that Jesus is the Son of God.

The term 'the Gospel' in this absolute sense—the sense of being equated with the life and significance of Jesus—is not found everywhere in the New Testament. Matthew has already been mentioned. Luke-Acts uses only the verb but not the noun form. It is also missing in the Gospel of John, from pre-Markan and Q material, as well as from James, Jude, II Peter, and Hebrews. Though the term 'the Gospel' is absent in these books much of the Gospel's content is present. What is not absent from these writings, of course, is a report regarding the person of Jesus Christ and his importance in the story of salvation. Thus, the content of the Gospel—the story of Jesus and its significance for the listener—certainly existed prior to (or at least separate from) the use of this term to designate it.

This absolute use of the word 'Gospel' appears to be the invention of the early Greek-speaking Christians and seems to be a form of symbolization that belongs particularly to the experience of hearing the story and understanding it as good news. What do we mean by this? Well, first, we should note that the term does not seem to be borrowed from other sources. Some have suggested, for example, that the Greek εὐαγγέλιον is a New Testament appropriation of the messenger of good news (Hebrew: *mebasser*) of Deutero Isaiah, who promises a coming victory of Yahweh and who ushers in a new era of divine dominion. (Isa. 40:9; 52:7; 61:1; Psalm 96:2, etc.) This would mean that the absolute usage was an outgrowth from Hebrew roots. If this were the case, then one should expect to find its usage already within early Palestinian Christianity. Although the verb form εὐαγγελίζεσθαι (a possible translation of the Hebrew *bissar*) is used frequently in Luke-Acts, it occurs only once in Q (Matt. 10:5) and is totally absent in Mark. Its absence in Mark is key because it is in that account that the substantive 'the Gospel' is

put forth. A case for borrowing could be put forth regarding Matthew's use of Isa. 61:1 in Matt. 11:1-5, but again there is no association between the messenger and the substantive form of the Gospel. And in Paul, where both verb and noun form for the Gospel are used, Isaiah's messenger of good news is specifically alluded to (Rom. 10:15; Isa. 52:7), but Paul identifies the messenger not with Christ but with preachers of Christ. And to make it more emphatic, he speaks of preachers in the plural, not the singular, which excludes any possibility of a messianic identification. In sum, the Christian concept of the Gospel is not simply a hellenized interpretation of the Hebrew *mebasser*.

Some have looked for non-Jewish sources, suggesting that τὸ εὐαγγέλιον was borrowed from the Roman emperor cult. Ordinarily the noun εὐαγγέλιον had no religious connotations, meaning simply good news, especially good news regarding victory or the bestowal of a reward. Relevant here, however, is an inscription from Priene *circa.* 9 B.C. which includes: "The birthday of the God-Emperor was for the world the beginning of joyful messages (plural) which have gone forth because of him." Might this have been the usage taken over by the New Testament? Not likely. The plural use of the noun for "joyful messages" is in sharp contrast to the New Testament usage where only the singular appears. In addition, had the early Christians borrowed the term from the emperor cult, then we would expect an implicit if not explicit polemic. In the case of Jesus' lordship, for example, we find a dramatic tug of war in the book of Revelation over who is Lord, Caesar or Jesus. But no such polemic with Rome regarding the notion of the Gospel is reflected in the texts where it appears. In sum, the emperor cult thesis garners very little textual support.

What, then, is the origin of 'the Gospel' in its absolute usage? The answer must be that it is a term identified with the compact experience of the Gospel itself. When the story of Jesus was told to those who listened and believed, it sounded like good news. It is most likely the case that Hellenized Christians employed the noun εὐαγγέλιον because they experienced the word of God as tidings that elicited authentic joy. The word 'Gospel' and the experience of the Jesus story simply belonged together for those first Hellenized Christian believers.[1]

Hence, as good news, the Gospel entails a double quality. On the one hand, as news, it must be news about something. It is the story of an event, of a happening. It has specific content. On the other hand, the "good" in "good news" reflects an existential dimension. It can be good only if the listener thinks so. It must be meaningful to those who hear it. It has an existential quality as well as reportable content. *The Gospel is the story of Jesus*

[1]Gerhard Krodel, "The Gospel According to Paul," *Dialog* 6 (1967): 99.

accompanied by its significance as good news for the person hearing it. This double quality is what the early Christians experienced and which remains vital to our understanding of the Gospel today.

KERYGMATIC CONFESSIONS OF CHRIST

To say that the story of Jesus is good news already involves a certain level of confession, of commitment to the meaningfulness or significance of this story. In fact, the story in its most compact form of symbolization never appears in the Bible apart from this interpretative perspective. With the Bible as our source we have no access to Jesus apart from this interpretation. The news of Jesus and its goodness are found together, inseparable. Just how and why it is good news is reflected in the most primitive confessional or kerygmatic formulas, even those formulated prior to the absolute use of 'the Gospel' in Hellenistic Christianity.

The sermons of Peter and Paul in Acts provide excellent examples. Because of their function as first evangelization in the ministry of the early church, we can expect that though brief they will include what is the essential and unmistakable heart of the primitive Christian message. Now one might be tempted to think that because the composition of Luke-Acts is comparatively late in the first century that we have the free compositions of the author rather than reports of what the early apostles actually said. When C. H. Dodd asked this question, he concluded that "there are indications that the author of Acts used his historian's privilege with considerable restraint."[2] Because of the "we" passages, the Acts author may just well have been a traveling companion of Paul and was working with his own memory of what had happened. Even if the writer could not recall verbatim what was said on each occasion, he certainly could recall the general contours of first evangelization as it took place in city after city. Even if the actual words had been forgotten, it is Dodd's judgment that Luke-Acts accurately reports the theology of the Jewish church in Jerusalem at a very early period. More importantly, it seems to me, the book of Acts gives us a sermon structure for understanding what Luke believed to be the essence of Christian preaching from the beginning to his own time.

Four consistent elements appear whenever the story of Jesus is told: (a) the fulfillment of Old Testament expectations; (b) the unwarranted death of the righteous one; (c) the resurrection from the dead; and (d) the forgiveness

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[2]C. H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1936) 17.

of sins.[3] Whether addressing the people from Solomon's portico or responding to the threat of prison for preaching in the name of Jesus, the apostles typically recited briefly the history of Israel understood as pointing forward toward fulfillment. This was followed by reporting the execution of Jesus on the cross and his vindication by God through the Easter resurrection. It was further explained that all this happened to effect the forgiveness of sins and the redemption of Israel (Acts 3:12-26; 5:24-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41). This preaching seems to have come as bad news—as judgment—to those who rejected it, because it appears "to bring this man's blood upon us" (Acts 5:28). But to those among the "multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:14) who became believers it was good news because it brought healing into their lives.

The book of Acts is not our only source for such brief presentations of Jesus and his significance. First Peter 3:18-22, for example, offers a complementary form of Gospel presentation. It appears to be an early creedal summary that most probably predates the letter itself. Some scholars, at least since the work of Hans Windisch in 1930, contend that behind this text is an early Christian hymn similar to the ones quoted in 1 Tim. 3:16 or even Phil. 2:6-11 and Col. 1:15-20.[4] In a mode of expression anticipating *Romanum* and the Apostles' Creed, the 1 Peter text follows Christ's resurrection with his exaltation to the right hand of God and its efficacy for the believer in baptism. The heart of the statement is the report of the righteous one who died for the unrighteous, resulting in the forgiveness of sins—χριστὸς ἅπαξ περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἔπαθεν (or ἀπέθανεν), δίκαιος ὑπερ ἀδικων—in order that he might bring us to God. The substitution of the righteous Christ for the unrighteous sinner, perhaps connoting a sacrificial offering (Lev. 14:19 in LXX), establishes for us a new rapport with God. First Peter 3:18 might be considered the Gospel in a single sentence, the story and its significance in a single statement.

The longer accounts of Jesus' life in the four Gospels are probably narrative expansions of briefer apostolic creeds, hymns, and sermons. Given the

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[3]Ibid., 23. Dodd's list of elements in the sermons of Peter and Paul is a bit more complex version of what I suggest here. His summary includes (1) fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy; (2) an account of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus interpreted in light of his Davidic descent; (3) the significance of the resurrection as the exaltation of Christ to the right hand of God; (4) the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church; (5) the return of Christ and the consummation; and (6) a closing appeal for repentance and the offer of the forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. I have a shorter list because I list elements which appear in all the sermons, whereas Dodd's list is a composite which includes items that appear in some sermons but not others.

[4]Hans Windisch, *Die katolische Briefe*, in *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Tubingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 3d ed., 1951) xv: 70, 154; cf. John Reumann, Joseph A. Fitsmyer, and Jerome D. Quinn, *Righteousness in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983) 29.

consensus regarding the time of composition of Luke-Acts after the fall of Jerusalem, more than likely Luke's Gospel account is not an expansion of these sermons per se. As we have them they are probably part of Luke's own reiteration. But we can surmise that in those very early years following the events of Jesus' life as the church began to move out from Jerusalem there was an identifiable kerygma which provided the core story with its interpretive significance expressed. It is generally agreed, for example, that Paul's kerygmatic formulation in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 is exemplary and includes many of the elements we identified in Acts: "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scripture . . . was buried . . . was raised on the third day . . . appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve."

Thus, the story of Jesus need not necessarily be a long story, just as a newspaper article today may be brief. As the story is told and retold repeatedly over time interest in learning and adding details may have come into play. Nevertheless, at root is the story of what happened. Hence, by "story of Jesus with its significance" we do not necessarily mean the full-blown narratives of the synoptic Gospels. These came later. What we mean is the reference to certain indispensable occurrences in the career of Jesus which establish that God has worked definitively in this time and in this place and in this person to accomplish our salvation.

SEPARATION OF STORY AND SIGNIFICANCE?

Even if the story of Jesus is cut to a bare minimum of events such as his death and resurrection interpreted in light of Hebrew Scripture, I believe the story is still necessary to have the significance. Story and significance belong together. But not everyone sees it this way. There are some who would like to have the significance apart from the story and, conversely, some who search for the story apart from the significance.

Rudolf Bultmann and some of his disciples tend toward significance quite distinguishable from story. Building upon the exposure of the failure by liberal theologians to reconstruct the biography of Jesus in the nineteenth century, the Bultmannians have given such priority to the bare kerygma that the Gospel narratives appear as secondary constructions tainted by the influence of legends and myths. Through demythologizing we need to re-present the pure kerygmatic significance. The search for the historical Jesus is both vain and dangerous. It is vain because it is impossible. It is dangerous because it diverts our attention toward historical facts and away from the existential challenge the Gospel poses to each one of our lives when it is preached. We sinners are motivated to seek for historical information regarding Jesus' factual history because we believe facts can add certainty to faith. But such a

motive to obtain certainty diminishes our trust in God and constitutes an intellectual form of works righteousness. In short, should the Bultmann position prevail, the Gospel would be understood in its kerygmatic significance but independent of the telling of the story of Jesus.

A strict Bultmannian position has been difficult to sustain. The scholarship of Joachim Jeremias and the early career of Norman Perrin has been able to show that certain teachings and actions of Jesus can be shown to be authentic. The search for the historical Jesus is not in vain, even though we must still admit that a full biography is not possible. We know now with a reasonably high degree of confidence that Jesus himself proclaimed the coming kingdom of God in such a way that it challenged those hearing the proclamation, that it precipitated a crisis. As in the case of the sermons in Acts, the parables of Jesus could be heard as bad news to those who resist responding to the proclamation of the kingdom. We can surmise on the basis of this confrontive and challenging character of Jesus' teaching that in at least some cases this produced an angered response and eventually led to his being nailed on the cross. This is grounds for thinking that the kerygmatic significance is largely the result of Jesus' actual teaching and destiny, not the other way around.

This brings us to the work of Paul Ricoeur who similarly distinguishes story and significance, but in contrast to Bultmann is more interested in the former than the latter. He uses the work of Jeremias and Perrin to make a slightly different point. He argues that there is a directional movement from proclamation to narrative, from the proclamation of God's coming kingdom to the development of the story of Jesus' life as the story of the cross.[5] Ricoeur here is engaged in literary reconstruction, but he also pursues this line of thinking for the purpose of driving a wedge between a pre-New Testament version of the story of Jesus and the theologized kerygma. What he does not like about the theologized kerygma is its promise of God's kingdom yet to come in the chronological future. Ricoeur believes the kerygma has been tainted and distorted by apocalyptic ideas.[6] He prefers to affirm a strictly ex-

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[5]Paul Ricoeur, "From Proclamation to Narrative," *The Journal of Religion* 64:4 (October 1984): 501-12.

[6]On this point Ricoeur seems to be taking just the opposite position from that taken by Ernst Käsemann. Käsemann argues that the apocalyptic framework belongs indelibly to the most primitive apprehension of Jesus and his significance and that those who try to lop off the futuristic thrust of the Gospel are truncating it. His case in point is the enthusiasm of the church in Corinth with its version of realized eschatology, a position repudiated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28 as well as Rom. 6. Cf. Ernst Käsemann, "*Zum Thema der urchristlichen Apokalyptik*," *Zeitschrift fur Theologie und Kirche* 59:3 (1962): 257-84, and in translation as "On the Topic of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic" in *Apocalypticism,* vol. 6 of *Journal for Theology and the Church,* ed. Robert W. Funk (New York: Herder & Herder, 1969): 99-133.

istential significance to the kingdom of God which we perceive in the present, in the moment of hearing the teaching. It almost appears that Ricoeur is satisfied with the bad news implied in Jesus' own proclamation of the coming kingdom, with the challenge to the present order of things that produces suffering; so he neglects to incorporate any good news regarding reconciliation or restoration. Only the cross belongs to the story of Jesus. He believes that the resurrection does not belong to the narrative of Jesus proper. It is something added by the kerygma. Hence, by beginning with the identifiable teachings of Jesus and reconstructing the story of Jesus solely from this source, he believes he can avoid the church's kerygma entirely. In short, Ricoeur wants the opposite of Bultmann, namely, the story without its kerygmatic significance.

It is my position here that theology begins where the story of Jesus and its kerygmatic significance are found together, in the Scripture. In the most compact form of symbolization available, the story and its significance are bundled up tightly in the same symbols. In order for Bultmann or Ricoeur to drive a wedge between story and kerygma, they must employ critical analysis. This means reconstructing a time and a text which does not in fact exist, an imaginary text in which either the story can be found in its purity or the kerygma can be found in its purity.

These scholars must admit that the separation of story and kerygma belongs to the speculation of the critical scholar, because they do not exist separated in any existent texts or traditions, save perhaps the extra-canonical Gospel of Thomas and the gnostic traditions that sought to preserve the teachings of the Nazarene. What we actually have in the Bible are the two bound together. In the brief confessional statements of the New Testament epistles the events of Jesus' death and resurrection are inevitably combined with the forgiveness of sins and promise of eternal life. In all four Gospels the narrative story of Jesus includes his Easter resurrection as an essential chapter without which we could not apprehend the significance of this person. One would have to ask Bultmann: if the kerygma alone was enough, why were these people in the early church motivated to write Gospel narratives? One would have to ask Ricoeur: if the parabolic proclamation of Jesus was enough to construct a narrative story which did not include the resurrection, why do all our existing narratives incorporate the resurrection and its kerygmatic significance? Bultmann and Ricoeur would likely answer that sinister forces such as works righteousness or apocalypticism corrupted what was pure right from the beginning. Our answer would be that we must begin with what we have, and what we have is the combination of story and significance. We may go behind the symbols with critical explication and distinguish them, or we may proceed with evangelical explication into new applications never heard of by

the New Testament authors, but in either case our beginning point is the unity of story and significance in the Christian Gospel.

PAUL AND THE GOSPEL AS NEW CREATION

Although the final manuscripts of Luke-Acts were completed late in the first century, we presume they report well the Gospel as apprehended in the early church at Jerusalem. When we get to the writings of Paul, which actually come earlier, we can see how the compact symbolization of the Gospel began to differentiate through the process of evangelical explication as the church moved out of Palestine and into the hellenistic world.[7] Explication and differentiation are a continuing process stimulated by new situations and contexts. This is seen most clearly at the emergence of the concept of new creation and the doctrine of justification by faith. The primitive story of Jesus is becoming the good news Gospel to the Gentiles. As Paul confronts new situations such as questions regarding the nature of resurrection and the rivalry between Jewish and Gentile Christians, he explicates the story of Jesus by appropriating the Gospel to these new situations. The telling of the story of Jesus in such situations entails affirmations of the apocalyptic hope for resurrection from the dead and the message that God justifies the ungodly without the performance of works demanded by the Torah. Far from being an alien intrusion into an already isolated and otherwise insulated teaching of Jesus, raising the concerns that give rise to apocalyptic eschatology draw out the protean richness of the Gospel. They constitute evangelical explication; and a retracing of the path taken by such explication will help us ascertain just what the content of the Gospel is.

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[7]Dodd attempts to reduce what he finds in the epistles of Paul to a list of common structural elements, and the resulting list is comparable to that found in the preaching reported by Luke-Acts. What this means is that, from the earliest beginning which we can retrieve, Christian proclamation has consisted in reporting the story of Jesus and interpreting it as significant. Furthermore, this significance seems to involve from the outset an indelible eschatological factor. "The Pauline kerygma," writes Dodd, "is a proclamation of the facts of the death and resurrection of Christ in an eschatological setting which gives significance to the facts." Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching*, 13, cf. 17. But the way things start out is not the way they stay. Things change. The compact Gospel differentiates and theology grows. Rudolf Bultmann depicts this process of the compact experience of faith undergoing differentiation when he writes, "Paul's theological thinking only lifts the knowledge inherent in faith itself into the clarity of conscious knowing. A relation to God that is only feeling, only piety, and not also knowledge of God and man together is for Paul unthinkable. The act of faith is simultaneously an act of knowing, and, correspondingly, theological knowledge cannot be separated from faith." *Theology of the New Testament*, 2 Vols. (New York: Scribners, 1951-55) 1:190.

As we have seen, the resurrection of Jesus has been an essential part of the Gospel elsewhere in the New Testament. It is for Paul as well.[8] The power of resurrection is tantamount to the power to create, and this power belongs to God alone, "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (Rom. 4:17). It is also significant for Paul because the resurrection of Jesus confirms the longstanding Hebrew hope for the final triumph of God's justice. The end of the age and the resurrection of the dead envisioned by apocalyptic seers have already occurred in Jesus Christ, and those who are united with Christ through faith are already participants in the new creation which is yet to come for the whole cosmos. The Gospel communicates that on account of Christ God's future is spiritually present now, imbuing us with newness of life and inspiring hope while granting us peace of mind.

In Christ, God's justice has triumphed. Justice (or righteousness, *ṣdqh*) is the central concept in the Old Testament for discerning the quality of all relationships between God and humanity, within human community, and even with nature.[9] *Ṣdqh,* translated δικαιοσύνη in LXX and *justitia* in the Vulgate, is the highest value in life, that upon which all reality rests when properly ordered. The king as Yahweh's messiah, the one anointed to rule, is supposed to govern with righteousness and justice, and this means protecting the poor and caring for the widow and orphan (Psalm 72:1-4).

But *ṣdqh* is more than maintaining order. It connotes the action whereby justice is attained, whereby the oppressed are delivered. It is the act of bringing salvation. The Song of Deborah already speaks of "Yahweh's acts of justice" (*ṣdqh* YHWH), referring to God's saving act in the Exodus history; and the identity of God's justice with salvation continues into the prophets, especially Deutero-Isaiah. The Psalmist publishes the good news of divine justice:

> I have told the glad news (*bśr,* LXX 39:10 εὐαγγελίσαμεν) of deliverance (*sedeq,* LXX δικαιοσύνη) in the great congregation . . .
>
> I have not hid thy saving help (*sidaqateka,* LXX τὲν δικαιόσυνεν σοῦ) within my heart,
>
> I have spoken of thy faithfulness and thy salvation.
>
> —Psalm 40:9a & 10a

After the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. *ṣdqh* becomes identified with Israel's

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[8]"The resurrection of Jesus from the dead was the central claim of the church's proclamation. There was no period when this was not so." Reginald Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971, 1980) 48.

[9]Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* 2 vols. (New York: Harper, 1962-1965) 1:370.

future expectation, the hope for God's vindicating action through a messianic king who would bring salvation and establish a kingdom of divine justice (Jer. 23:5; Isa. 51:5; 54:14-17; 59:16f).

During the intertestamental period this hope becomes cosmicized and transmuted to the age to come. The apocalyptic pessimism regarding the present aeon and doctrine of the two ages accents the need for God himself to intervene in terrestrial affairs and "bring in everlasting righteousness" (Dan. 9:24). Where human justice is so lacking, only the justice of God will do. So Jews under the oppression of the Selucids longed for the age to come, where "righteousness has increased and truth has appeared" (II. Esdr. 7:14).[10] The sign of the arrival of the new age would be the resurrection of the dead. It is this apocalyptic vision of resurrection and transformation that decisively conditions Paul's experience and evangelical explication of the Gospel.

Jesus Christ is "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep," Paul tells the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:20b; cf. Rom. 8:19; Col. 1:18). He had opened chapter fifteen with a creedal summary of the Gospel as story reminiscent of the sermons in Acts: " . . . Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures . . . he was buried . . . he was raised on the third day . . . " (1 Cor. 15:3-4). Now he is unpacking this compact formula in light of the Corinthian situation. Questions have come to Paul concerning such things as a case of incest, marriage, decorum at the Lord's table, spiritual gifts, and so forth. Paul is trying to answer such questions to Christians in Corinth, a city and culture enshrouded in a Hellenistic cosmology foreign to the apocalyptic dress of Paul's Gospel exposition. Although the two world views are each dualistic in their respective ways, the spatial-vertical categories of the Greeks do not coincide with the temporal-historical mind-set of the Hebrews. A historical perspective ascribes more reality and value to the physical world of the body than does a vertical dualism which considers the body irrelevant if not harmful to the health of the human spirit. In light of this someone in Corinth had been teaching some sort of escapist or strictly spiritual salvation that denies the future resurrection of the dead. Ernst Käsemann believes these teachers were enthusiasts who were saying that the Corinthians had already passed from fleshly death into spiritual life, making a bodily resurrection superfluous.[11] Therefore, the transformation of history and the resurrection of the body require of Paul judicious apologetic description.

Of course the dead will be raised! exclaims Paul. If this were not so then there would be no Gospel and no forgiveness and no hope.

For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. If Christ has

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[10]Reumann et al., *Righteousness in the New Testament,* 16.

[11]Käsemann, "Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," 127-33.

> not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.—1 Cor. 15:16-19

There is no doubt here that there is no Gospel without resurrection.

Paul then proceeds here as he does in Romans 5 to contrast the present age identified with Adam and death with the future age identified with Christ and resurrection of life. Christ is the *avant garde,* the embodiment in advance of the new order that is to come. Employing apocalyptic imagery Paul looks forward to the ultimate future, when the messianic king will establish the age of God's justice.

> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. . . . When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to every one.—1 Cor. 15:24-26, 28; RSV

Salvation does not consist in some sort of individual escape from the physical realm of history into a transcendent realm of soul or spirit. Rather it is contingent upon the transformation of the created order, on the divinely promised redemption of the cosmos. The victory of Christ over the grave and the new life promised us is just part of something much bigger, namely, the triumph of God over the enemies of divine justice, death included. The resurrection victory of Christ is an advance incarnation of the yet to come new order of creation.

The Gospel message, then, is that we have grounds for hoping in the transformation of a world gone astray and that through faith in Christ the power of the future new creation and the justice of God's future rule become part and parcel of our life today.

> Therefore, to be in Christ, is to be a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. . . . For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ).—2 Cor. 5:17, 21; cf. Rom. 6:1-11

One might object to this interpretation on the grounds that the Gospel is essentially independent of any world view and that Paul is not really trying to convince the Corinthians of the correctness of the apocalyptic conception. Hans Conzelmann, for instance, recognizes the apocalyptic character of Paul's teaching but says that this is "embarrassing" for modern exegetes. Conzelmann then denies the relevance the apocalyptic world view with its future and

cosmic orientation, translating all of what Paul says so that it refers strictly to one's "faith in Christ" or "the present state of believers."[12]

Conzelmann is not alone. Earlier this century Harry Emerson Fosdick described the Gospel as an "abiding experience amidst chancing worldviews" and Rudolf Bultmann sought to free the Gospel kerygma from the shackles of an outdated apocalyptic *Weltanschauung* through demythologizing. But the fact remains that for Paul the apocalyptic interpretation of history is interwoven with the truth of the Gospel. It is not simply a husk to be shucked off, a dress to be removed in order to rerobe the Gospel in new conceptual garments. It is clear that Paul could not and did not simply carry his "abiding experience" into the Hellenistic world view and leave behind the apocalyptic symbolism that must have been constitutive of the originary Gospel experience. No doubt he sought to understand the Corinthians in their context and even adapted as much as he could, especially in his discussion of the nature of the resurrected body (1 Cor. 15:35-50). Yet there came a point at which the nonapocalyptic world view simply could not bear the Gospel message, and so no further compromise could be granted. The explication of the Gospel as Paul understood it simply requires commitment to the future reign of God and resurrection of the dead. "For Paul," writes J. Christiaan Beker, "the issue of apocalyptic categories is not a provincial idiosyncrasy but is interwoven with profound christological, anthropological, and ethical issues. Paul's problem with the Corinthians is at bottom their denial that spirituality is commensurate with materiality and historical existence."[13] Hence, Beker can write with some force: "I posit the triumph of God as the coherent theme of Paul's Gospel; that is, the hope in the dawning victory of God and in the imminent redemption of the created order, which he has inaugurated in Christ. Moreover, I claim that Paul's hermeneutic translates the apocalyptic theme of the Gospel into the contingent particularities of the human situation."[14] The Gospel is commensurate with materiality and historical existence and promises the transformation of both. It also promises that through faith in Jesus Christ we today can become one with that future transformed order.

PAUL AND THE GOSPEL AS JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH

Thus we can say that the story of Jesus is significant first of all because it signals the coming of the new creation. It is the power of new life. But this is not the only way of expressing its significance within the matrix of New

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[12]Hans Conzelmann, *I Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) 249; cf. 267-70.

[13]J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980) 172.

[14]Ibid., ix; cf. Beker's *Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) 19.

Testament symbols. The notion of justification by faith is tied intimately with the Gospel.

What follows is important in discerning the theological norm, because the doctrine of justification has frequently been equated with Paul's Gospel itself. "The justification of the ungodly is the most concise summary of the pauline proclamation of the Gospel," writes Gerhard Krodel.[15] We need to ask here whether this is true and, if so, to what extent. It will be our conclusion that the Gospel for Paul, as for the rest of the New Testament, consists in the unpacking of truths already entailed in the church's experience with Jesus and that, as it comes to doctrinal expression in Paul, the Gospel's focus is on our sharing with Christ in the proleptic presence of God's future redemption of the creation. The doctrine of the justification of the ungodly gives an authentic—but not the sole—expression to the immediate significance of this Gospel hope.

Although Paul is not much of a storyteller and consequently writes didactic and hortatory treatises rather than narratives, as we saw in the opening verses of 1 Corinthians 15 the content of the Gospel he presents parallels what we found in Acts and probably belongs to the wider tradition of evangelical preaching. In the opening lines of Romans he follows suit and his reference here to the Son of God is reminiscent of Mark 1:1. Paul declares himself to be an apostle.

> set apart for the Gospel of God (εὐαγγέλιον θεοῦ) which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the Gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and designated Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.—Rom. 1:1b-4: RSV; cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-11

We might describe this as a Christological formulation of the Gospel, wherein the Gospel is in the first instance the story of Jesus as the Son of God fulfilling Israel's expectation and climaxing in the Easter resurrection. It is curious, however, that the forgiveness of sins is not mentioned here. One might note that the notion of forgiveness is nearly absent from the Pauline corpus (exceptions are Rom. 3:25; 4:7), although it soon reappears in deutero-Pauline literature (Col. 1:14; Eph. 1:7). Why? Because the significance of Jesus' resurrection is interpreted by Paul through a correlative yet slightly different concept, namely, justification.

We have just mentioned the Christological formulation. The role justification will play can be seen in the Soteriological formulation which follows a bit later in Romans 1, where the Gospel is confessed and proclaimed as the

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[15]Krodel, 101.

power of salvation. Note that what the Gospel reveals is the justice of God, which as we saw in 1 Corinthians 15 will be eschatologically established.

> For I am not ashamed of the Gospel (εὐαγγέλιον): it is the power of God for salvation (δύναμις γαρ θεοῦ ἐστιν εἰς σωτηρίαν) to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ) is revealed through faith for faith (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν); as it is written, "Whoever through faith is righteous shall live." —Rom. 1:16-17

That Paul prefaces his announcement of salvation with "I am not ashamed" reveals its confessional character. The Gospel has had an existential impact on Paul. He has experienced the power of salvation of which he speaks. Now as he gives explication of the evangel, what he says will reflect not only the story of Jesus but the meaningfulness of that story for Paul and Paul's context.

What is that context? It is the context of Jewish-Christian relations or, perhaps more specifically in the case of Galatians and Philippians, the relations between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The situation in Galatia is that Paul has to defend his Gospel and apostleship against the attacks of interlopers who teach "another Gospel" (Gal. 1:7, 9; 2:12; 3:1; 5:7, 9, 12), those whom he calls "dogs" in Phil. 3:2. The dogs are barking out a false Gospel and confusing the churches. Presumably they are Jewish-Christian missionaries rivaling Paul by teaching that outside the Torah there is no salvation.[16] In order to obtain justification, that is, righteousness in the eyes of God, they are requiring that believers in Christ become circumcised and fulfill additional requirements of the Jewish law. Paul responds categorically: "a person is not rightwised (δικαιοῦται) on the basis of works of the law but only through faith in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 2:16). Paul excludes works of the law from the content of the Gospel. If this were not true he says, "then Christ died to no purpose" (Gal. 2:21). If Christ be the proleptic embodiment of the fullness of God's justice in the new creation, and if we be united with Christ through faith and therefore with that righteousness, then conformity to the laws of the old creation simply have no influence on our salvation.

The net effect of this interpretation of the Gospel in this context is to establish equality at the foot of the cross. It counters the claim for superior status by Jewish Christians within the church. With eloquence and passion Paul trumpets: "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). The differentiation process which is taking place as the Gospel moves from a strictly Jewish context to a Gentile context leads to a vision of emancipa-

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[16]Hans Dieter-Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) 9.

tion, of the elimination of subordination among the people of God. This is not yet what the West will eventually come to know as a social equality of rights. It is rather an extension of the angel-like state of fulfillment which had been previously articulated in the apocalyptic vision of salvation.[17] Hence, the Gospel symbols achieve here in Galatians a new level of differentiation and appropriation when applied to the context of conflict.

The situation in Romans is similar but not identical. Here Paul does not seem to be on the defensive against dogs and interlopers. The mood is more relaxed so that Paul seems free simply to say positively what he believes. Because Paul has not yet been to Rome and visited those to whom he is writing, this has led some interpreters to treat Romans as a near situation-independent theological essay, as one in which the occasion of the writing is of minor significance. If the notion of context independence can be sustained, then what we have in Romans is a general epistle written for audiences everywhere. We have Paul's systematic theology, his compendium of church doctrine. Anders Nygren, for example, views the letter as a theological treatise in which "the occasion for its writing does not contribute to the deeper meaning of its contents."[18] Should Nygren be correct, then we would have here a confessional summary of Paul's thought that would make all his other letters but fragmentary contributors. Because of the prominence of "justification by faith in Romans," we would, in short, have isolated the theological norm in this one doctrine.

This view of context independence, however, does not hold sway among some other biblical scholars. Krister Stendahl and J. Christiaan Beker, for example, are convinced that the context of Romans is Jewish-Gentile relations. They are further convinced that this context decisively determines the content.[19] This alleged decisiveness of the context forbids interpreting Romans as a general systematic theology applicable to the general course of church history. The only general theological principle we can squeeze out of an exegesis of Romans, then, is Paul's message that God is the one God of both Jews and Gentiles alike.

Pushing the thesis of context decisiveness further, some scholars have sought by it to knock the doctrine of justification out of the center of the

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[17]Käsemann, "Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," 125.

[18]Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949) 6; cf. Georg Kümmel who would contend that justification is not merely a "polemical doctrine" but rather is "the basic and most highly personal form of expression of the Pauline message of God's eschatological saving action." *The Theology of the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) 195.

[19]Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976) 23-40; Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 69-89.

Christian Gospel. This began with Wilhelm Wrede's argument that justification is strictly a polemic doctrine aimed at counteracting monistic theology. Albert Schweitzer followed with his thesis that the center of Pauline thought is a Christ-mysticism, which makes justification subsidiary. "The doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore a subsidiary crater which has formed within the rim of the main crater—the mystical doctrine of redemption through the being-in-Christ."[20] Stendahl continues the skeptical tradition by contending that because "Paul's doctrine of justification by faith has its theological context in his reflection on the relation between Jews and Gentiles. . . . the doctrine of justification is not the pervasive, organizing doctrinal principal or insight."[21] Not happy with this, yet recognizing that Paul's propounding of justification is limited to polemical contexts, Joachim Jeremias still affirms the equation of justification with the Gospel because justification is bestowed through baptism and baptism applies to all Christians, Jews and Gentiles alike.[22] All of the above, including Jeremias, would agree that Paul is not limited to a single image or a single vocabulary for expressing the Gospel, and that the formula "justification by faith"—though an authentic expression of the Gospel—is dependent entirely upon the polemical context.

I believe the answer lies somewhere between context independence and context decisiveness. There is no question that the situation to which the Gospel is being presented influences the form of its articulation. This is generally the case with all New Testament writings. But it is also the case that there existed pre-Pauline formulations of the Gospel in terms of justification, which at least makes the doctrine independent of the immediate situation at Rome, or Galatia for that matter. Paul may have adapted and employed the notion to meet the questions raised by Jewish-Gentile relations, but in doing so he was unpacking truths already entailed in the more compact experience and tradition of the Gospel. Before Romans was written there had occurred an authentic experience of the Gospel which was becoming articulated in the context of the Roman situation; but that articulation has an integrity of its own and is not merely the accidental product of a squabble between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Following Ernst Käsemann, both Lutheran John Reumann and Roman Catholic Joseph Fitzmyer of the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue, agree

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[20]Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Seabury, 1931, 1968) 225.

[21]Stendahl, 26, Stendahl's italics.

[22]Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965) 58.

that the key passage of Romans 3:24-26 is pre-Pauline. According to Reumann, the Jewish-Christian pre-Pauline version ran thusly:

> Being declared righteous as a gift (δωρεὰν) through the redemption (ἀπολυτρώσεως) which is in Messiah Jesus, whom God put forward as a ἱλαστήριον in his blood, for showing God's righteousness (δικαιοσύνης θεοῦ), because of the passing over (or: with a view to remission) of former sins, in the forbearance of God.[23]

What did this early Jewish-Christian formulation emphasize? Here we have the forgiveness of sins and the revelation of God's justice, although they are tied more to the cross than to the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:17). Jesus' death, here blood (αἷμα), effects for us redemption (ἀπολύτρωσις), which can also mean the ransom or liberation of a slave. Through Jesus the Messiah we are "declared righteous," that is justified, which is also a making known the true righteousness of God (v. 25). This notion of justification appears to be a development out of the basic and continuing insight that the Gospel signals God's forgiveness of our sins. Because these scholars identify Rom. 3:24-26 as a specifically Jewish-Christian formula, its original intention could not have been to provide rhetorical ammunition for Gentiles to attain social parity with Jews. It simply gave expression to the significance of the story of Jesus in terms of the Old Testament concern for the justice of God. As it differentiates amidst explication in the Galatian and Roman contexts, its significance comes to be apprehended in terms of emancipation and equality among the people of God.

In the letter to the Romans Paul prefaces the pre-Pauline text in chapter three by emphasizing that "the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law" (v. 21) and that there "is no distinction" among Christians because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (v. 23). In v. 28 he repeats that our justification is by faith apart from the works of the law and then makes his point again that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile in Christ, "since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith and the uncircumcised through their faith" (v. 30). Faith is the great equalizer. He then concludes the section by reaffirming the goodness of the law (v. 31).

What we see here is that the seeds for the doctrine of justification were already sown in the early experience of the Gospel and its pre-Pauline formulation. Our justification, our redemption, our ransom, our salvation is a gracious gift to us from God. It is not the product of human achievement. What Paul does in the context of writing the letter to the Romans is unpack what is delivered to him already compact. He proclaims the Gospel of justi-

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[23]Reumann et al., 36; cf. 74; 205.

fication in the context of Jewish-Gentile relations, and through evangelical differentiation our equality in humility before God's justifying and reconciling grace becomes articulated.

We have said that in Romans the Gospel is presented in both a Christological and Soteriological form. Now we might ask: what is the relationship between Christology and Soteriology? For all practical purposes, as we have seen, we have no direct access to Christology in the sense of the bare story of Jesus apart from its soteriological significance. They come together in a single compact package. Yet, as we examine the material critically, we can discern an internal logical movement wherein Soteriology is dependent upon Christology. Who Christ is determines the salvific benefits for us. Our righteousness or justification (δικαιοσύνη) before God, which is requisite for our salvation, is something accomplished by Christ in our behalf.

> For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.—Rom. 5:19; RSV
>
> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ).—2 Cor. 5:21; RSV

Reumann adds,

> Justification/righteousness terminology first appears in primitive Christianity not in the original work of some one theologian like Paul but as part of the common apostolic faith, in Jewish and more particularly Jewish-Hellenistic communities. It does not appear in the simple kerygmatic announcements that "Jesus dies for our sins" and "God raised him up," but rather in reflection on the meaning of that death and of Jesus' resurrection. It therefore has to do with atonement and significance of Christology.[24]

Furthermore, the explication of the Gospel in terms of justification is at least in part dependent upon its explication as new creation. The justice of God of which Christ is the proleptic embodiment is for us still an eschatological hope. We are still sinners, still participants in the injustice of the old order. Yet in Christ we participate as well in the justice of the expected new order.

Thus there is a double character to justification. On the one hand, it is a firm and present possession that yields peace in our lives (Rom. 5:1ff.). On the other hand, it lies at the same time in the future. "For through the Spirit, by faith, we wait for the hope of righteousness (dikaiosyne)" (Gal. 5:5). Jeremias calls this an "antedonation" of God's final salvation, the beginning of a movement towards a goal, namely towards the hour of the definitive justification, of the acquittal on the day of judgment, when the full gift is real-

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[24]Ibid., 39.

ized.''[25] Instead of ''antedonation'' I prefer the term 'prolepsis,' indicating that the future reality is here ahead of time. Through faith in Christ we are citizens of two aeons, the future and the present. We are justified because participation in the future consummation of God's justice is given to us now through faith. Here we can see that the concepts of new creation and justification are complementary and interrelated ways of drawing out the significance of the story of Jesus.

Thus the Gospel begins with Christology. It begins with the story of the unwarranted death of the obedient and righteous one and follows it with reflection until we see the effects of salvation for those who are united with him. Whether one uses the language of new creation or that of justification, the point here is that in Christ God has acted in behalf of the ungodly in our time. The effect the Gospel has on us is that we now realize how our righteousness is a borrowed righteousness, a righteousness which belongs properly to God but which is bestowed upon us. The Gospel is the report of divine grace establishing our justification and opening the door to new creation.

PAUL AND THE GOSPEL AS PROCLAMATION

But it is more than a report, much more. The very telling of the Gospel participates in the reality of the Gospel itself. The Gospel by definition is news, and as such presses to be told and retold. The Gospel when preached is not merely information or even revelation about justice. Rather, the very preaching itself makes that divine justice a possibility for the hearer. The proclamation of the news itself bears the power of salvation.

Because the power of the Gospel is borne by preaching, it has an ambivalent relationship to written Scripture and tradition. On the one hand, Paul denies any dependency upon the apostolic tradition that preceded him. ''I did not confer with flesh and blood,'' he declares in Gal. 1:16. He received the Gospel from direct revelation, from his vision of the resurrected one on the road to Damascus and, perhaps, an ecstatic experience in the desert of Arabia. Paul does not need to appeal to the authority of the original apostles because the Gospel is not simply a bundle of teachings or traditions which can be memorized and transmitted. It is not a finished *depositum fidei* or timeless dogma. It is itself the manifesting of the Spirit in the world. Hence, it is something that lives.

On the other hand, he occasionally talks about the Gospel as a tradition (παράδοσις) or teaching (διδαχή) which can be handed down and which

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[25]Jeremias, *The Central Message*, 65.

needs to be preserved. Returning again to the kerygma of 1 Corinthians, we find Paul saying,

> I preached to you the Gospel, which you received . . . For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures. —1 Cor. 15:1-4; RSV

One might think that because Paul had been a zealot for "the ancestral traditions" (Gal. 1:14) that he might propound a conservative or traditionalist version of Christianity. What he says here he has received is most probably a version of the Jesus story told by Christians in Antioch. This he passes on to the Corinthians. But his radical appropriation and reinterpretation of such things as the Jewish law in the doctrine of justification shows that tradition lives for Paul only when it bears the Gospel. The Gospel, to be sure, has content which can be passed on through teaching, and we have seen this in Rom. 1:1ff., and we can see it in the 1 Cor. 15 passage above which undoubtedly reflects another pre-Pauline confession taken over by Paul. But the content of the Gospel lives through its proclamation. Tradition stands in the service of preaching, not vice versa. There is something elusive and alive about the Gospel that makes it subject to tradition, yes, but always something more than tradition.

Thus the Gospel for Paul has a metaxic character. It exists at the in-between of delivery and reception, uniting message and hearing. This delicate dynamic is portrayed by J. Christiaan Beker in describing "the identity of the Gospel."

> The Gospel is not a written text about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ; rather, it is oral proclamation that dictates its own hermeneutical method. The interpretive content (the *interpretandum*) and the interpretive act (the *interpretatio*) fuse here more directly than in the interpretation of a written text of the past. Because oral interpretation involves an audience, it is dialogically centered and decisively situational. The proclamation of the Gospel is directed to a specific group in a specific time and place. The content of the Gospel, its understanding, and its appropriation fuse in the interpretive act, inasmuch as the Gospel aims directly at the "Amen" of the obedience of faith. . . .
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> The "Gospel" . . . refers both to the content of preaching and the act of preaching. However important situational immediacy is, it cannot be divorced from the doctrinal content of the Gospel, because content, direct address, and obedience coincide.[26]

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[26]Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 120.

We see here how for us the Gospel has come to mean not just what is told but the act of telling itself. The meaning and power of God's work becomes contemporary and effective in the very proclamation of it. The Gospel is not merely the report of the history of Jesus," writes the now late Edmund Schlink, "but it is at the same time the Word through which Jesus Christ is God's active Word."[27]

The whole life and destiny of Jesus is in fact God's word spoken to the world. It is divine address. So for us in the church to present the Gospel through preaching or teaching is to participate in the very activity whereby God himself addresses the world. Through our representing the originary symbols of the Gospel experience as reported to us in the New Testament, God himself calls people to live in the light of his revelatory action. Telling and listening to the story of Jesus with its significance is itself part of the ongoing work of God.

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[27]Edmund Schlink, *Ökumenische Dogmatik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 4; cf. 422; 425. Although the emphasis upon God's action in the moment of proclamation is essential, the temptation among existentialist and hermeneutic theologians in our own century has been to go a bit too far. They risk turning the sermon into the saving event itself rather than seeing the sermon as news of the saving event. In paragraph 88 of the otherwise very fine document produced by Lutherans and Roman Catholics in dialogue, "The Common Statement on Justification by Faith," we find the Lutherans saying this: "The central point is that the proclamation of God's grace in word and sacrament is itself the saving event in that it announces the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ." *Justification by Faith,* vol. VII of Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue, ed. H. George Anderson, T. Austin Murphy, and Joseph A. Burgess (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 47.