

VESSELS OF MERCY:
INVESTIGATING A PLAN OF UNIVERSAL SALVATION
IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS



6th
INAUGURAL
LECTURE

Godfrey Okoye University Enugu

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OF MERCY:
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IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS**

INAUGURAL LECTURE DELIVERED

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Godfrey Okoye University Enugu

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this lecture to

Most. Rev. Godfrey MaryPaul Okoye
Father Founder, Daughters of Divine Love

And to

My dearest parents,
Theophilus and Rachel Nwachukwu
who taught me the ways of God by the example of their lives

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...If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all.

Rom. 5: 17 -18

Introduction

This study is an investigation of a program of mercy in the history of salvation, as Paul presents it in the letter to the Romans, in order to determine the presence or a case of a divine plot to bring about universal salvation neither through obedience to the law nor through faith in Jesus Christ, but through mercy. It exposes notions found in Paul's letter to the Romans which point to the way by which God intends to reclaim the entire humanity – faithful and unfaithful, believers and non-believers – in the final drama of history. The letter to the Romans has been for me a treasure mine of the Christian theology of the Old Testament. Although being an occasional document, the letter to the Romans has been judged by some scholars as the bearer of the most comprehensive soteriological beliefs of St. Paul (Cranfield, 1979: 445; Dunn, 1988: 519-520). In it, one finds a complete picture of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, according to which Jesus Christ, through his sacrificial death and resurrection, achieved the redemption of humanity from sin (Rom 3:21-24).

The phrase – vessels of mercy – is taken from the potter-clay metaphor in Rom 9:20-21:¹

Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object [vessels] for special use and another for ordinary use?, What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects [vessels] of

¹ (In this work, all citations from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version)

wrath that are made for destruction; and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects [vessels] of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory..." (Rom 9:20-23)

The potter-clay metaphor depicted in this text provides the language and the nature of the relationship between God and human beings which inspired this research. The metaphor is a familiar image that is rooted in the notion found in early Israelite and non-Israelite religions that the Creator formed the human race from clay like a potter (Müller, 1964: 27). Terminologies associated with this metaphor are: *kerameús* (potter), *pélós* (clay), *plássō* (to make, to form) and *plásma* (that which is molded). The metaphor represents a graphic image of God as creator, who formed the human race and all created things from clay (Gen 2:7,9,19). More importantly, it denotes the supreme power, sovereign will and authority of God to decide the destiny of mankind. Paul invokes this God-human relationship in order to provide an explanation to the dilemma of Israel's lack of belief in Jesus and her status as a vessel under the judgment of God's wrath.

The problem that this essay treats is found in Rom 9 where Paul expresses one of the major concerns of the letter, which is the inclusion of the Gentiles among the people of God and the precarious state Israel in relation to faith in Jesus (Rom 9:3). Paul reflects on the many advantages of the Jewish people – adoption, glory, and covenant, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, the patriarchs and the Messiah – in spite of which Israel rejected Christ.

The thrust of Paul's amazement is that Gentiles, without submitting to the requirement of the law, have become full members of God's people, while the Jews, by not pursuing righteousness on the basis of faith in Christ, were in

danger of falling out of election (Rom 9:30-33; 10:3).

Paul could make no sense out of this failed life-long history of efforts to obtain salvation through the holy and divinely given law. He discovered in the very history of Israel that one is not saved through personal effort to keep the law, but through an apparent divine caprice to show mercy to whomever he wills (Rom 9:14-16). Nevertheless, he affirmed, after a series of painful reflection on the fate of recalcitrant Israel, that Israel would be saved (Rom 11:26).

By saying this about the Israel who did not believe in Jesus Christ, he also includes the fate of all who are outside of faith in Jesus, "...for God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all" (Rom 11:32). There appears to be some sort of scheming, intrigue or conspiracy on the part of God. Mercy, not adherence to the demands of the law seems to be the norm of salvation.

The Letter to the Romans exposes the vision of life envisioned by Paul in light of how he understands the relation between Israel's rejection of the gospel and the fulfillment of God's covenant in Jesus Christ. After this general introduction, this study begins with the exposition of the theological basis of the letter to the Romans which is the doctrine of Justification by faith.

THE DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Ideas about this project - "Vessels of Mercy" - were first nurtured as I was writing my doctoral thesis between 1998 and 2002. In fact, some aspects of the structure of the present topic are embedded in my doctoral monograph. So I take the first steps to the development of the present idea from my doctoral thesis which I defended publicly on March 22, 2002 at the Gregorian Pontifical University in Rome, under the title *Creation - Covenant Scheme and*

Justification by Faith. A Study of the God – Human Drama in the Pentateuch and the Letter to the Romans. The Gregorian University Rome accorded this thesis the rare privilege of being included as no. 89 in the Gregorian Theology Series.

The theological basis for the idea of universal salvation is the revelation of the righteousness of God in the death of Jesus. The dominant perspective of this doctrine is found in Rom 3:21-26, a text which belongs to the first of the three doctrinal parts of the letter (Rom 1:18–4:25; 5–8; 9–11; cf. Nwachukwu, 2002: 181). This text presents Jesus Christ as the revelation of the righteousness of God and the climax of Israel's covenant history (cf. also 9:4-5; 10:4).

The Death of Jesus Reveals God's Righteousness – Rom 3:21-26

²¹But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²²the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe, for there is no distinction, ²³since all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, ²⁴they are now justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus ²⁵whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness because in his divine forbearance he has passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

In the text of Rom 3:21-26, a summary of the subject matter of the previous section (Rom 1:18–3:20) is repeated in v23, which is, that God's wrath is revealed against universal human ungodliness and unrighteousness. Having said this, Paul presents the message of the salvific relevance of the

death of Jesus as God's response to the human history of impiety and unrighteousness. In the text, statements about the death of Jesus are enclosed by the assertion that it reveals the righteousness of God (vv21-22 and v25-26). A study of the phrase 'righteousness of God' should, therefore, precede the exposition of statements about Jesus' death.

The Righteousness of God

The major terminology of justification by faith is the noun *dikaiosune* (translated as 'righteousness, uprightness, justice, liberation'), the verb *dikaiōō* (translated as 'to show justice, to justify' or 'to make righteous, to set free') and the adjective *dikaios* (translated as 'upright, just, righteous') which appear throughout the letter to the Romans (Bauer, 1979: 195-198). The doctrine of justification by faith states that God's righteousness has been revealed apart from the law and that it brings salvation to all, both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 1:17-18).

The Greek term *dikaiosune* and the verb *dikaiōō* refer to actions that conform to agreed standard of relationship or to the requirement of the law (Bauer, 1979: 196). This ethical meaning is found in Paul's use of the term in the letter to the Romans (for instance, Rom 6:13, 16, 18-20), even though the term embraces a totally non-legalistic and non-ethical meaning in its Hebrew original. In the Hebrew thought world, the general context for understanding the language of righteousness is the covenant where the term includes both forensic and soteriological aspects (Kertelge, [1990] 331) The Hebrew noun '*tsedekah*' together with other words that derive from the Hebrew root *sdq* are applied to the sphere of covenant relationship between God and Israel, where it means faithfulness, mercy, loving kindness, truth, justice and liberation.

Given the covenant context of the term, the determination of what qualifies as

a righteous act is human community based (Ziesler, 1972: 186). The righteousness of the king or leader, for instance, consists in the ability of the leader to fulfill the demands of community living through preserving the peace and wellbeing of the state, including the care of the poor of the society and defending them from oppressive forces in the society (Ps 72:2-4). Job is considered righteous because he was “eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame...a father to the needy...championed the cause of the stranger and broke the fangs of the unrighteous” by releasing their innocent and helpless prey (Job 29:14-17). Those who engage in such humanitarian services are called righteous (Ps 15:2-5; 82:3-4; Prov 12:26; 29:7; 31:8-9; Isa 33:15; Jer 22:3, 15-16) because they respond to the obligation to uphold and restore the foundation of human life in a human community (Prov 14:34). The reason for God's election of Abraham, according to Gen 18:17-19 is that he might teach his descendants and household to keep the way of the Lord which consists in observing 'righteousness and justice' (*ts'dakah umishpat*). The occurrence of this word pair (hendiadys) in other Old Testament texts shows that it is both revelatory of God's character (Jer 9:23-24) and a norm of conduct required by God (Ps 97:2; 99:4).

In many cases in the Old Testament, righteousness is interchangeable with salvation (for instance, Isa 46:13). This soteriological meaning is more outstanding in the letter to the Romans, even though the ethical connotation is not absent (Ziesler, 1972: 22-43). According to this perspective, the term refers principally to God as sovereign king, ruler and judge, and the expression 'righteousness of God' refers to divine act of liberation in keeping with his covenant faithfulness of which his chosen people are at the same time beneficiaries and mediators (Nwachukwu, 2002: 258-259)

The foregoing explanation reveals two aspects of righteousness. On the one

hand, righteousness refers to God's acts of liberation according to the demands of the covenant, to save and deliver an oppressed people from tyrannical political and sinister forces. On the other hand, righteousness is a quality in God (Rom 3:5) which contrasts with human injustice (*tse'aqah* – outcry of the oppressed). They are ethical acts that uphold human and societal life, which are prescribed as way of life for the people of God. These soteriological and ethical meanings of the righteousness are present in the letter to the Romans.

Righteousness in the Letter to the Romans

The revelation of the righteousness of God is a pervasive theme in the entire Letter to the Romans. In the different parts of the letter, it is shown how the revelation of the righteousness of God is revealed against human ungodliness (Rom 1:17-3:20), how it embraces what God has done in the event of Jesus' death (Rom 3:21-26), how it has been God's way of relating with Israel (Rom 4) and how it is operative in the lives of those who believe in Christ (Rom 6-8). In fact, the same theme of righteousness serves Paul in the investigation into the fate of unfaithful Israel (Rom 9-11). The letter's introductory statement that the 'righteousness of God' is the power of God for salvation (Rom 1:16) is key to understanding the goal of God's action in Christ on behalf of creation which the Letter presents.

The death of Jesus as redemption from the power of sin and expiation for sin

Paul begins the letter with statements about the revelation of the wrath of God and the righteousness of God (Rom 1:17-18; 3:21). Humanity is accused is *asebeia* (ungodliness) and *adikia* (unrighteousness) against the truth of God's revelation (Foerster, 1971: 186-188). Against these, the wrath of God is

revealed, to deal with sin through the death of Jesus (Rom 5:6). The novelty of this revelation hinges on its being revealed apart from the Law (Rom 3:21a), which used to be the ethical standard for the rightness of an action, even though it is attested by the Law and the Prophets (Rom 3:21b). According to the text, the event of Jesus' death is now the bearer of the revelation of God's righteousness. In it, God has provided the farthest reaching measure against sin, by stepping in to fulfill his obligation as Creator and Lord to save his people (Rom 1:16-17; 3:21-26).

The historic death of Jesus opened Paul's mind to the Hebrew Scriptures and to the awareness that the event of Christ was part of and in line with God's action in the history of salvation which is recorded in the Law and the Prophets (Rom 3:21). In Rom 3:21-26, two covenant terms - *apolútrois* (redemption) and *hylasterion* (expiation) - are employed to show how the death of Jesus achieved the justification of the sinner.

The compound Greek word, *apolútrois* (redemption) is a combination of the adjective (*apó* - from) and the verb (*lutróō* - to set free or to loose), and it refers to the act of setting free a slave or captive from an oppressive master by the payment of a ransom (Bauer, 1979: 96). Its meaning as ransom is equivalent to the Hebrew term (*ga'al*), which refers to the duty incumbent on a next of kin to liberate his relative from a harsh master (Bauer, 1979: 96). The Old Testament applies this term to the exodus and metaphorically to God as the one who protects and frees Israel from all forms of alien power or bondage. By using this covenant term to interpret the death of Jesus (Rom 3:24). Paul relates its meaning as liberation to the concept of righteousness, describing the death of Jesus as God's gracious turning to humanity in its need of redemption (Kertelge, 1990: 138; Nwachukwu, 2002: 275-277). Therefore, the sinful humanity presented in Rom 1:18-3:20 are actually presented as those in need of liberation.

The other important covenant term, *hylasterion* (Rom 3:25), is a rare Greek term which derives from the Hebrew verb *koper* and which could be translated as “expiation” (wiping away or forgiveness of sins) or “propitiation” -the satisfaction of God's wrath (Bauer, 1979: 375). Its meaning as expiation is preferred here, since Jesus death is also described as “sin offering” in Rom 8:3 when it says,

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and as a sin offering (*peri hamartias*), he condemned sin in the flesh...

The Greek expression *peri hamartias* in the sentence is an extended use of the word “sin” as a reference to sin offering or atoning sacrifice (cf. Lev 4:3,14,28,35; Ezek 32:13; 43:19; Byrne, 1996: 423). Similarly, Heb 10:12-14 calls Jesus' death the sin offering by which he achieved the eternal perfection of all whom he is sanctifying. Since this sacrifice is a gracious offer of new life to sinners, it actualizes an objective transformation in them.

The term *hylasterion* is associated with the supreme sacrifice of the Day of Atonement which the High Priest offers annually for the remission of sins (Herrmann, 1971: 318-320). In the Septuagint version of Exod 25:6-21, the word is used 7 times for the mercy seat, the place where atonement was made and which is a symbol of God's beneficent power to forgive sins (Bauer, 1979: 375). In Rom 3:25 where this term occurs, God is the subject of the atoning sacrifice and the object is the sin (*hamartia*) by which human beings provoked God's wrath. This implies that the real enemy of God is sin (*hamartia*) and not the sinner.

In other parts of the letter, especially 5:12-24; 6:12 and 7:14 sin is described (in the singular) not as an evil act which humans commit but as a power in

competition with God for dominion over creation. This power had held human beings under its sway and had forced them to obey its orders in disobedience to the will of God (Beker, 1980: 189-192; Byrne, 1996: 175). Nevertheless, this power is not an entity outside of the human being but it is located in the flesh as sinful passions engendering fruits for death (Rom 7:5). The entire human race has been under this bondage to sin. The expression 'under the law' (Rom 6:14) refers to the particular Jewish manifestation of the common state that characterizes existence 'under sin'. The inability of all humanity to achieve righteousness is caused by the subjection of weak human flesh to the power of sin in the flesh. This notion fortifies the sense of human helplessness and the idea that human beings are more of victims than culprits. They, therefore, need to be rescued from the power of sin.

Through the death of Jesus, Rom 8:3 says, "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh to deal with sin..." Therefore, while the term 'redemption' depicts God as the one responsible for liberating humanity from bondage to sin (Rom 3:24), 'expiation' is a symbolic reference to God's covenant faithfulness and his beneficent power to forgive sin (Rom 3:25). In these two terms, the meanings of righteousness and covenant meet as liberation.

The death of Jesus as fulfillment of the covenant

The description of Jesus death as an event of covenant is not done through the covenant term *diathēkē* (Heb. *b'rit*) but through the two terms, explained above, which are taken from the exodus motif. A simple description of covenant (*b'rit*) as solemn declaration of will or agreement between two parties (Bauer, 1979: 183) is unable to communicate the weight and depth of commitment involved in the Bible's description of God's covenant with

creation and with Israel. As the fulfilment of the covenant, what God has done in the death of Jesus is understood against the background of earlier covenants in the history of Israel which reveal a comparable pattern of divine action for his creatures. God's covenant with creation (Gen 6-9) is narrated as God's solemn commitment to relate with a sinful world, even though the human tendency to wickedness which caused the Flood continues to exist (Gen 6:5; 8:21). After it is shown that the Flood did not affect any change in the human tendency to evil, the covenant is introduced in the story as God's decision to relate with a sinful world "come what may" (Okoye, 2018: 106). In a comparable manner, the covenant remaking ceremony of Exod 34 is described within the context of the threat which the Golden Calf apostasy posed to Israel's continued existence as God's chosen people. Therefore, in relation to Israel's rebellion and the description of them as incapable of keeping God's law (stiff-necked people - Exod 32:7-9; 34:9), the covenant is given as God's bestowal of grace and compassion to Israel (Exod 33:19; 34:6) at the moment when Israel deserved the execution of his wrath (Nwachukwu, 2002: 147-149). In both the covenant with creation and with Israel, the covenant is given as God's merciful response to take responsibility for the threat which human sinfulness cause against human existence.

The death of Jesus is the climax of the revelation of God's sovereign freedom to bestow grace and compassion to a sinful world, as Rom 5:6 says, "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly". The reference to Christ's blood in Rom 3:25 draws out other implications of the event of Christ's death as a covenant.

In a sacrificial context of the covenant, the blood (Greek *haima*; Hebrew *dam*) of the victim is the bearer of life and a means of expiation before God which has purifying and atoning efficacy for sin (Behm, 1971: 173). Therefore, the

phrase 'the redemption in Christ's blood' would mean the sacrificial offering of God's life for us by which God redeemed humanity from the power of sin. Jesus bore the consequence of our sin through the sacrifice of his life.

God's Righteousness as a gracious gift

As an act of God's righteousness, the liberation of sinful humanity from the punishment due to their sins must be considered as the gracious gift of God. The inner logic of the meaning of Christ's death as gift is highlighted through the notion that in it God's righteousness is revealed apart from the law (Rom 3:21). In this way, Paul contrasts how it was revealed in the past and how it is revealed now in Christ. The terminology of righteousness underscores the meaning of the Christ event as God's judgment of that alien oppressive power of sin, whose goal is the liberation of human beings. This is made more emphatic by the use of the verb *logizomai* (to be reckoned or imputed – Rom 4:3-6, 8-11, 22-24; 9:8). This reckoning of righteousness fits the notion that righteousness is a free gift (Rom 3:22; 5:17). Any idea of human merit is excluded. The two covenant terms *apolutrosis* and *hylasterion* describe God's action as fulfillment of a covenant relationship between the creator God and sinful humanity, an event with universal, forensic and salvific relevance (Nwachukwu, 2002: 283). The biblical model for this free justifying action of God is Abraham, whom God justified on the basis of faith alone (Rom 4:3; Gal 3:8; Gen 12:3; 15:6). All this bears witness to the transcendence of God's saving grace over human ungodliness. The grace of God underlines the weighty soteriological meaning of the event.

Justified through faith in Christ

A final consideration of Rom 3:21-26 is made on the status of the human being, the beneficiary of God's action. The text says that in liberating human beings from the power of sin, God revealed his righteousness by justifying

“the one who has faith in Christ” (Rom 3:26). It must be noted that the word ‘righteousness’ (*dikaïosune*), the verb ‘to justify’ (*dikaïōw*) and the adjective ‘righteous’ (*dikaïos*) all derive from the same semantic field. This implies that in making someone righteous, God infuses into the person his own divine life and values and he has done this through the death of Jesus. Justification realizes an ontological change in the human person. Christians are, in effect, dead to sin and alive to God (Rom 6:11). Therefore, the phrase ‘to be justified through faith in Christ’ is to acquire the life and values of God revealed in Jesus’ self-giving for others. In Rom 3:22 and 3:26, Paul links the phrase ‘righteousness of God’ to the expression ‘through faith in Jesus’ as means through which God justifies sinners.

The meaning of faith in the expression “faith in Jesus” goes beyond the dictionary meaning of faith (*pistis*) as ‘trust’, loyalty or ‘faithfulness’. The word refers to a transformed life, crammed with action. It points to a union of life with Christ which is achieved through the revitalizing work of the Spirit, as we read from Rom 8:9-11,

“But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Jesus is introduced at the beginning of the letter as ‘Son of God with power according to the Spirit... through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith... (Rom 1:4-6). Through

faith, human beings now share the same fate and mission with Jesus. They are not liberated from sin to do nothing; they are sent as apostles to bring about the obedience of faith among Jews and Gentiles. They have become instruments of righteousness (Rom 6:13). In other words, they are being empowered to accomplish works which have salvific effects for others. The universal benefit of the event of Jesus' death is now mediated through those who believe in Christ.

Paul concluded Rom 3:21-26 by stating that God has manifested his righteousness in the atoning death of Jesus in order to prove at the present time that God justifies those who believe in Jesus (Rom 3:26). Rom 8:3-4, puts it more clearly that God's purpose for sending his Son is in order that the righteous demands of the law might be fulfilled for those who walk according to the Spirit. These statement unite the two dimensions of the universal character of God's saving action through the death of Jesus and his call of believers to let their lives be wholly shaped as instruments of righteousness (Nwachukwu, 2002: 296).

It could be asked if human beings can accomplish acts that can save others. In an article I published in 2012, titled "The Word of the Lord and Power of Human Agency: An Appraisal of a Theological Dynamic" (Nwachukwu, 2012: 59-71), I had exposed the relational characteristic manner by which God involves human agency in creation and in salvation. Human mediation is a very strong theological dynamic in the history of salvation. The notion is behind the statement in Heb 1:1-2 that God communicated his word through the prophets and ultimately through his Son Jesus Christ. This notion of human mediation in salvation is strongly emphasized in Rom 5:12-21, a text which presents the typology of Adam and Christ, each serving as representative of humanity in different epochs:

...If, because of the one man's trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous...so that, just as sin exercised dominion in death, so grace might also exercise dominion through justification leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 5:17-21).

Two different verbs are used in this text to contrast Adam and Christ and to show how the effect of one's positive or negative action is beneficial to others. The verbs *kurieuō* (to be lord) and *basileuēin* (to exercise dominion) designate the effect of either disobedience or obedience of Adam and Christ (see also Rom 6:9, 12, 14). It is asserted that Christ's action is a total contrast to that of Adam, since his exercise of dominion in life engender the free gift of righteousness. In contrasting these notions, Paul placed the power of sin and the power of grace in opposition, pointing out that mediation is God's way of dispensing grace from one to many. On the basis of the language of righteousness and the contrast between the dominion of Christ and the dominion of Adam (Rom 5:17) in the text, it could be affirmed that what is being emphasized is the ability of grace to powerfully engender liberation from sin as free gift (Nwachukwu, 2002: 288). In the fourth chapter of the letter, Abraham is introduced as the ancestor, beneficiary and model of human mediation of grace and blessing in the biblical story of election.

THE TYPOLOGY OF ELECTION AND THE THEME OF DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE

Election in the Letter to the Romans

The theme of the election of Israel features in different parts of the letter to the Romans with the goal of showing how the election of believers in Christ has ancestry in the story of Abraham. Paul takes up the theme of election in Rom 4, immediately after his exposition of the revelation of the righteousness of God in the death of Jesus (Rom 3:21-26). In discussing Abraham in Rom 4, Paul referred to texts which concern how Israel's election relates to other nations (cf. Patrick, 1992: 436-437). Paul's first decisive reference is to the covenant context of Gen 15, a text which narrates God's promise to Abraham that he would have a son born from his own flesh and from whom would come numerous descendants (Gen 15:4). The text also connects the inheritance of promise to the reckoning of righteousness in the person of Abraham. By referring to Gen 15:6, Paul infers that Abraham provides the proof that the fulfillment of the promise of numerous descendants is conditional on the righteousness and faith of its recipients.

Rom 4:4-8 is an interpretation of the precise citation of Gen 15:6 "... and he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness". The character of justification as God's gift to his elect is rendered by the verb *logizomai* (it was reckoned). Paul used this verb to interpret Gen 15:6 from the viewpoint of Ps 32:1-2 "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin". Ps 32 is used here to explain that God's justifying activity is worked out as removal of sin. Therefore, Abraham's righteousness is the result of unmerited divine grace because election did not separate him from the common human inheritance of slavery to sin (Swetnam, 1981: 82-83). It

must be understood that Abraham features in Romans as proof that God has fulfilled his promise of numerous descendants to Abraham in the present life of believers in Christ, who Paul identifies as the seed of Abraham, and to whom righteousness is reckoned through the redemption in the death of Christ (Rom 4:16-17,23). Since righteousness was not reckoned to Abraham on the basis of law, the fulfillment of the promise rests on God's grace and not on obedience to the law.

In order to further establish the unity of identities of Abraham and believers in Christ, the text of Rom 4 unveils some of the underlying aspects of the Abraham's life and marriage with Sarah. According to the story, the promise of numerous descendants was made to an old man whose barren wife, Sarah, had passed the age of child birth; this promise, obviously seemed only an unattainable prospect. Abraham's hopeless and helpless situation is equivalent to the helpless situation of human beings' subjection to bondage to sin. The sense of continuity between Abraham and Christians is further discerned from the two verbs that describe God's equivalent action in the dead body of Abraham and the dead body of Christians. In the life of Abraham, God is described as the one "who gives life to the dead (*zōopoieiv*) and calls into existence (*kaleiv*) the things that do not exist" (Rom 4:17). The same faith is reckoned to Christians who believe in the God "who raised Jesus Christ our Lord from the dead (*egeirō*)" – Rom 4:24. In the Bible, these two verbs associate God's call with his activity as Creator and restorer of life (cf. H. Moxnes, 1980: 234-239). Christians are those who like Abraham believe in God's power to raise the dead. They are those who inherit the promise of redemption that began in Abraham and culminated in the death of Jesus. Given the foregoing, God's justifying activity is described as a divine call from death to life. As Paul states in Rom 4:16, faith defines Abraham's seed as those who believe, like Abraham, in God's creative power over death (Rom 4:17-22).

The God whom these verbs describe is not only the God of Israel; He is the creator God of the entire human race. His plan of salvation concerns the whole world, even though it is revealed to Israel. His creative power is shown to render insignificant any threat to the promise to bless all the families of the earth through Abraham and his descendants (Westermann, 1985: 222-223). The promise, referred to in Rom 4:17 is that of Abraham's fatherhood of numerous descendants, according to Gen 15:5 and 17:5. The present identity of believers in Christ was given as promise in Abraham. Faith describes the human recognition of innate weakness but the attitude of total reliance on the power of God to fulfil his promise.

In Rom 9, the topic of election continues through the notion of God's call (Greek verb *kaleiv*). It had been shown that this verb has specific reference to the exercise of God's creative power in the life of Abraham (Rom 4:17). In Rom 9, its use is extended to the question of identity in Israel (Rom 9:7) and identity in the Christian community (Rom 9:24)

Paul's arguments in Rom 9-11 recalls the entire gamut of Israel's history of election, from Abraham to Jesus Christ, in order to justify the astonishing incident of Israel's unbelief. Paul wrestled with this subject by reflecting on how election serves the revelation of God's wrath and mercy in the history of salvation.

Election Mediating Divine Wrath and Mercy

In Rom 9:20-23 terms such as wrath and mercy situate the idea of election in the context of God's decisive action in creation.

"You will say to me then, "Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?"²⁰ But who indeed are you, a human being, to argue with God? Will what is

molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" ²¹Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? ²²What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience the objects of wrath that are made for destruction; ²³and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory – ²⁴including us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (Rom 9:19-25)

This text describes a disconcerting concept of God and of his relationship with human beings. God's sovereignty and absolute freedom over human beings is underscored in the question "Will what is molded say to the one who molds it, "Why have you made me like this?" Has the potter no right to the clay?" These questions were occasioned by the assertion made in the previous section (9:6-18) that election depends neither on physical descent from Abraham nor on human merit but on God who shows mercy (9:16). This assertion instigates human reaction and enquiry into the administration of God's justice (v14), and human helplessness in the face of God's sovereign will and right over human beings (v19). All these ideas indicate that the topic of divine omnipotence in creation is in question.

In Rom 9:20-24, two verbs – *plasseiv* (to mold) and *kalein* (to call) – whose subject is God are used to show how God's call serves the particular function of revealing God's glory in creation. The potter-clay metaphor, which Paul employed here is a familiar image, in both the Old Testament and late Judaism, which designate God as creator (cf. C. Müller, 1964: 27). It is rooted

in the notion found in early Israelite and non-Israelite religions that the creator formed the human race from clay like a potter. This image of God is represented in the account of creation in Gen 2. Hence, the verb *plásseiv* (Hebrew equivalent – *yātsar*) meaning 'to form', can refer to the creation of the human race or the human body (C. Westermann, 1969: 203-206). Paul's application of this metaphor here is an affirmation that this basic form of the relationship between creator and creature had characterized God's relation to Israel in election as well as in his relation to other nations.

In Inter-Testamental literature, the metaphor is applied to different situations, where it is shown that it is always linked to the requirement of creaturely obedience. In other parts of the Bible (Isa 29:16; 45:9; Jer 18:1-6; Lam 4:2; Wisd 15:7; Sir 33:10-13) the metaphor describes God's activity in relation to human beings, but also human constitutive fragility and weakness as made from dust (Moo, 1996: 603). In Jer 18:1-6, especially, God, the potter, is presented as remaking Israel, who is depicted as a broken vessel. This text, therefore, highlights God's responsibility for Israel and his power to reverse Israel's destiny from destruction to salvation. All the meanings implied by the motif – God's power as creator, human fragility and weakness, human beings as created to serve God's purpose in creation, God's sovereign will over human destiny, and even his right to grant unconditional salvation – are implied in Paul's use of the term. Reflecting on the nature of the relationship between God and creation, the motif presents biblical revelation as the drama between the overwhelming power of God's forgiving grace and the weakness of human sinfulness before the sovereignty of God. Since God has the freedom and authority (use of *exousia* in v21) to decide the destiny of mankind, human beings should neither question the creator nor turn against his sovereign will (Otzen, 2003: 260).

The distinction which the act of creation impacted on human beings is expressed by means of two designations in Rom 9:22-23: vessels of wrath (*skeuē orgēs*) and vessels of mercy (*skeuē aleous*). Both designations are parallel to a similar phrase in v21 which endorses the right of the potter to make out of the same lump one vessel (*eis timōn skeuos*) for honor (special use) and another (*hō de eis hatimian*) for dishonor (ordinary use). Scholarly debate over the meaning of this distinction centers on whether they refer to salvation and destruction (cf. Munck, 1967: 58; Dunn, 1988: 557). Proof of a functional distinction is discerned from the interchanging functions of both vessels in Rom 9:22-23.

According to Rom 9:22-23, God is patient with the vessels of wrath in order to reveal the richness and greatness of his glory to the vessels of mercy prepared for glory. In saying this, Paul represents the Old Testament concept of divine wrath, and especially a development in Hebrew thought that links God's anger with his long-suffering faithfulness (Fichtner, 1971: 405). Although the text says that the vessels of wrath are prepared for destruction, the perfect passive participle verb (*katērtisména*) which describes the vessels of wrath, and which suggests a completed action in the past, describes their situation as deserving of God's wrath. Moreover, the meaning of this verb, *katartizō* ('to mend', 'to restore', or 'to make complete'), reserves the possibility of restoration in judgment, which relates to the meaning of the motif in Jer 18:2-4 (Nwachukwu, 2002: 198-199). On the other hand, the aorist active indicative verb (*proētoimásen*), which describes the vessels of mercy, is indicative of an ongoing action of God – they are being prepared beforehand for God's glory. In Rom 9:23-24, the verb *kalein* is used to show that God is free and justified to define election as he chooses, even if his decision leads to the overturning of the status of his chosen people Israel into vessels of wrath. The scriptural support for the justification of God's action are taken from the prophecies of Hosea and Isaiah (Rom 9:25-26, 27-29).

Given the above background, it could be said that Paul's expression of sorrow Rom 9:1-6 concerning the desperate situation of Israel as a people, caused by her unbelief and failure to achieve the righteousness of God, relates to the very reputation of God as sovereign over creation. A basic presupposition of Paul's argument in Rom 9-11 is an understanding of God's relation to the world as sovereign Lord over creation and history. An investigation into the notion of wrath and mercy in the Old Testament is important to ascertain whether these notions, as Paul describes them, are consistent with activities that describe the two arms of God's rulership of the world – justice and mercy – in creation and salvation.

The Wrath and Mercy of God in the Old Testament

According to H. Spieckermann, the wrath and mercy of gods are the most significant divine features of any religion in antiquity (Spieckermann, 2008: 3). In ancient polytheistic religions, gods show either favour or animosity to human beings, and their actions are often viewed as emotional and arbitrary, lacking any degree of transparency. This poses a threat to the righteous person who could be struck to experience affliction caused by a god's irrational anger (Spieckermann, 2008: 4-5). In some cases, a deity's anger cannot be appeased in spite of supplications and ritual sacrifices, and avenues did not exist through which the human being could have access to the mind or will of the gods (Spieckermann, 2008: 7). This attitude of the gods had grave consequences for human fate. Alongside this image of the gods stands a description of Israel's God whose nature is dominantly determined by his inclination toward grace. This description of God is formulated in many Old Testament texts, especially in Exod 34:6-7

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and

abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.

Similar statements are found in Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 145:8 and Neh 9:17. Revealing himself in this way, God shows the pre-eminence of his mercy (*rahûm*), grace (*ḥannûn*) and his loving kindness or steadfast love (*hesed*). In the Old Testament, this character of God stands alongside the intensive expression of God's wrath against human sin and stubbornness. In this presentation, the God of Israel further distinguishes himself from the gods of other nations because while they could also express mercy and grace, the term 'hesed' (steadfast love) is a unique description of Israel's God. According to Spieckermann, "it is solely attested in the Old Testament, referring to the benevolence which God shows to humans and which is exercised among humans" (Spieckermann, 2008: 9-10). Different from the caprice and arbitrariness that characterize the gods of nations, the term 'hesed,' which predominant in the Psalter, expresses God's reliable readiness to save and his salvational affection toward a creation in need of his mercy (cf. Ps 8:6; 103:4).

Some prophetic texts focus on the subject of judgment and salvation in relation to the revelation of God's grace in the history of Israel. The exilic prophet, Deutero-Isaiah, underscores the pre-eminence of God's steadfast love (*hesed 'ôlām*) over his wrath through the concept of a 'covenant of peace' (*berit šâlôm*) (Isa 54:8-10). In fact, the prophet intended to prove that God would deal with recalcitrant Israel as he had done with entire humanity in the

story of the Flood. In the story of the Flood, human life is spared total annihilation only thanks to God's universal covenant oath (Gen 8:21). The prophet Isaiah recalled this, citing the character of the God, which the flood portrays, as what endures in his relationship with sinful humanity.

Another prophet that reflects on the dialectic of judgment and salvation in relation to God's steadfast love is Jeremiah. In Jer 31:2-3, the prophet substitutes steadfast love (*hesed 'ôlām*) with 'everlasting love' (*'ahabat 'ôlām*), meaning that this unconditional love is the distinct character of God's nature and acting from eternity:

Thus says the LORD: The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the LORD appeared to him from far away. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you (Jer 31:2-3).

Finally, it is important to underline Isaiah's remark in Isa 43:18-25 that this acting of God out of love when he should have punished is always understood in terms of new creation.

In Rom 1:18-3:20, the ideas relating to wrath and mercy indicate the conceptual background of the revelation of God's righteousness. The universal demonstration of his patience for the vessels of wrath is a demonstration of God's sovereign power in creation whose goal is not destruction but salvation (cf. Rom 3:25; 9:22; 4 Ezra 7:74). In developing his understanding of the relationship between God and the vessels of mercy, Paul reveals how God intends to accomplish his plan to save all.

Vessels of Mercy and Universal Salvation

This section of the work investigates the manner in which Paul explains the place of the vessels of mercy in the achievement of the glory of God. Ideas about the role of the vessels of mercy must begin from an exposition of their status and role for the achievement of God's glory.

The Vessels of Mercy

Ideas about how the vessels of mercy participate in salvation is found especially in the eighth chapter of the letter to the Romans. This chapter is the conclusion of Paul's interpretation of the believers' new life in Christ (Rom 5-7) which is the result of the revelation of God's righteousness in the death of Jesus. Rom 8:1-4 is a concise summary of a long argumentation in Rom 7:7-25 where Paul asserts that in Christ and through the Spirit, God has provided a definite solution to the problem of the inability of the law to confront the power of sin in the flesh. Human beings are liberated for the service of righteousness under a new master. Those who believe in Christ are designated as those whom God has called and to whom he has made known the riches of his glory and prepared beforehand for the glory of God (Rom 9:24). This statement allows us to determine the identity of the vessels of mercy through the verb *kaleiv* (to call), the verb which the biblical tradition uses to designate individual agents of salvation (cf. Jer 1:5; Isa 49:5,8; 53:11; Ps 139:16).

The prophet Isaiah (chapters 43 and 44 LXX) and other Old Testament traditions used the term *kaleiv* to speak of reversal themes that lead to the restoration of Israel. It describes the power of God in creation by which God calls things into being by the word of his mouth (Ps 33:6; 147:15-20; 148:5; Amos 5:8; Wisd 11:25), makes a way and gives water in the wilderness (Isa 43:19-20); pours water on thirsty ground (Isa 44:3) and gives life to the dead (2

Kings 5:7; 2 Macc 7:28). In the book of Isaiah, especially, these reversal themes are used to show that God has the power to change the destiny of his chosen people from curse to blessing. The meaning of the verb *kalein* (to call) is made even clearer in Isa 43:7 where the goal of election is expressed through the affirmation that everyone called by the name of the Lord is created for God's glory. Similarly, Paul says in Rom 9:23-24 that the vessels of mercy are those called to manifest the fullness of God's glory and his merciful dealings as Creator. Their function as bearers of God's creative power and agents of restoration is implied in Paul's application of *kalein* in relation to them.

In Rom 8:28, they are those called according to God's purpose which is now revealed in Christ. In Rom 9:7,12 they are those chosen by God to represent the medium of blessing in the family of Abraham. The verb is applied to Christians (Rom 1:6-7; 8:29-30; 9:24), which means that God's activity in Israel is continuous with his call of Christians in Jesus Christ. Israel's call to participate in salvation continues through a newly elected people who function as God's means of ensuring mercy for sinners. Since Rom 1:6 says that they are those "called to belong to Jesus Christ", they are defined under the general category of "those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26), who are called from among the Jews and Gentiles (Rom 9:24). The explanation of the phrase "faith in Jesus" presents the vessels of mercy as those who have united their life with Christ through the Spirit and who embody the values and principles of righteousness. Through his death, Jesus has provided the model of life by which these vessels are empowered to live for God.

God's call of his chosen ones in Jesus Christ expresses the gracious and merciful aspect of the judgment of God which offered liberation and redemption, instead of damnation, to a sinful humanity under God's wrath (Rom 1:18-3:26). In the language of Hosea, Paul says that the same call of God

makes 'no people' the 'people of God', and makes those 'unloved' the 'beloved of God' (Rom 9:25-26 // Hos 2:1,25). Hosea's prophecy deals with the restoration of Israel to the covenant relationship after a period of unfaithfulness (Stanley, 1992: 112). By bringing Hosea's words about Israel into this discussion, Paul reads the meaning of the verb *kalein* into the MT (Hebrew) and LXX (Greek) texts of Hosea and infers that what had applied to Israel now applies to the heritage of God's eschatological people of God (cf. Nwachukwu, 2002: 204).

God's call, as Paul shows in Rom 9:6-9 and 9:29 identifies those who are truly the descendants of Abraham. It is addressed to both Jews and Gentiles on the basis of their common belonging to Abraham through faith (Rom 4:11-12, 24-25; 9:24). The elect people now embrace a remnant of Israel and a majority of Gentiles. Without saying that this new people of God has replaced Israel, there is an underlying implication that they are called to be the bearers of salvation in the same way that Israel was called.

New Life in the Spirit

Rom 8 is an explanation of how God, through his Spirit, empowers believers for the work of salvation. While it is ascertained that God has achieved a definitive victory over the power of sin (Rom 3:21-26), human beings who have been redeemed in Christ are sustained through the gift of the Spirit. The empowering presence of the Spirit is the solution to the incapability of the law to deliver its subjects from the power of sin and death (Brodeur, 1996: 167-168).

In the different parts of the letter, the Spirit is defined as the divine principle of life (Rom 9:9,11), God's gift of life to our mortal bodies (Rom 5:5; 8:32) and the pledge of divine life in us, since he is the Spirit of him who raised Jesus

from the dead (Rom 8:11). The purpose clause in Rom 8:4 explains how the benefit of God's victory over sin is achieved through the vivifying action of the Spirit who fulfils in us the righteousness required by the law. Paul states that in Christ and through the work of the Spirit, that very righteousness shapes the lives of those who believe in Christ (Rom 8:2-4; 10:5-8):

Rom 8 expresses the Old Testament understanding of the vital and dynamic power of God at work in creation and in the life of Israel. In fact, Paul shows how the roles of Jesus Christ and the Spirit in the redemption of human beings depict a mutual interweaving of the actions of the Persons of the Trinity. Christ and the Spirit manifest God's life-giving power in destroying the reign of sin, in re-establishing God's claim in creation and in leading human beings from death to life (Rom 8:3-4). In Rom 8:9-11, therefore, the statements regarding the justifying work of God through the death of Jesus (Rom 3:21-26; 6:4-14) are repeated in connection with God's work through the Spirit in the present and future life of the believers.

¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you...

¹²For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.

¹³For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:11-15)

The two expressions in Rom 8:15, "spirit of slavery" (*pneuma douleias*) and "spirit of sonship" (*pneuma huiothesias*), explain with the language of exodus, that Christians are led from their former state of slavery and death to freedom as children of God (people of God) under the Spirit. Thanks to the Spirit, believers are conscious of their adoptive sonship through the cry 'Abba' (Rom

8:15; Gal 4:6). Within the text Rom 8, there are imperative statements (Rom 8:5-8, 12-17) which describe the way in which believers are summoned to renounce living according to sinful passions in the flesh and to allow their new pattern of life to be determined by the Spirit of Christ. Thanks to the theme of the Spirit's indwelling in the believer, the apostle proceeds to show how God is determined to lead creation to glory, to the final and ultimate conformity of his elect to Christ.

Vessels of Mercy and the Redemption of Creation

The second part of Rom 8 (vv18-30) states that the children of God, who have the grace of new life under the Spirit will participate in the redemption of creation from its bondage to decay. This section of Romans develops a concept of redemption that brings together the liberation of the human and sub-human world in God's predetermined redemption purpose through Christ. The text is divided into four parts (A. Pitta, 2001: 300; Gieniusz, 1999 87-88). The first three describe the groaning of creation (vv18-22), the groaning of believers (vv23-25) and the groaning of the Spirit (vv26-27). The fourth part (vv28-30) contains assertions concerning God's eternal purpose for his chosen ones through Christ. A study of this section begins with a consideration of the meaning of the groaning of creation and believers.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has

been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies... (Rom 8:18-25).

It is obvious that the text speaks of the state of creation, mentioned 5x in the text. From v19, every sentence of the text has creation in view. The goal of the narrative is the liberation of creation from futility. The text say that creation is subjected to futility and decay; creation groans in labor pains and has been waiting in hope of liberation from its bondage to decay; creation hopes to achieve the freedom of the glory of the children of God; we, along with creation, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption and the redemption of our bodies

It is important, first of all, to examine the precise meaning of the word 'creation' (*ktisis*), which is used in this text. The Greek word, *ktisis*, means 'creation' or 'creature' or 'the created world' in the sense of that which is created (Cf. Mark 10:6; 13:19; Rom 1:25; 8:19-22, 39; 2 Cor 5:17; Col 1:15, 23; Heb 4:13; 2 Pt 3:4). This word is found three times in verses 19-21 and designated as 'whole creation' in v22, meaning that it refers to the entire created order. It is disputed whether these four occurrences of the term in vv19-22 refer to the totality of inanimate creation (Fitzmyer, 1993: 535; Byrne, 1996: 256), or to the totality of the human and sub-human creation (cf. full discussion in Nwachukwu, 2002: 302). Human beings should be considered as included in the designation, even though the text talks of human beings separately in vv23-25. In Rom 8:22, the bond between the human and material created order is highlighted by the use of the adjective '*pasa*' 'entire' and the verbs *sustenazō* ('to groan together') and *sunōdinō* ('to suffer agony together').

Three terminologies in Rom 8:18-22 explain the situation of creation. The verb *hupotassō* (to be subjected) in v20 from the expression "...for the creation was subjected to futility", is used here to show that creation suffers the action of another agent. The subject of the aorist participle verb (*hupotaxanta*) is assumed as well known, the same way Paul introduced the topic of creation in v19 (Michaels, 2000: 104). However, the statement in Rom 8:22 that "*the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now*" points clearly to the story of the Fall in Gen 3:17. This shows that from the beginning, creation has been subjected to *mataiôtēs*. What is the meaning of this term *mataiôtēs*?

The term *mataiôtēs* means 'emptiness, futility, frustration, something without relevance (Bauer [1979] 203). This noun, found again only in Eph 4:17 denotes what is useless or an action or decision that obtains no gain for human life. Another idea in the text which is used synonymously with the idea of futility is 'corruption' ...*creation itself will be set free from its bondage of corruption* (Rom 8:21). This should be understood as a bondage that consists in corruption. These two terms clearly give a sense to the subjection of creation as referring to creation's sharing of the negative state of all human beings, a situation brought about by human rebellion against the Creator (Gen 3:17). This means that the passage is referring to an idea of created reality as fragile, corruptible, without relevance in its own terms and essentially different from the divine nature.

With regard to the objective of creation's subjection, the phrase "...not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope", explains that creation's subjection is not out of voluntary surrender to an overbearing agent but because of the indispensable plan of an overbearing agent to keep creation under hope of being set free. Although using the language of exodus, the principal referent to creation's subjection to bondage is the Eden story of

Gen 2-3, which would suggest that creation's fate is implicated in the sin of human disobedience against God. In fact, human disobedience should be an integral aspect of creation's susceptibility to corruption. The Eden story also has the emphasis that creation's present state is the result of God's judgment of human disobedience. This would imply that God is responsible for creation's subjection to futility. Obviously, here Paul echoes ideas he had expressed elsewhere about the universal inheritance of death through Adam (Rom 5:12-21) and the subjection of all flesh to the powers of sin and death (Rom 7:24; 8:10). The idea of creation's subjection to futility refers both to the existential reality of pain and suffering from the time of creation and to the bigger Creator's plan to set creation on the way to liberation. Creation is said to wait eagerly for this to happen. A clear evidence for this line of interpretation is found in 1 Cor 15:27-28, which says,

God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "All things are put in subjection," it is plain that this does not include the one who put all things in subjection under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who put all things in subjection under him, so that God may be all in all.

Human beings' connection to the fate of creation is further made evident by the presence of two groaning: the groaning of the creation (v22) and the groaning of human beings - the people of God (v23). The entire creation - human and sub-human realities - are involved in the groaning. The indicative present form of the verb 'to groan' in v22 (*sustenázetei*) describes this situation as something that has been and which continues until now. Creation groans, first of all, because it was made subject of futility (verse 20), and, second, because it is in the bondage of corruption (verse 21). Creation's

groan is caused by a long period of expectation, described by the verb *apekdéchomai*, which describes the pain of childbirth (Cf. Rom 8:19, 23, 25; Phil 3:20; Heb 9:28).

The pain of childbirth is used as metaphor to describe creation's experience of waiting (Rom 8:22). With this, another connection is made to the book of Genesis. In Gen 3:16, the existential reality of the woman's pain and groaning at child birth is presented as consequence of sin. According to Rom 8:22, instead, the birth pang is shown to be the fate of the entire creation. This connection is made to imply that creation looks forward to the revealing of the sons of God, just like a woman looks forward to the birth of a child. Since this metaphor speaks of the pain of childbirth, the expectation of creation can only be that of the joy and excitement which comes with childbirth.

These connections with the account of creation in Genesis confirms the sense of this final act of God as a restoration of what God ordained for creation at the beginning. It must be said further that Paul applies to creation the very terms he had used to describe the liberation of human beings from their bondage to sin.

The third part of Rom 8:18-30 describes another subject of groaning, who is the Spirit:

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (NRSV)

The groaning of the Spirit is different from the groaning of creation and of believers. The difference is that the Spirit does not groan out of restriction, but he gives an inexpressible deep-seated intercession on our behalf in order to help us in our weakness. The idea of our weakness seem to refer back to expressions of creation's bondage to futility (v20) and the weakness of our body to set itself free which necessitates its redemption (v23). The image of the Spirit who intercedes with silent groans is an evocation of the divine *pathos* (Fretheim, 1984: 116). It describes God who suffers with, rather than abandon his people, as they bear the punishment due to their sins. The Spirit is the assurance of God, who has never abandoned creation in its state of corruption. The idea of divine *pathos* provides the basis for the understanding of the goal of God's action as salvation and restoration.

After identifying the groaning of God's people with that of creation, Paul shifts his attention to the description of how creation depends on the sons of God for its redemption from bondage to decay (Rom 8:18-23). The idea expressed here describes the event of Christ in terms of human restoration in view of universal salvation. For Paul, therefore, God's agents for the liberation of creation from its bondage are sons and heirs of God under the leadership of the Spirit. This state of affairs will be accomplished as in the beginning, through the human being. The human being in question is not Adam, the "man of dust", but "the man of faith in Jesus", those who possess the Spirit, who are the first fruits of the resurrection. It means that in his omnipotence, God rehabilitates weak and sinful human being through the power of the Holy Spirit to carry forward the original human responsibility to creation.

Vessels of Mercy and Future Glory

Rom 8:28-30 is a summary of God's saving plan which involves those "who are called according to his purpose" (v28). This plan presented around a five-chain sequence of events: those whom he foreknew (*proégnō*), he called (*ekalesen*), he justified (*edikaiōsen*), he glorified (*edóxasen*), and he predestined to conform (*proorisen summorfous*) to the image of Christ. This sequence of events represent the stages from justification through sanctification to salvation. The first verb that designate God's foreknowledge (*proégnō*) relates to Hebrew verb *yadāh* used in the Old Testament to describe an intimate relationship which God establishes with those he has chosen for the purpose of fulfilling his divine purpose for creation (cf. Gen 18:17-19; Amos 3:2; Jer 1:5; Rom 11:2; cf. Fitzmyer, 1993: 525). Gen 18:17-19 offers a good example of a text that contains all the ingredients of the relationship that this verb indicates (see underlined phrases):

The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have foreknown him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."

In this text, the intimate relationship between God and Abraham, indicated, by the verb to know or to foreknow, is established by the requirements of righteousness and justice, and it is the basis for the fulfillment of the promise to bless the nations of the earth in him. In the Old Testament, this verb is used as the equivalent of the verb *kalein* (to call), which also designates those

electd or chosen by God. In Rom 8:28, both verbs 'to know' and 'to call' indicate the intimate relationship of love (*agapē*) between God and his elect. They are recipients of the gracious justifying work of God through the death of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The motive of their election is God's divine plan in creation. This is indicated by the verb 'to predestine' (*proorizō*). This verb does not include the sense of individual predestination to salvation or damnation, but it helps to bring out the meaning of God's action as a process which began from the moment of creation and in view of the incarnation. Its use here explains how those whom God has called serve God's predetermined purpose for creation, and how their fate is bound up with the redemption of creation (Nwachukwu, 2002: 308-309).

All the three verbs – to call, to foreknow and to predestine - are described with aorist verbs which indicate that these divine actions have become a reality in the event of Christ, even though salvation and glorification are also spoken of as future events (cf. Rom 5:10; 8:23-24). According to Rom 8:29, the actual goal of God's plan which began with the promise to Abraham is the conformity of the elect to the image of Jesus Christ. To describe the believer's likeness to Christ, Paul uses the very rare verb *summorfīzō* (to conform), meaning to confer the same form (Grundmann, 1971: 787). The meaning of this term in the text hinges on two other expressions which refer to Jesus as 'image' and 'firstborn'.

The biblical tradition that underlies the term 'image' (*eikōn*) has its foundation in Gen 1:27-28 where it is stated that God created Adam in his own image. The motif of 'image' is linked to the God-given human commission to mediate God's rule as God's representative through service of God's purpose for creation (Gen 2:15). Due to human disobedience to God, this commission was then given to Israel and described in royal and priestly terms (Exod 19:4-6). In

Hellenistic Judaism, the term *eikōn* (image) was applied to a variety of mediators through whom the invisible God revealed himself to the world (Eltester, 1958: 129). Similar to the word *eikōn* (image), the other term 'firstborn' (*prototōkos*) is also a term that expresses mediation.

In the Old Testament, the term 'firstborn' (*prototōkos* or Heb. *bekor*) designates the first male that opens the womb, who occupies a favored position of closeness to the father and given prerogatives that are not granted to other sons (Gen 10:15; Exod 6:14; Num 3:2; 1 Sam 14:49). He is the heir of the father's blessing and he deputizes for the father. These rights bestow on him a status of authority, sovereignty, responsibility and right of succession (Nwachukwu, 2002: 147). Similarly, Israel is called God's firstborn in relation to all the nations of the earth (Exod 4:22). Israel's position as firstborn describes her closeness to God, her consecration as God's people, her favored position as God's most treasured possession out of all the nations of the earth and her inheritance of God's promise. The concept of firstborn is another way of expressing the theology inherent in Gen 12:1-3 and Exod 19:4-6.

In Rom 8:27, Jesus is described as the firstborn within the family of the elect. The application of the term to Christ implies the uniqueness and the manifest superiority of Jesus, but also the sharing of his status with believers who are members of the same family of God (Fitzmyer, 1993: 525). Expressed in the passive, the subject of the action is God who conforms his elect into the image of his Son. The nature of this conformation could be discerned from the only other place in the New Testament where this word appears, which is the text of Phil 3:21. According to this text, God "will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enabled him to make all things subject to himself". This text implies that the idea of conforming the elect to the form of Christ is developed as

God's power to transform the weak and dead bodies of the elect into the glorious body of the resurrected Christ through the Spirit. This means conforming them to dying and rising with Christ.

Another Pauline text, 1 Cor 15:49, strongly supports the idea that the image of God's Son represents the original design of God for humanity when it says, "Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the man of heaven". Paul implies that the image of God and his dominion in creation is now mediated through Christ; not through the natural means of procreation, nor through obedience to the Law, but through the supernatural regeneration under the transforming power of the Holy Spirit (Levenson, 1993: 221). These ideas are more clearly expressed in 2 Cor 3:18 where the Spirit of the Lord is identified as the agent of the ongoing process of our transformation into the image of Christ's glory. The foregoing explanation of the meaning of God's action of conformation shows that it does not relate to external likeness to Christ; rather, it points to process by which believers are empowered to adopt the spirit-filled life of Jesus Christ even now during their earthly existence. This is an essential process of the transformation of believers into the image of the risen state of Christ in glory (Brodeur, 1996: 141).

The end to which God calls his elect and justifies them is their glorification. Rom 8:18-30 has references to glory in its opening (v18) and closing (v30) sections. Earlier in the letter (Rom 1:23; 2:7, 10; 3:23; 5:2), Paul had described glory, on the one hand, as that element of relationship with God which humanity had lost due to sin. On the other hand, it is the full realization of God's design for human beings (1 Cor 2:7), which is conformity to the image of Christ.

The application of terms like 'image' and 'firstborn' makes it evident that Paul is describing the routing of eschatological salvation through human mediation. One is moved to ask if human mediation would not frustrate God's action, as it had done from the beginning. Would the universal flavor of God's action in Christ not experience vulnerability in confrontation with human action? This impression is annulled by the fact that final redemption is the work of God through the Holy Spirit. Moreover, by describing believers as "first fruits" in Rom 8:23 and as "those who exercise of dominion in life" in Rom 5:17, Paul affirms that those who believe in Christ, who possess the Spirit, are already signs of the universal salvation which will be completed at the time of consummation (cf. Dunn, 1988: 277). This conclusion confirms the New Testament witness that Jesus is the goal of creation: "all things are created through him and for him" (Col 1:16) and in him is the fulfilment of all God's promises of salvation to the world and to Israel.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

In concluding my lecture, I feel obliged to return to the very problem that inspired this study, which is expressed in Paul's admission that Israel, even though she does not believe in Christ, will be saved.

²⁶And so all Israel will be saved; as it is written, "Out of Zion will come the Deliverer; he will banish ungodliness from Jacob." ²⁷And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins. ²⁸As regards the gospel they are enemies of God for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their ancestors; ²⁹for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they have now been disobedient in order

that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. ³³For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all (cf. Rom 11:26-32).

In this text, Paul recaps his point of departure for his reflection in Rom 9-11, which concerns God's apparent indiscriminate choice of Jews and Gentiles in salvation history. It reminds me of when a theology student cited this text to me to express his confusion over the disconcerting statements which the last verse (v32) of this text presents about God. According to him, God is presented as if he were a deceitful player, who imprisoned all in disobedience; so why does he blame humans for disobeying him? He saves them, helpless as they have become, out of mercy; so he takes undeserved credit and worship. I did not know how I escaped the hungry eyes of my students that day. All I could remember is that I prayed and wisdom was given to me.

In the effort to understand this text, one must not forget the immediately succeeding verse where Paul says that this is a mystery about God's unsearchable and inscrutable ways (Rom 11:33). No human logic can satisfy or explain why Paul would assert that all Israel will be saved in spite of their ongoing disbelief in Christ, and why God imprisoned all humanity under disobedience (Rom 11:32) in order to save them at the end. Before this text, Paul had reflected on the difficult journey of human beings from the sin of Adam towards fullness of obedient sonship in Christ. The idea of imprisonment to disobedience has an equivalent parallel in Rom 8:20 where Paul speaks of the subjection of creation to futility and decay as a reference to the natural state of weakness which characterize human existence. Rom 11:25-32 is the climax of Paul's discussion on the place of Israel and Gentiles in God's plan of salvation.

Inquiry into the meaning of “all Israel” in Rom 11:26 is necessary at this stage. Scholarly discussion of this issue focuses on whether “all Israel” refers to ethnic Israel (for instance, Fitzmyer, 1993: 627) or to a remnant in Israel (for instance, Moo, 1995: 254-255) or to the Church (for instance, Wright, 1992: 236-246). Dunn has thinks that it refers to faithful Israel and the Church because according to him, the Church is defined by inclusion in Israel (Dunn, 1998: 504-509). The conflated texts of Isa 59:20 and Isa 27:9 which Paul cites in support of the statement in Rom 11:26 provide him with a theological category for expressing the unconditional message of deliverance for Israel. In these texts, Paul understood that God will, in a definite way, fulfil his covenant with Israel by removing the ungodliness which had delayed salvation, and this will happen within the context of God's salvific act for all creation. This meaning accords with Paul's understanding of the death of Jesus as the revelation of the righteousness of God (Nwachukwu, 2002: 246).

Universal salvation is not a popular notion in theology, even though seeds of the idea are prevalent in the Bible. Paul is not a lone voice in the New Testament in regard to ideas about the universal character of eschatological redemption. Analogous ideas are found in texts like 1 Cor 15:22, 28; 1 Tim 2:4; 4:10 and Col 1:19-20. Conversely, some other texts of scripture have a restricted and ethical view of salvation according to which God's justice will be revealed as punishment for disobedient humanity. Examples are:

John 3:36

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

2Thess 1:8-9

“He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. “They will be punished with everlasting

destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

Against this ethical dimension of the eschatological doctrine is the impressive faith articulated in the Letter to the Romans. While it could be admitted that no serious treatment of Christian eschatology can pass over in silence the ethical issues that arise from Israel's rejection of the gospel, Paul's arguments in Rom 9-11 express the conviction that at the time of consummation, a comprehensive vision of a transformation of all things in the light of God's glory would serve as the key to interpreting God's final action for creation.

There are bases on which Paul bridges the gap between the awareness of the normative character of faith in Christ and the dreadful implication of the covenant unfaithfulness of Israel. The interpretation of the letter to the Romans made in this work did well to point out different nuances of meaning inherent in the terminologies and themes which Paul employed in the letter. Theological themes of righteousness of God, election, covenant and the theme of God's wrath and mercy and their related terminology are used to address the tension between divine justice and mercy, and the concurrent issues relating to God's covenant faithfulness and his sovereignty in creation. Besides their meaning as expressions of the gracious character of God's action for human beings and creation, they also describe God as suffering with creation. The God who is revealed in his righteousness and in his covenant is the God who is behind the assertion that "while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom 5:6). Moreover the potter-clay metaphor which Paul applied to the thorny question of Israel's recalcitrant state also reveals the image of the God who is not only the creator and designer of human destiny, but also the God who, like the potter, takes

responsibility for the fragility and the weakness of creaturely existence. All these ideas relate to how eschatological universal salvation is the outcome of the revelation of God's power to achieve victory over any conceivable threat to his purpose for creation.

In its various sections, especially Rom 9-11, the letter to the Romans makes a strong case of the unity of those elected as instruments of salvation and those who are not elected. So, even though the election of some might seem an unjust act by God, as Rom 11:28-32 seemed to suggest, it does not lead to the exclusion or damnation of the non-elected. Rather, the goal of election is mercy for all (Rom 11:32). The non-elect or the unchosen are not outside of God's plan. The interchanging functions of vessels of wrath and vessels of mercy, as Paul describes them in Rom 9:22-23, underscore the fact that the election of some does not mean the damnation of others. This is clearly stated in Rom 11:30-31 "Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy". The texts underscore the belief that God can use any vessel to achieve his ultimate aim to show mercy, and this is an expression of divine omnipotence in creation. Pharaoh was a vessel of wrath whom God used to proclaim his power and lordship (Rom 9:17).

In fact, Paul's letter to the Romans could be described as an investigation into the meaning of divine sovereignty and omnipotence in relation to his divine purpose for creation and for his creatures. In discussing the nature of redemption, Paul made constant appeal to terms which describe the sovereign power of God in creation, his power to create, to raise the dead, to bring life out of nothing, and to liberate his people from bondage. Paul seemed to have been investigating if God, all sovereign and omnipotent,

could allow his beloved though sinful creatures to be swallowed up by evil at the end of time? Is the final damnation of some not a contradiction to the idea of divine sovereignty and omnipotence?

In the biblical tradition of Abraham (Gen 12-24), Paul discovered seeds of this universal divine plan to save all. It is found in Abraham's being a blessing for all the families of the earth (Gen 12:3), in his blessing as the father of Israel and of other nations (Gen 17:5); in righteousness being reckoned to him not by merit but on the basis of faith (Gen 15:6), in his being model of belief in the power of God to give life to our mortal bodies (Rom 4:24), in his transmitting God's ways of righteousness and justice to his descendants (Gen 18:16-19), and his ability to reveal the power and beneficial impact of righteous living on others (Gen 18:23-32). Like Abraham, the question is asked if the Lord would sweep away the place and not forgive it for the sake of the righteous who are in it (Gen 18:22-33).

The Letter to the Romans makes a good case of the great relevance of bearers of the righteousness of God, those "for the sake of whom" God will not destroy but will redeem creation from its bondage to decay. Romans contains themes which imply that the original purpose of God which God intended to realise in creation through human agency will be fulfilled at this eschatological time through the vessels of mercy. These are those called and justified by the gracious act of God's liberation from the power of sin and death and who have been empowered by the Holy Spirit, the agent of the ongoing process of their transformation and conformation to the image of Christ's glory. In Christ and through the work of the Spirit, the very righteousness of God shapes the lives of those whom God has called in Christ as the vessels of mercy. Thanks to their ongoing conformation to Christ, these vessels of mercy will have domineering influence of grace on others. The final

victory of God over the powers that hold creation and humanity under bondage will be achieved through the inner connection between human redemption from sin, sonship in Christ through the Spirit and the ongoing conformation of believer to the pattern of Christ death and resurrection.

This lecture does not give me the time to relate the issues raised here to what the Church says about the Church as the sacrament of salvation, the Church's relation to non-Christian religions and the question of the anonymous Christian. It suffices to point out that Vatican II, through its teaching (especially *Ad Gentes; Lumen Gentium*), has discouraged ideas which equate believers in Christ with salvation and non-believers with damnation. The profession of GOD'S EVERLASTING MERCY has been the content of the credo and song of the Church from the Magnificat of Mary and the Nunc Dimitis of Simeon to the present. All ambivalence between the two notions of God's wrath and mercy is found reconciled in the lived experience of God's everlasting mercy.

Let us always remember the great lessons of this lecture:

- In Christ, God has called you to become a vessel of mercy. So dispose your life to be empowered by the Spirit as instrument of salvation.
- Humanity is the greatest investment for the creation of a renewed world.
- Never judge people by their limitations but by the exigencies of your responsibility for them.
- Be faithful to your relationships.

Today, I repeat the Nunc Dimitis of Simeon because with this lecture, I proclaim that my eyes have seen the salvation which God has prepared for all nations.

APPENDIX A

My Academic Journey

My academic journey to the rank of Professor is like a journey to freedom. Let me, therefore, begin this inaugural speech with one of the most famous quotes of Nelson Mandela who said,

“I have walked that long road to freedom. I have tried not to falter; I have made missteps along the way. But I have discovered the secret that after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb. I have taken a moment here to rest, to steal a view of the glorious vista that surrounds me, to look back on the distance I have come. But I can only rest for a moment, for with freedom come responsibilities, and I dare not linger, for my long walk is not ended.”

I like to let you know that my journey is like a tale of feat drives, which saw me climbing from one hill to another, falling off the cliffs at some points but rising with greater determination to continue the journey. The grace of becoming a Daughter of Divine Love, and the rare opportunity of becoming a biblical scholar are the two things I consider as God's greatest gifts to me. For this, I remain grateful to this religious family that nurtured me and who put me on the pedestal of educational industry. Having been decorated with the title of Professor, I realize that my academic journey should continue with lengthier strides.

My higher academic journey started in Rome where I did biblical studies at the prestigious Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome, otherwise known as BIBLICUM. The requirements for studying at the Biblicum are: first degrees

in Philosophy and Theology which preceded my studies at the Biblicum. Students of the Biblicum are admitted with provisional admission which is confirmed after a successful examination at the end of the first year of study. This exam included the translation of sections of the Hebrew text of Judges and the Greek text of the Gospel of Mark without the dictionary. This explains the intense nature of the study with its focus on the original texts of the Bible. The curriculum included courses in biblical and oriental studies and a compulsory tour of the lands of the Bible in Israel and surrounding countries like Syria, Egypt and Jordan. Besides exposure to the lands of the biblical world and ancient texts of the Bible, the curriculum at the Biblicum also exposed students to different research methods for biblical research. The research method that won my fascination is the canonical research method or what is otherwise known as canonical criticism.

My fascination for the canonical criticism was inspired by one of my lecturers at the Biblicum, Fr. James Swetnam, who for over forty years taught Biblical Greek and moderated a seminar titled "Old Testament Backgrounds of the New Testament". My participation on his seminar session opened my mind to the reality of the wealth of interpretation within scripture itself, an art of biblical interpretation which J.W. Aageson calls "scripture interpreting scripture" (J.W. Aageson, *Written Also for Our Sake. Paul and the Art of Biblical Interpretation*, Louisville 1993). I have learnt to begin all my interpretation of the biblical text by looking at how other parts of the Bible interpret that text, that is, how the community of believers received that message before it reached us. I was fortunate to have been mentored by Rev, Fr. Professor James Swetnam, a great iroko of Biblicum, who also was the moderator of my doctoral thesis titled *Creation - Covenant Scheme and Justification by Faith. A Canonical Study of the God - Human Drama in the Pentateuch and in the Letter to the Romans* (Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2002).

APPENDIX B

My Research Methodology

The canonical criticism was popularized by Brevard Childs in 1979 (in his *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*), even though the phrase was first used by James Sanders in 1972 (*Torah and Canon*, Fortress Press). Compared to older historical research methods, canonical criticism is both new and complementary, the reason of which L.G. Perdue said that biblical interpretation was standing on the threshold of a new era, having witnessed the collapse of historical methods as the dominant paradigm in biblical interpretation (L.G. Perdue, 1994).

My adoption of this research method was motivated by my passion for the canonical and inter-testamental connections of the biblical message and the desire to see in what manner a text discloses a canonical reality that is theologically normative for the faith community. Since the method emphasizes, along with the final form of the text, also the process within the community, which resulted in the formation of the canon, it situates each biblical text within the single plan of God (Childs, 1979: 76, 83; Nwachukwu, 2002: 10).

Applying Canonical Criticism to the Study of Pauline Letters

Of all New Testament authors, I am enthralled mostly by St Paul, thanks to whose total self-giving to Christ and openness to the Holy Spirit was able to have deep insights into the wisdom and power of God. Reading through his letters, one also discovers his unparalleled knowledge of the scriptures. He was able to weave a Christian theology that is more acutely grounded in the Old Testament. Paul sought to situate the event of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection within God's one plan of salvation from the beginning of

creation in order to strive for an actualization of the Holy Scriptures for contemporary Christians.

I find canonical criticism best suited for any studies in Pauline literature, for the following reasons: (a) Paul's letters bear numerous citations and allusions to the sacred scriptures, and this clearly indicates that his arguments are steeped in the Old Testament. The Letter to the Romans, for instance, has 47 explicit quotations from the Old Testament and 72 implicit quotations and allusions (Nwachukwu, 2002: 27). This clearly shows that Paul's doctrine takes its origin from the Old Testament. And where he does not quote directly, he uses key Old Testament words to relate biblical passages to his elaborate theological themes. (b) Secondly, Paul's central message revolves around the "Gospel of Jesus Christ", which he says was promised beforehand through the Law and the Prophets (Rom 1:1-2; 3:21). This affirmation guides the reader to the source of his doctrine of Justification by faith, which is Sacred Scripture. The dominant perspective of this doctrine is Jesus Christ as the climax of Israel's covenant history (cf. Rom 3:21-26; 9:4-5; 10:4; (Nwachukwu, 2002: 27). (c) Given the two evidences above, I take advantage of canonical criticism's emphasis on the function and authority of tradition in the believing community and its witness to the presence of inner biblical exegesis within scripture (Fishbane, 1980:343-361). This method is best suited for the understanding and interpretation of inter-textual connections in Pauline literature. It leads to the clear appreciation of how individual biblical texts are interpreted primarily within the context of the entire Bible.

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The same grace of God led me to become a religious sister, member of Daughters of Divine Love, a Congregation founded by His Lordship, Most Rev. Godfrey MaryPaul Okoye. I am deeply grateful to DDL, the religious family who nurtured God's gifts in me and gave me golden opportunities and experiences that made me who I am. I reserve special thanks to my superior General, Rev. Mother Anastasia Dike, for her care and friendship. Thanks to the priceless support she gives me, I have the liberty of spirit to do my apostolate. I equally thank Mother Chilota Elochukwu and Mother Ifechukwu Udorah for their motherly love and support. I thank all my elder sisters in the congregation for giving me the space to grow, all the sisters I have lived with in the community and all the Daughters for their love for me.

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