depression when there seem to be no results, the emotional exhaustion which pastoral concern can bring on — in short, all the times when the Christian life must be in some sense stretched to the limits of its capacities for a task which is very nearly, but by God's grace not quite, too much for him. Anyone who knows only his strength, not his weakness, has never given himself to a task which demands all he can give. There is no avoiding this weakness, and we should learn to suspect those models of human life which try to avoid it. We should not be taken in by the ideal of the charismatic superman for whom the Holy Spirit is a constant source of superhuman strength. Nor should we fall for the ideal of the modern secular superman: the man who organizes his whole life with the object of maintaining his own physical and mental well-being, who keeps up his impressions and his prestige, and who keeps his life well within the limits of what he can easily cope with. Such a man is never weak because he is never affected, concerned, involved or committed beyond a cautiously safe limit. That was neither Jesus' ideal of life nor Paul's. To be controlled by the love of Christ means inevitably to reach the limits of one's abilities and experience weakness.

Of course, I am not suggesting that the Christian minister may not take reasonable precautions against overwork or reasonable steps to maintain his physical and mental health. Nor am I suggesting he should not do his best to be efficient in his work. He owes it to his Lord to do so. But a perspective on Christian service taken up further than that. The Christian minister should be sensible, but above all he must be wholehearted. He should try to be efficient, but even when his efficiency runs out the effectiveness of his ministry need not do so. His efficiency may actually need sometimes to run out — by necessity, not neglect — if the power of Christ is to prove effective in his ministry.

That the Christian minister's life should match his message is a common enough thought. But the content which Paul gives to it is not so commonplace. For Paul the Christian minister's weakness is not the point where he is failing, but the point where the deepest integration of his life and his ministry as a whole is possible. If he can respond to God at that point in his experience as Paul did, then it will be for him an experience of Jesus Christ, and for his ministry an occasion for God's power to be most evidently and characteristically at work. The impressiveness of his ministry will not be his own impressiveness, but that of his message which matches up to the experience of human weakness and makes it the vehicle of God's power.

For those with ears to hear, that quotation says it all. Kösemann is self-consciously a Protestant, a pupil of Bultmann; an avid historical critic; and one who has wrestled long and hard with Paul, and with the problems which his thought raises in particular. His large-scale commentary is the result. It breathes the air of the sophisticated German Protestant criticism of the last 50 years, with all its dialectical tensions and ambiguities. He is passionately concerned with Paul's view of Christian freedom, and equally passionately concerned to maintain the true (i.e., Reformation) heritage and tradition. It is doggedly set on producing, through ruthless historical criticism, both and of all these views. What Paul was talking about and the message which Romans has for the church in the twentieth century. There is already a tension in this double aim which is perhaps all the healthier for never being resolved in Kösemann's writings. On the one hand the commentary gives constant support to an earlier statement of intent:

My questioning and my listening have never been directed exclusively to academic theology. . . . Theology has both the commission and the capacity to summon the church to take up the promise which is given to her . . . my work is intended to have doctrinal implications. Controversy with lesser, or less serious, views would be merely pretentious . . . it is for the very purpose of liberating the church for decisive action that theology has to carry out its work of radical and critical questioning.

On the other hand, the commitment to rigorous historical-critical exegesis — already invoked, in fact, as part of the hermeneutical task — is stated with equal vigour:

The impatience, who are concerned only about results or practical application, should leave their hands off exegesis. They are of no value to it, nor, when rightly done, is exegesis of any value to them.

One can see what he means, even if the expression is a little harsh. But there is no distinction between the practical value of theological exegesis which Kösemann commends and exemplifies and the "practical application" which he despises is, in the last resort, a subtle one, and the reader will have to decide whether it can be consistently maintained.

Certainly for Kösemann the desire (and calling?) to 'liberate the church for decisive action' is so strong that in many passages Paul is made — forced, some might say — to speak directly to the twentieth century. The whole work of Paul in life with the fundamental question of 'New Testament Theology' ('Are we doing history, or normative theology, or both?') and the tension that results from giving the answer both is clear through his work, just as it was, though in different ways, in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann.

But the world to which Kösemann believes that Paul must be related is not a world in which many readers of the new English translation of his commentary will feel at home. It is the world of post-war German Lutheranism, bruised and shocked after the 'church struggle' of the '30s and '40s, horrified by the Holocaust, bewildered to discover that Nazism is still not eradicated, fearful lest the church in Europe be seducing the gospel. Those who know little about Bonhoeffer and nothing about the Barmen Declaration will find themselves at sea in passage after passage of Kösemann's polemic. He not only fights battles which are not his own (say) for Englishmen or North Americans (we have our own battles: some of them may have analogies with the German situation: but they are not the same ones). He does so allusively, like Dante, so that the uninitiated need almost a running commentary to see what lies behind the sharp remark, the sudden outburst, the sustained polemic, indeed the whole massively thought-out reinterpretation of Paul and his theology, to look respectable ('find out what God is doing in our nation, and do it with him . . .'). He opposes a

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1. Kösemann, *Commentary on Romans* (ET Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: SCM, 1980). See also *Exegese und Hermeneutik in der Reformierten Theologie*, 2 (Tübingen: C. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1974). Page references below are to this book unless otherwise stated; and, unless otherwise noted, the German and English publishers of Kösemann's other writings are the same as for the commentary. There are many small changes between the first and third German editions, though they involve some renumbering of pages.

2. "New Testament Questions of Today (hereafter NTQT): London: SCM, 1969, p. 41. Cf. *Exegese und Hermeneutik in der Reformierten Theologie*, 2 (Tübingen: C. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1974). Page references below are to this book unless otherwise stated; and, unless otherwise noted, the German and English publishers of Kösemann's other writings are the same as for the commentary.

3. Compare the passages which speak disparagingly of "edifying" exposition, e.g. p. 250: "Apocalyptic alone can explain . . . i.e., the revelation of the love of Christ's love and preserve us from the usual edifying interpretation that this is an allusion to God's love for the Church (2 Cor 5:14; also, Jeus, *Religionsgeschichte* [hereafter *RF*], 1968, 9, 5th enlarged, German edn. was published in 1972.)."

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A new Tübingen school? Ernst Käsemann and his commentary on Romans

T. N. Wright

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In 1925, as a student of 19 years old, Ernst Käsemann attended a lecture course by (Erik Peterson) on the Epistle to the Romans. Looking back from the vantage point of 1973, he could write with satisfaction that his experience determined his course of study 'and in some sense, as faiths, a theologian, my life'. The basic problem was posed. In the following semesters I then listened to the expositions of H. von Soden and R. Bultmann. I then turned to the commentary work of W. T. Tübingen, C. B. Moltz (Paul Siebeck), [1974] Page references below are to this book unless otherwise stated; and, unless otherwise noted, the German and English publishers of Käsemann's other writings are the same as for the commentary. There are some small changes between the first and third German editions, though they involve some renumbering of pages.

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He discerns in contemporary German Protestantism a comfortable bourgeois mentality that seeks from the gospel not a challenge to radical obedience but a prop for the status quo. He sees in the rediscovery of ‘salvation history’ a relapse into the facile theology that looks respectable (find out what God is doing in our nation, and do it with him . . .). He opposes a

1 Ernst Käsemann, Commentary on Romans (ET Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: SCM, 1980), p. vii. (ET of An Introduction to New Testament Thought, T. W. TV in, C. B. Moltz (Paul Siebeck), [1974] Page references below are to this book unless otherwise stated; and, unless otherwise noted, the German and English publishers of Käsemann’s other writings are the same as for the commentary. There are some small changes between the first and third German editions, though they involve some renumbering of pages.


3 Compare the passages which speak disparagingly of the ‘edifying’ exposition, e.g. p. 250: ‘Apocalyptic alone can explain it, i.e. i.e. the revelation of Christ’s love and preserve us from the usual edifying interpretation’. Cf. also, of course, Jesus of History, Jesus of Freedom (hereafter Freedom: London, 1969), p. 14. (ET of Der Prophet von Frank, Tübingen, 1968; a 5th enlarged, German edn. was published in 1972.)


5 See his article on ‘Justification and Salvation History’ in Perspectives on Paul (hereafter PP: London, 1971), pp. 68-78, where he actually quotes this, cf. his article on ‘Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith’ in Jesus and Church (hereafter JC: London, 1975), pp. 28ff, 134f., etc; Käsemann is here close to Barth and Bonhoeffer in his emphasis on the first commandment (see E. Busch, Karl Barth. His Life from Letters and Autobiographical
theology of resurrection' with the old Lutheran theologica crucis: God is not the God of the godly, the devout, the comfortable, those who are at ease in Zion, but is the justifier of the outsider, the ungodly, the friend of sinners and set comfortable society by its ears. (It would be to miss the point entirely to object that Christianity is based on the cross and the resurrection. Käsemann knows that perfectly well; he is here confessing a weakness of attitudes which he, and those he opposes, have characterised in this sometimes unhelpful fashion. The question is not -- or not directly -- whether Käsemann 'believes in the resurrection', but whether it is to be seen as an all-embracing theme, with the cross merely as its preliminary, or as the next chapter in the theology of the cross itself.)

Thus Käsemann can write of Jesus that 'the revolutionaries had their eye on him, and felt able to set the world on fire for a time. We are now paying heavily for the fact that German Christian people (original: deutsche Christenheit) failed to appreciate this and made him a bourgeois after their own image; and in exactly the same way his laments over the decline of the theologies of his own time have been taken seriously enough by those who had every occasion to do so.' It might be thought that Käsemann is fighting out-of-date battles, seeking merely to exorcise ghosts from the past. It is not to be denied that, if I do know that the concerns which most fire him are not, and for all sorts of good reasons simply cannot be, pressing concerns for those who have not shared the struggles of German Protestantism -- unless we are mistaken, see Germany as Käsemann thinks Paul saw Israel, as somehow paradigmatic for the rest of mankind.

If these remarks serve to distance English readers from Käsemann, they should in doing so, rather than lessen, their respect for him. Germany has signally refused to allow the academic to be isolated from the 'real world', and Käsemann stands in the noble tradition of those who are determined to integrate their academic work into the different sides of a theologian's existence. And because Käsemann, by conviction, an exegete first and foremost, one who has struggled long and hard to think Paul's thoughts after him, his work remains fascinating and disturbing, for those like myself who, though born out of
due time, are unable to feel the last war as part of their own experience. For those who can remember, and for those who wish to continue to relate the New Testament to what Barth called 'dogmatics', the present book will have already a great stimulus to faith and will no doubt continue to do so.

Before launching into an exposition and critique of Käsemann's theological position, some remarks are in order about his work as a tool for studying Romans. Perhaps the most telling thing that can be said about it is that its tone is very reminiscent of Barth's famous commentary. It is more like a theological treatise, which happens to give the text of the epistle, than a commentary as usually understood; but because it does follow the text of the epistle it is a difficult treatise to read. (This is of course the result of the tension we noted earlier between his historical and his theological results.) The methodological discussions jostle with minimal textural or verbal notes, without any signposts or crossheadings within the long sections into which Käsemann divides the epistle. Forgoing the use of 'footnotes' (the writing of exegesis is a junior priority to exegesis; but there are plenty of shadowy excursuses in-all-but-name, confusing in their unheralded appearance. There is no introduction or conclusion; nor are there any indices, and the thought is very inadequate. In order to be able to see the book one really needs to scribble in one's own headings, and to complete indices as one goes along. And another trait reminiscent of Barth, who has perhaps been more influential for me than a pupil of Bultmann would care to acknowledge -- there are many passages both evocative and cryptic, teasing and paradoxical. Contrast this with (say) Cranfield; at least with the latter you know that if you comprehend a sentence, and find it odd, and so sentence again, light will dawn. With Käsemann, as often with Barth, there is no such guarantee. Perhaps both would claim that this is a virtue in theology.

1 Friedrich, W. Püttmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds), Rechtfertigung. Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag (Tübingen: Mohr und Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1976). I shall note below, en passant, several of the thirty articles, all of which are in German except for two English ones. The volume as a whole is a carefully thought out work, and a worthy tribute.


3 I have my doubts about words like 'noninterchangeable' (p. 384) (especially as applied to God!); and, though it may sound faint praise, I was impressed by a Greek writer in a recent article in Evangelische Theologie 21, 1976, pp. 80-94; K. P. Donfried in Religious Studies Review 2, 1974, pp. 84-94; M. A. Lewandowski, 'An Introduction to Ernst Käsemann's Theology' in Encounter (Indianapolis, Indiana) 35, 1974, pp. 222-242.

4 See also W. Püttmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds), Rechtfertigung. Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag (Tübingen: Mohr and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1976).

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At the same time, the book is an exegetical tool of great value. Its grasp of detail, as well as of whole arguments, is massively impressive: Käsemann has read the book up to the 30's (providing incidentally a silent support for quite different modes of thought), and continued to do so until W. D. Davies registered his protest in Paul and Rabbinic Judaism. Since then the lines have not been so easy to follow. Already Bultmann, who was among the first to attempt to set Paul against a background neither hellenistic nor rabbinic, but strictly apocalyptic. This suggestion, scorned at the time, has now come to roost in the work of the new Tübingen school, namely, that the term follows. Though some of Paul's ideas (e.g., his baptism-theology in Rom. 6) are still held to derive from the mystery-religions, the great emphases in can only be understood in terms of apocalyptic.
was the centre of Paul's thought, Käsemann from the same background puts forward a view of God's 'righteousness', focused on the crucified Christ, as the chief point on which the whole doctrine of the Incarnation, or whatever the 'link' is, between church and church then requires a toning down of Paul's polemic, and Käsemann finds this in the 'deuter- Pauline' and 'early Catholic' writings. Questions remain about the exact meaning and motivation of Käsemann's line of thought, but it is clear that there is no doubt that it is a thesis of this scope and breadth, and originality, which is being advanced.

The righteousness of God
The most striking result of Käsemann's position is the reinterpretation of dikaiosunē theou. Just as he initiated a new phase of gospel study with his essay on the historical Jesus, so Käsemann launched a whole research programme with his short paper on 'The Righteousness of God', originally delivered in Oxford on 14 September 1961.16 Teaching experience suggests that, even though several accounts of Käsemann's discovery are available, English-speaking students still find it difficult to grasp. Yet another attempt at explanation may therefore be in order.

Käsemann develops his view in sharp contrast to the more prevailing, but note, in line with Bultmann, Conzelmann, Cranfield and others, that dikaiosunē theou in Paul usually refers to that 'righteousness', i.e. that righteous status, which the believer has as a result of God's action in Christ according to the place. This 'righteousness' is predicated of the believer, and theos is either a genitive of origin (righteousness from God) or an objective genitive (the righteousness which counts before God). Käsemann rejects this, along with the whole individualistic solution which he sees as its context. In its place he suggests a new meaning for dikaiosunē and a new understanding of theos, based (quite consistently with his soteriology) on an apocalyptic phrase now reinterpreted by Paul in the light of Christology. This phrase, found in the Scrolls and elsewhere (e.g.

IQS 11.12; CD 20.20; Test. Dan 6.10) is, according to Käsemann and his followers,17 a technical term, and refers neither to a moral quality of God nor to a divine attribute, but rather to a reality which is extraneous to God or with God, but to God's 'salvation-creating power'. This somewhat compressed phrase denotes God's saving activity seen both as power (God's own power with which he conquers evil and establishes his own dominion over the cosmos) and as gift (the same power, now given to the believer so that he is recapitulated for radical obedience to God). Dikaiosunē is thus basically an activity of God, and theos is therefore a subjective generic.

This leads inevitably to a new view of justification18 and faith. If 'The revelation of God's righteousness' means God's triumph over the world in the cross of Christ, faith is 'the liberating'19 acknowledgement of this event in the subsequent effect of the consequent Lordship of Christ.20 As for Bultmann, faith and radical obedience are really the same thing; though, in sharp contrast to Bultmann, the meaning of that faith and obedience is understood in the context of the contemporary relational theology rather than that of individualistic existentialism. 'Justification' is therefore that action of God by which the believer is brought into this new position of faith/obedience.

Christology
Underneath all this is Christology. Käsemann uses this word not primarily to refer to the question of Jesus' 'divinity' and/or 'humanity', but rather as a shorthand for the theologia crucis, the revelation of God's righteousness in the cross, by which the world is defeated, and because of which the believer is challenged, and enabled, to live by faith rather than in the false confidence of piety and religious respectability. Just as the cross was, for Luther, the weapon to be used against all human righteousness and cleverness, so for Käsemann it becomes the centre of his whole polemical position.

Christology stands over against anthropology and ecclesiology. By 'anthropology', Käsemann refers to Bultmann's reduction of Paul's message to the analysis of 'how one is justified/saved': by 'ecclesiology' he seems to mean theological positions which move from Roman Catholicism. Here again a certain level of groundwork knowledge may help. Käsemann is very conscious of the fact that some of his fellow-pupils under Bultmann have made a different pilgrimage to the Roman Catholicism of the 'other solution' to the problem, and to a knowledge of that branch of Roman Catholicism, the only alternative to Bultmann's version of Protestantism. Heinrich Schlier, himself the author of a large recent commentary on Romans, is the most obvious example.21 Käsemann sets out a third alternative which enables him — indeed, requires him — to remain a radical Protestant while avoiding the many dangers which he, like Schlier, sees in Bultmann. Here we encounter Käsemann's characteristic Reformation battle-cries: his understanding of the modern theological situation in Germany is that the radical historical criticisms such as himself represent the genuine Lutheran tradition, protesting against a theologia gloriae, a theology of the church triumphant, of worthy development of the human religiousness such as Käsemann sees not only in Catholicism but also in many churches — not least those which in England would be called 'evangelical' — which might consider themselves within the Reformation heritage.

Thus the basic human problem, which in Käsemann's theology takes the place occupied, in Bultmann, by the analysis of man's inauthenticity, is that man precisely in his religion is in rebellion against God.

Here is the heart of Paul's teaching. It is not just that...

21 This theme crops up frequently in Rechifigur. See particularly D. Lührmann, 'Christologie und Rechifigur' (pp. 351-371 in Beiträge zur Paulinischen Theologie, ed. H. G. M. Williamson, E. F. Limperis and W. Schenke; 1973). Paul's theology of the cross (pp. 509-526). M. Hengel's massive article 'More than a Trinitarian/Crucifixion (pp. 125-184) has now been simply classified as a separate beast. ('Crescimento em natureza' and the Bolso of the Message of the Cross. London: SCM, 1977), all the more harrowing for its sober historical tone. It is dedicated, significantly, to the memory of Käsemann's daughter Elisabeth, who died in 1977, aged twenty-five.

22 See the typically cryptic freedom, p. 91. Schiller's best known 'christological' hymn, the 'Christ had yielded...'. It holds the epistle to be Pauline and indeed representative of true Pauline thought, while in Romans (as has indeed been pointed out by many others) Käsemann insists that none of these works is available in English.


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was the centre of Paul's thought, Käsemann from the same background puts forward a view of God's righteousness, focused on the crucified Christ, as the chief point in the work of salvation, or the link between God and humankind. His church then requires a toning down of Paul's polemic, and Käsemann finds this in the "deutero-Pauline" and 'early Catholic' writings. Questions remain about the historical accuracy of this reconstruction, but it could be no doubt that it is a thesis of this scope and breadth, and originality, which is being advanced.

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Christology
Underneath all this is Christology. Käsemann uses this word not primarily to refer to the question of Jesus's 'divinity' and/or 'humanity', but rather as a shorthand for the theologica crucis, the revelation of God's righteousness in the cross, by which the world is defeated, and because of which the believer is challenged, and enabled, to live by faith rather than in the false confidence of piety and religious respectability. Just as the cross was, for Luther, the weapon to be used against all human righteousness and cleverness, so for Käsemann it becomes the centre of his whole polemical position.

Christology stands over against anthropology and ecclesiology. By 'anthropology', Käsemann refers to Bultmann's reduction of Paul's message to the analysis of 'how one is justified/saved': by 'ecclesiology' he seems to mean theological positionings towards Roman Catholicism. Here again a certain amount of ground knowledge may help. Käsemann is very conscious of the fact that some of his fellow-pupils under Bultmann have made a different pilgrimage to Rome and Rome Catholicism, and the only alternative to Bultmann's version of Protestantism. Heinrich Schlicher, himself the author of a large recent commentary on Romans, is the most obvious example. Käsemann sets out a third alternative which enables him - indeed, requires him - to remain a radical Protestant while avoiding the many dangers which he, like Schlicher, sees in Bultmann. Here we encounter Käsemann's characteristic Reformation battle cries: his understanding of the modern theological situation in Germany is that the radical historical criticism as himself represent the genuine Lutheran tradition, protesting against a theologica graecae, a theology of the church triumphant, of worldly development and of religious respectability such as Käsemann sees not only in Catholicism but also in many churches - not least those which in England would be called 'evangelical' - which like to consider themselves within the Reformata heritage.

Thus the basic human problem, which in Käsemann's theology takes the place occupied, in Bultmann, by the analysis of man's inauthenticity, is that man precisely in his religion is in rebellion against himself.

Here is the heart of Paul's teaching. It is not just that

28 This theme crops up frequently in Rechfirmung. See particularly D. Lührmann, 'Christologie und Rechfirmung' (pp. 31-51 in Rechfirmung: Theologie des Paulus' (1975)), H. L. Schmoller, 'Paulus' Rechfirmung' (pp. 145-96 in Theologische Rundschau) and Fred Baur, 'Paul's theology of the cross' (pp. 509-526). M. Hengel's massive article 'Moses' Trumpe'ris' Cruces' (pp. 124-155) has been almost completely translated as a separate booklet ('Crescendo in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross. London: SCM, 1977), all the more so bearing for its sober historical tone. It is dedicated, significantly, to the memory of Käsemann's daughter Elisabeth, who died in 1977, aged 31.

29 See the typically cryptic freedom, p. 91. Schlicher's best known article, 'Knowingness and Being' (1967) holds the epistle to be Pauline and indeed representative of truth in the New Testament and now Romans (1977). Sadly, none of these works is available in English.


the creature repeatedly comes up against its limits after the fall, but precisely the religious person carries the particular person on his back, for which reason he becomes entangled in his own desire for life which tries to snatch what can only be given and thus falls subject to the possibility that the person typifies as no one else can the nature of self-willed, rebellious, perverted and lost creation.

This radical stance has not a little in common with the Barthian view of Christianity as something more than the protest against the protest of Bonhoeffer (and J. A. T. Robinson) in favour of 'religionless Christianity'. Indeed, it could be seen as an attempt to give this theological position a firm grounding in exegesis. This is the clue not only to much of Käsemann's exposition but also to the broad issues in his theological position. Most significantly, it enables him to bring back into the picture Paul's discussions of Israel, which Bultmann's scheme had simply squeezed out. For Käsemann's is an Israel-type-the type of theoε, perhaps the type - of homos羔us. Romans 9.11 then becomes important in that Israel provides (not a main theme in herself, but nevertheless) the crowning example of God's strange dealings with sinners and the just, of God's grace which in turn are of course grounded in Christology. Only at the end of Romans 11 is this picture distorted by 'apocalyptic dreaming' which allows Paul to imagine a final conversion of Israel at the end of the age. 

Paul is thus made to fight, like Luther, against 'nomism', against the great victorious religious establishment, against human righteousness of all sorts. This is why, though Käsemann is far too critical to be called a 'salvation-historian' in Paul, that perspective is to be seen very definitely in the light of Christology, and of the justification (not of those who stand in the 'right' tradition or succession, but) of the ungodly. And also suitably to his second running battle on his hands: that against the 'enthusiasts'. This convenient category, with its German overtones of the radical reformation, is perhaps too hard to transfer to the English-speaking world as the word 'enthusiasm' is to transfer to us. It would be very interesting to find out just which English Christians, if any, Käsemann would put in this category. I suspect it would be a sort of

20 P. 209, ad Rom. 7: 14f.

21 See D. H. Schmithals, 'Kierkegaard's Idea of the Cross', in his book on Romans 9.5 (Rechfirmung, pp. 291-303), regarding the whole argument of chs. 9-11 as significant for the meaning of the verse. Passages from Kierkegaard's works such as 2 Cor. 5.15-17 (1843) and 3:13 (1844) and the study by F. E. D. Brettell provides a very useful fresh study of Galatians 4: 21-31 in a particularly like Luther Paul has a second running battle on his hands: that against the 'enthusiasts'. This convenient category, with its German overtones of the radical reformation, is perhaps too hard to transfer to the English-speaking world as the word 'enthusiasm' is to transfer to us. It would be very interesting to find out just which English Christians, if any, Käsemann would put in this category. I suspect it would be a sort of...
The Spirit and the letter
This analysis of Christology and the battles with which it commits the theologian goes some way towards explaining a constant theme of Käsemann which often appears to have been brought up in a different sort of Protestantism. For Käsemann, as we have already hinted, radical historical criticism is not a necessary evil, undertaken in response to the apologetic need to trim one's sails to modern thought, but is rather a super-normal element in Christianity. It makes a virtue out of the demolition of 'historical grounds for faith', seeing such grounds as the attempt to base faith on history and so turn it into a 'work', or as the claim of the doubter to stand within a particular historical tradition and thus to be automatically justified. The 'acid bath of criticism' (into which young theological students are to be plunged) is a purifying baptism, a death to 'pious' or 'secure' theological position, with at least a high view of the whole of Scripture, which Käsemann sees as attempting to imprison God's word, to shut up the Spirit in the letter.

This emerges particularly in Käsemann's exposition of God's freedom to the human plight. On the one hand, God justifies the ungodly — those who, like Abraham, simply hear and believe the bare word of the promise in the teeth of the evidence. No attempt must be made to base faith elsewhere in the world on this true and radical freedom, freedom under the sign of the cross, freedom for radical obedience which sits loose to all ecclesiastical pressures and comforting structures, freedom from reading the Scriptures as

gramma, 'letter'. With this last move, the whole scheme ties some of its own loose ends together: the Jewish scriptures are read by Paul as a radical historical critic would have them read, with a direct and precise analysis of the doctrine of sachkritik ('material criticism', i.e. the sifting of the material on the basis of a central theme, a sachmitte). In one of his most significant non-exercuses, placed under the heading of 10: 5-11, Paul sets himself to analyse the historical aspects of Israel. These pages (284-288) would be a good passage to study closely if one wishes to make a start in understanding the writer and his thought: here we see how, for him, Paul's hermeneutic of the Old Testament was already one aspect of his whole critique of Israel and the law and as part of his view of the freedom of faith and the Spirit. We stand here at the commencement of a theologically reflected Christian hermeneutics. Its mark is that it is not an apologetic, a defense. It demands critical exposition, with the message of justification as the decisive criterion. . . . Since what is at issue in the message of justification is not just the salvation of the individual but the lordship of God over the world, Israel's history is also seen from this viewpoint.

And the antithesis of the last sentence is further expanded in another passage, this time in exposition of 8: 18-22, speaking of 'the pledge of eschatological liberation':

If Maccioni was forced by the inner logic of his theology to cut out vs. the new covenant, then the idea of an existentialism which individualizes salvation and thereby truncates Paul's message by describing freedom formally as openness to the future. In fact, this is a term for the earthly reality of Christ's lordship. The truth in the existential interpretation is that it recognizes in pride and despair human powers which must be deeply crucified. Its theological derivation from a world view which no longer knows what to do with Pauline apocalypse, allows anthropological positions such as that of van der Lubbe, who states that the basic Christian problem is the Jews, the German nation, indeed their historical soul, the Jewish-theo-political Adam, thinking to find life in 'religion', in the law, and finding instead only death. The 'good' and 'evil' speech of the world, including even the 'passions of the flesh' in 7:5, are not morally right and wrong, but mirror the 'good' *and* life, or salvation, and the 'passions of the flesh' are the desires for self-justification which lead the religious man to attempt to earn that justification by doing what the law requires (pp. 194-204). According to this view, chs. 9-11 then recapitulate the train of thought of the first eight chapters, in order to show in the case of Israel how God deals with the problem of religious man. 

Chs. 12-16 apply the theological positions thus outlined to probable concrete situations, the dangers of self-assertive 'enthusiasm', which according to Käsemann is the real theme of 12:3ff. Within this framework, Käsemann gives a positive wealth of detailed exegesis. In the absence of a guide, the student may have to plough through several hundred pages of passages to refer back to for useful discussions. Among the particularly interesting passages we can only indicate a handful. The proposal of a liturgical and an anti-enthusiast background for parts of 15:1-6 is a hint which may surprise many: and, if Dodd found the Achilles heel of Romans in 9: 19ff, for Käsemann the weak spot is 10: 18, where Paul (he thinks) has deceived himself into constructing a salvation-historical programmatic Christology before a base on which was a programme which was never carried out and which, consequently, indicates theological judgments which cannot be adopted by those who come after him. Here is the paradox both of Paul and of his criticism: the Pauline theology must itself be treated critically, since it contains profound inconsistencies — and yet even when this is done it remains a dynamic thing. Paul has left us a theological concept which cannot be finished in any one part, is not finished even when they have fallen apart, have again and again had an impact on world history. Thus the Adam-christ picture of 5: 12-21, and the vision of the final restoration of 'all Israel', are remains of Pauline speculation which the apostle should, for the sake of consistency, have forsworn — just as the (hypothetical) formulee in 1: 3f.; 3f. 24f. reflect a pre-Pauline understanding of the messiah which has now radicalized by supply of both internal alterations and a new context. Exegetical details reflect this, at point after point, the basic history-of-religions thesis and polemical theological position. Paul's theology is only comprehensible in terms of Jewish apocalyptic thought now radically reworked in the light of the cross. Glimpses of that process of rethinking are visible within the epistle itself, and indicate both the fragile nature of the solution which Paul has home-made and the need for sachkritik in present-day exegesis of his writings.

■ See particularly Morgan, op. cit. pp. 1-4 above, pp. 43ff. and pp. 166-171 (also see Collingwood's review of the Canon in the Canon' in recent German discussion, in Rech festigungen, pp. 415-442. See also Collingwood's review of the Canon in the Canon' in recent German discussion, in Rech festigungen, pp. 138-168, and the articles by J. Blank and F. Lang in Rech festigungen (pp. 77-19, 305-320). Cf. too n. 26 above.

125 Ch. 12-20. 126 See also the article on Baptism and Justification by F. Hahn (Rech festigungen, pp. 95-124). Hahn, like Strecker above, employs the 'in-textual' or 'extra-textual' approach to exegesis. The question of affection or religion is as crucial to the integration of the Pauline ethic with the doctrine of justification as to the understanding of the useful article in English (English, keeping Barrett company) of L. E. Keck in Rech festigungen, pp. 199-209.

127 See especially G. Klein's article on Paul and the Jews in Rech festigungen, pp. 259-243. Klein strongly re-asserts the standard view that Paul's rejection of Judaism was a consequence of the Second World War, which, since the Second World War, has been trying to see himself in a different light.

128 P. 296.
blend of ‘fundamentalists’ and ‘charismatics’: the characteristic marks of his ‘enthusiasts’ are not merely outward things such as glossolalia but the more fundamental belief that salvation is a present possession to be enjoyed in triumph as though all battles, including that with sin and death, can be regarded as past. Against this triumphalism, just as against the ‘pious’ or ‘ecclesiastical’ sort, the theologica crucis must be used ruthlessly, by Paul in the first century and by Käsemann in the twentieth. (We might raise the question at this point, whether there is in the last analysis any theological difference between being a ‘nobody’ and being an ‘enthusiast’, and if so, why they do in fact appear in different varieties of the same breed, how Käsemann can justify this in terms of a history-of-religions analysis of both positions.)

The Spirit and the letter
This analysis of Christology and the battles to which it commits the theologian goes some way towards explaining a constant theme of Käsemann which often brough him up in a different sort of Protestantism. For Käsemann, as we have already hinted, radical historical criticism is not a necessary evil, undertaken in response to the apologetic need to trim one’s sails to modern thought. He vulcanizes to the front lines of supernatural elements in Christianity. It makes a virtue out of the demolition of ‘historical grounds for faith’, seeing such grounds as the attempt to base faith on history and so turn it into a ‘work’, or as the claim of the ‘deutero’ to stand within a particular historical tradition and thus be automatically justified. The ‘acid bath of criticism’ (into which young theological students are to be plunged) is a purifying baptism, a death to ‘pious’ or ‘secure’ theological positions that would have a high view of the whole of Scripture, which Käsemann sees as attempting to imprison God’s word, to shut up the Spirit in the letter.

This emerges particularly in Käsemann’s exposition of God’s ‘apocalyptic’ to the human plight. On the one hand, God justifies the ungodly — those who, like Abraham, simply hear and believe the bare word of the promise in the teeth of the evidence. No attempt must be made to base faith elsewhere in the humanly true and radical freedom, freedom under the sign of the cross, freedom for radical obedience which sits loose to all ecclesiastical pressures and comforting structures, freedom from reading the Scriptures as gramma, ‘letter’. With this last move, the whole scheme ties some of its own loose ends together: the Jewish scriptures are read by Paul as a radical historical critic would have them read, with a whole dose of sachkritik (‘material criticism’; i.e., the sifting of the material on the basis of a central theme, a sachmitte).16 In one of his most significant non-enclosures, placed under the heading of 10: 5-8, Käsemann states a remarkableinner logik that may no longer be entirely comprehensible to us. . . . Viewed as a whole, the Epistle to the Romans reveals a closely knit argumentation which is hidden only to those who do not exert enough effort over it.17

We have already seen how this is worked out in relation to the question of Israel, which becomes relevant for justification because Israel is the classic example of ‘religious man’. The same holistic approach, characterized by the apocalyptic interpretation of Paul, enables Käsemann to integrate the Adam-Christ framework of thought into the whole of ch. 1-4, and to incorporate also the sacramental language of ch. 6,18 and the apocalyptic vision of ch. 8 clearly belongs in the same world of thought. In particular, this hermeneutical key gives Käsemann a base on which to build his version of the Kümmel-Bultmann view of ch. 7. This view, often misunderstood by English critics who think that the main question the Germans are asking is ‘who is here being spoken of’, holds that the ‘I of Romans 7 is the Jewish-theory-independent Adam, thinking to find life in ‘religion’, in the law, and finding instead only death. The ‘good’ and ‘evil’ spoken of in the passage, including even the ‘passions of the flesh’ in 7.5, are not ‘morally right and wrong, and forbidden’; ‘good I want’ is life, or salvation, and the ‘passions of the flesh’ are the desires for self-justification which lead the religious man to attempt to earn that justification by doing what the law requires (pp. 194-204).

According to this view, chs. 9-11 then recapitulate the train of thought of the first eight chapters, in order to show in the case of Israel how God deals with the problem of religious man.19 Chs. 12-16 apply the theological positions thus outlined, probably in an effort to guard against the danger of self-assertive ‘enthusiasm’, which according to Käsemann is the real theme of 12-3ff.

Within this framework, Käsemann gives a positive wealth of detailed exegesis. In the absence of specific references, it may be helpful to list several hundred entries of passages to refer back to for useful discussions. Among the particularly interesting passages we can only indicate a handful. The proposal of a liturgical and an anti-enthusiastic background for the ‘expediency’ 20 - a programme which was never carried out and which, consequently, indicates theological judgments which cannot be adopted by those who come after him. Here is the paradox both of Paul and of Käsemann: Pauline theology must itself be treated critically, since it contains profound inconsistencies — and yet even when this is done it remains a dynamic thing. Paul has left us a theological concept which cannot be adapted. Käsemann’s critical work even when they have fallen apart, have again and again had an impact on world history.21 Thus the Adam-christ picture of 5: 12-21, and the vision of the final restoration of ‘all Israel’, are remains of Pauline apocalyptic which the apostle should, for the sake of consistency, have forsaken — just (as the hypothetical formulae in 1: 3f.; 3: 24f. reflect a pre-Pauline understanding of the apostle has now radicalised by supply) both internal alterations and a new context. Exegetical details reflect this, at point after point, the basic history-of-religions thesis and polemical theological position. Paul’s theology is only comprehensible, if at all, in terms of Jewish apocalyptic thought now radically reworked in the light of the cross. Glimpses of that process of rethinking are visible within the epistle itself, and indicate both the fragile nature of the solution which Paul himself proposed and the need for sachkritik in present-day exegesis of his writings.

16 See also the article on Baptism and Justification by F. Haen (Rechtuffvng, pp. 95-124). Haen, in K. Strecker’s (above), 12-25, in recent German discussion, in Rechtuffvng, pp. 415-442. See also the essay by F. Haen, in Rechtuffvng (1927), on the question of the integration of the Pauline ethic with the doctrine of justification in Paul’s view (2: 15).


18 V. 258.

19 P. 296.
Questions and problems

It would not be difficult to point to exegetical details which lay themselves open to challenge. But more important, and more interesting, are the difficulties in which Käsemann’s large ideas force upon us – not least in their effect upon exegetical details.3

To begin with, there are all sorts of questions to be asked about Käsemann’s use of the term ‘apocalyptic’ (as well as gradually) that this word has a particular theological meaning for Käsemann: it is, in fact, more a hermeneutical term than an historical one.4 That is, it does not refer to a literary form, nor to the practice of most Jewish (apocalyptic) that God would act soon and decisively on behalf of the Jews. Nor does it include such well-known features of ‘apocalyptic’ as visions and interpretations, or the dualistic (exclusively explained by the ‘two ages’ doctrine). Rather, in Käsemann’s writings it comes to mean a particular belief about God, namely, that he is the Lord of the world and is establishing that kingdom in and through the cross of Christ. But in interpreting this theological position, and in labelling it ‘apocalyptic’, intending thus to use it as a means of demonstrating Paul’s worldwide vision over against a particular or covenantal Jewish idea, Käsemann in fact thoroughly demythologized the very background literature to which he is appealing (just as Bultmann’s demythologizing programme was the servant of a larger hermeneutical concern). In so doing, he invites the question: what if a centrifugal, non-negotiable, feature of ‘apocalyptic’ as it actually was was in fact just such a nationalistic hope? What if the vision of God as Lord of the world in the apocalyptic literature was invoked precisely in order to guarantee Israel’s eventual triumph over her national enemies? The question has only to be put for the answer to be clear. It was just such a vision, and hope, that motivated the Jewish writers of ‘apocalypses’. If Paul shared the apocalyptic quest he shared in a way the Jewish writer of an apocalypse cannot be merely an example of something else. It begins to look as if Käsemann has pressed the idea of ‘apocalyptic’ into service in order to perform the same task that the earlier Bultmann school and Käsemann himself in an earlier stage has. What if, exactly, the category ‘hellenism’ – namely, that task of showing how Paul’s theology transformed a

3 I have explored several of the relevant areas in my doctoral thesis (above, n. 19).

4 See Sauter, op. cit. (above, n. 10), p. 86.


justification and of Paul’s whole critique of Israel. 3 Can it be that Käsemann, when he uses the phrase ‘God’s righteousness’, is really referring to something else? God’s sovereign and saving rule over against the apocalyptic or the covenantal background of Käsemann appears in fact tells heavily against him. It begins to look as if his ‘cosmic’ theology is simply Bultmann’s anthropology writ large. The actual concerns of first-century Jews are in much the same cases pursed in much the same terms.

This becomes especially apparent in Käsemann’s interpretation of dikaiosunē theou. He is well aware that a natural meaning of the phrase in early Christianity would include God’s sovereign and saving rule as a way of life. But he recognizes that in the New Testament, God’s sovereign lordship is not revealed (according to the apocalypticists) in order to save the world, but precisely to condemn it and to deliver Israel. The very history of the Jewish people, for Paul, the Spirit. Käsemann however has been unable to see Paul’s faith in a different (Pauline) concept, or even two different concepts. Hence there follow both the initial plausibility and appeal, and the subsequent pursuance, of this line of thought.

A fuller understanding of the apocalyptic background would have also pointed towards a more satisfactory solution of the religionsgeschichtlich, theological and exegetical problems of 5: 12-21. The only flaw of the argument thus far is that Paul deliberately altered the sense of the phrase so as to exclude that element, appealing to a supposed ‘technical’ use of the concept in the apocalyptic writings. But precisely this meaning of ‘God’s faithfulness’ in his covenant with Israel’ was (arguably) uppermost in the many instances cited by Käsemann and others in the background literature as evidence of the meaning of ‘God’s salvation-creating power’; in fact, God’s righteousness was so closely connected with the true faith of a people that Paul, in his strange dealings with Israel and with the world, and that to which Israel can appeal for help in time of need. And Paul, in rejecting the nationalistic view of the covenant, does not reject the covenant itself, but believes that the Jewish purpose of Romans 4 is not merely ‘proof from scripture of justification by faith’; it is a re-examination of the meaning of the covenant, aimed at demonstrating that God is faithful to his promised covenant, and that the key to this event is not the nation Israel, but the Jewish faith itself, the faith which has been expressed in the crucifixion and in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, true membership in Abraham’s family. The difference between Paul and the Jewish writers who appeal to the same concept is apocalyptic. Käsemann is right when he says that Paul does not tell us how the Christian Church came to be the new Israel, but that Käsemann’s analysis, provides a unifying theme for 8: 12-30; complete Paul’s argument about God’s dealings with humanity’s sin and death, and precisely in so doing raise the question: when, then, about Israel? (The same sequence of thought occurs in 2: 17-29 and 3: 1-9). And from that perspective new solutions to the problems of 9-11 become apparent. The conclusion of the argument (11: 25-27) is no apocalyptic dream (nor, I believe, does it refer to the parousia). It is arguing from the premise that Israel is still the people of the Messiah, even though ‘according to the flesh’ (9: 5), and that she must follow her Messiah through the ‘death’ of the flesh to aek ek nekousmaion, an example of homo pathos; she is the bearer of God’s promises, in whose paradoxical fate we see, reflected on a large screen, both the problems of Adam in his fall and the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (which perhaps he does not see). And, just as the world will be renewed when Adam is renewed (8: 18ff), so Israel’s re-acceptance (whatever that means) will signal a new beginning for the world. This view arguably ties the whole epistle together much more tightly than Käsemann is able to do.

Conclusions

It is a measure of the stature of Käsemann’s achievement that it has succeeded in raising, in a new form, almost all the basic questions about Pauline theology. I have indicated that I disagree with many of his detailed solutions, but that he has posed in a fresh and powerful way the general questions that Paul against the background of Jewish apocalyptic thought, and by placing the cross, and the revelation of God’s righteousness, at the centre — seems to me now beyond dispute. The largest question mark remains the way in which Paul has done justice to his own statement, itself admirable as a programme for exegesis: ‘History is the field of reconstructions, and whether these are right or not depends on how far they overcome the problem posed’ (1: 3: 35). I have suggested that the loose ends which remain in Käsemann’s scheme are there because he has not carried through his apocalyptic understanding of its natural conclusion. Seeking to make Paul relevant by abstracting him from the context of the Jewish people as a whole, from the ongoing problem of God’s dealings with the world, and from the new life in Christ the Church has to take up the task. Paul’s work is now as relevant to the Church as it ever was to the Jewish people, and the Church has to continue the work for which the New Testament texts speak, and which Käsemann has in fact already begun.

Questions and problems
It would not be difficult to point to exegetical details which lay themselves open to challenge. But more important, and more interesting, are the theological implications in which Käsemann's large ideas force upon us—not least in their effect upon exegetical details.17
To begin with, there are all sorts of questions to be asked about Käsemann's use of the term apocalyptic—possibly even (though gradually) that this word has a particular theological meaning for Käsemann: it is, in fact, more a hermeneutical term than an historical one.18 That is, it does not refer to a literary form, nor to the genre produced by most Jewish apocalypsts) that God would act soon and decisively on behalf of the Jews. Nor does it include such well-known features of 'apocalyptic' as visions and interpretations, as well as dualism (especially exemplified by the 'two ages' doctrine). Rather, in Käsemann's writings it comes to mean a particular belief about God, namely, that he is the Lord of the world and is establishing that order in and through the cross of Christ. But in asserting this theological position, and in labelling it 'apocalyptic', intending thus to use it as a means of demonstrating Paul's worldwide vision against a particular or covenantal Jewish idea, Käsemann has in fact thoroughly demythologized the very background literature to which he is appealing (just as Bultmann's demythologizing programme was the servant of a larger hermeneutical concern). In so doing, he invites the question: what if a central and non-negotiable, feature of 'apocalyptic' as it actually was was in fact just such a nationalistic hope? What if the vision of God as Lord of the world in the apocalyptic literature was invoked precisely in order to guarantee Israel's eventual triumph over her national enemies? The question has only to be put for the answer to be clear. It was just such a vision, and hope, that motivated the Jewish writers of 'apocalypses'. If Paul shared the apocalyptic vision as a Jew, it is possible that Paul could not have been a Jew if Israel cannot be merely an example of something else. It begins to look as if Käsemann has pressed the idea of 'apocalyptic' into service in order to perform the same task that the earlier Bultmann school found in his understanding of the concept. Thus, the category 'hellenism'—namely, that task of showing how Paul's theology transformed a

17 See Sastier, op. cit. (above, n. 10), p. 86.


20 See, e.g., 1Q5 4:23; CD 3:20; IQ 1 15:17, 17; 4Q537 3:1f; for the whole position, see my thesis, pp. 34f.


22 In the question of the presence of the term 'God's righteousness', is it fair to assume that Paul has misunderstood his own theology as it is stated in the letters? Theological reflections on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (which perhaps he does not see). And, just as the world will be renewed when Adam is renewed (8:18ff), so Israel's re-acceptance (whatever that means) will signal the end of time. Thus, this view lays the whole epistle together much more tightly than Käsemann is able to do.

Conclusion
It is a measure of the stature of Käsemann's achievement that it has succeeded in raising, in a new form, almost all the basic questions about Pauline theology. I have indicated that I agree with many of his detailed solutions, but that he has posed them differently. I believe, does it refer to the parousia?)19 Paul is arguing from the premise that Israel is still the people of the Messiah, even though 'according to the flesh' (9:5), and that she must follow her Messiah through the 'death' of the flesh to ze ek nekaios (Paul's parable of the two brothers). An example of homo religiosa: she is the bearer of God's promises, in whose paradoxical fate we see, reflected on a large screen, both the problems of Adam and Israel, and the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ (which perhaps he does not see). And, just as the world will be renewed when Adam is renewed (8:18ff), so Israel's re-acceptance (whatever that means) will signal the end of time. Thus, this view lays the whole epistle together much more tightly than Käsemann is able to do.
Towards a mutual understanding of Christian and Islamic concepts of revelation

Ida Glaser

Miss Glaser was until recently a student at All Nations Christian College in England.

The Christian looking at the Qur'an will naturally approach it with a pre-understanding shaped by his knowledge of the Bible; and the Muslim will approach the Bible with a pre-understanding shaped by his knowledge of the Qur'an. Because there exist similarities between the two religions, and in particular because of the Muslim context and the completion of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is sometimes assumed that similar criteria can be validly used in considering the two revelations. It is my contention, however, that there is a wide gulf between understanding the Qur'an and the Bible a third time, then seeing a direct mode of revelation, and understanding rather than assessment or criticism, since it seems to me of enormous importance that we understand a thing before we assess it. We are otherwise likely to be guilty of assessing a fragment of our imagination, and not what we claim to be studying.

Here follows a brief explanation of forms of revelation in Islam and Christianity, and a discussion of their implications. A paper of this length inevitably includes over-simplifications, and many of the statements below will require some balancing comment for completeness. However, since my main aim is to compare the two systems, and to indicate the strangeness of each to adherents of the other, I consider the simplifications not only to be necessary for brevity, but also to be useful in comparison.

A. FORMS OF REVELATION

1. Islam

In Islam, revelation is embodied in the Qur'an, which came as a message from God to man through the prophet Muhammad. The key here is that God's words came to man, the prophet being only the channel for communication. His title is "the Messenger of God," which well describes him as one who takes the message and relays it to the recipient.

The mechanism of communication is simple: the Qur'an is considered to have been written in Heaven from eternity. Books have been given to many prophets in different languages and cultures from Adam onwards, but all have, it is said, been lost or distorted. The final revelation of the eternal Qur'an in the Arabic language was given to Muhammed, to be preserved in all its purity for the remainder of his lifetime. The story of the beginning of the revelation is best told in the words of the Hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari 1, 3:

The first revelation that was granted to the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God upon him) was the true vision of sleep, so that he never saw a vision but the truth of it shone forth like the bright gleam of dawn. Then solitude became dear to him and he used to take himself to the cave of Hira, where he would devote himself to Divine worship for several nights before coming back to his family. He would take provisions for this purpose, then he would return to Kandara until he arrived at the same point. He would then return to Hira, until the Truth 1 came to him while he was in the cave of Hira. The Angel came to him and said, "Read." He read it aloud of those who can read. And he continued: 'Then he (the angel) took hold of him and pressed me so hard that I could not bear it and threatened me to death.' When I replied, 'I am not one of those who can read,' he took hold of me and pressed me a second time so hard that I could not bear it any more, then he let me go and said, 'Read.' I said, 'I am not one of those who can read.'

The Prophet continued: 'Then he took hold of me a third time, then he let me go, and said, "Read in the name of thy Lord who creates—creates man from a clot. Read, and thy Lord is Most Generous." (Sura 1: 4)'

The Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God upon him) returned with this message, his heart trembling, and he went to Khadijah, daughter of Khawalid and said, 'Wrap me up, wrap me up.' So they wrapped him up until the swe had left him.

The mechanism of revelation is further clarified in al-Bukhari 1, 2:

Ashan, the mother of the faithful (God be pleased with her) reported that Harith ibn Isham asked the Messenger of God (peace and blessings of God upon him), 'O Messenger of God, how does the revelation come to you?' A Gabriel sent by God (peace and blessings of God upon him) said, 'Sometimes it comes to me like the ringing of a bell, and that is the type of which is the hardest on me; then he (the Angel) departs from me and I retain in memory from him what he has said. At times the Angel comes to me in the likeness of a man and speaks to me and I retain in memory what he says. 'Ashah (God be pleased with her) said, 'I saw him standing on him on a severely cold day, when it departed from him his forehead dripped with sweat."

There are various points of interest here. Firstly we see a direct mode of revelation, where the angel Gabriel was sent from God to give the exact words of the message. Muhammed then transmitted it to his disciples, who later committed it to writing. Secondly, it itself a means of grace, and an instance that he could not read. This is taken by many to symbolize and ensure the purity of the message—where the verity of Mary can be seen as symbolizing and ensuring the divinity of Christ. Some would even consider Muhammed's purported illiteracy necessary to the faithful transmission of the message: the message must be entirely of God, and not of Muhammed. In a sense, then, the nature of the messenger is unimportant: it is necessary only that his personality does not affect the message in any way. (Of course, Muslims consider Muhammed as much more than a passive messenger. His position as prophet gives him a lifetime and style and words a high and even an authoritative value. The value of the person behind the speech and actions on a level second only to the Qur'an, and see his example as binding, and even inspired.)

Muhammed's illiteracy exemplifies a third emphasis in the record of revelation: that of the miraculous as nature of the revelation. It is the highest style of Arabic poetry so that its very language rejoices the heart of the reader. In fact, Qur'anic language is considered the highest form of Arabic, and so lofty is the style that it is seen in itself to be sufficient the miracle as nature of the revelation. When asked what miracle he wrecked to validate his prophethood, Muhammed pointed only to the Qur'an; and the stress on his own illiteracy implies the divine origin of the miracle.

Finally, we notice the untraditional form of language in the above quotations, and see this as an example of the centrality of language in the Islamic revelation. If the wording of the traditions is important, how much more is the wording of the Qur'an itself? It contains the exact words given by God through Gabriel, and represents the eternal Word written in heaven. There is therefore virtue in using its exact wording in prayer, and in reading it aloud or memorizing it. In Christian terms, the Quranic text must be translated, and that translation is almost sacral. The role of the Arabic language has even been compared to that of