

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

T. N. Wright

*Dr Wright, who is now Assistant Professor of New Testament at McGill University in Canada, contributed to Themelios (6:1) a major review article on C. E. B. Cranfield's commentary on Romans. Now he guides us expertly around one of the most important German commentaries, which has recently appeared in English translation.*

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 that this early experience determined his course of study 'and in some sense, as befits a theologian, my life'. 'The basic problem was posed. In the follow-

ing semesters I then listened to the expositions of H. von Soden and R. Bultmann. I then turned successively to the work of K. Barth, A. Schlatter, Luther and Calvin, studied them critically, and was led by them into interpretation ancient and modern. No literary document has been more important for me.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (ET Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: SCM, 1980), p. vii. (ET of *An die Römer*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 8a, Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 only small changes between the first and third German editions, though they involve some renumbering of pages.

For those with ears to hear, that quotation says it all. Käsemann 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 of Romans 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 to-ings and fro-ings. It is passionately concerned with Paul's view of Christian freedom, and equally concerned to maintain the true (*i.e.* Reformation) heritage and tradition. It is doggedly set on producing, through ruthless historical criticism, both an accurate view of 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 Käsemann'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. If it were to be content with less, it 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 impatient, who are concerned only about results or practical application, should leave their hands off exegesis. They are of no value for it, nor, when rightly done, is exegesis of any value for them.<sup>3</sup>

One can see what he means, even if the expression is a little harsh. Yet the distinction between the practical value of theological exegesis which Käsemann 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.

<sup>2</sup> *New Testament Questions of Today* (hereafter *NTQT*: London, 1969), p.x. (ET of essays, mostly from *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, 2, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, <sup>2</sup>1965.)

<sup>3</sup> P. viii. Compare the passages which speak disparagingly of 'edifying' exposition, *e.g.* p. 250: 'Apocalyptic alone can express this (*i.e.* the paradoxical nature of the revelation of Christ's love) and preserve us from the usual edifying interpretation of the text' (*i.e.* Rom. 8:35). See too *Jesus Means Freedom* (hereafter *Freedom*; London, 1969), p. 14. (ET of *Der Ruf der Freiheit*, Tübingen, <sup>3</sup>1968; a 5th, enlarged, German edn. was published in 1972.)

Certainly for Käsemann 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. Käsemann has lived and worked all his life with the fundamental question of 'New Testament Theology' ('Are we doing history, or normative theology, or both?'): <sup>4</sup> and the tension that results from giving the answer 'both' is clear throughout his work, just as it was, though in different ways, in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann.

But the world to which Käsemann 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 Naziism is still not eradicated, fearful lest the church again be seduced into compromising the gospel. Those who know little about Bonhoeffer and nothing about the Barmen Declaration will find themselves at sea in passage after passage of Käsemann's polemic. He not only fights battles which are vital for him but not (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 Romans. Perhaps the most revealing of his books in this respect is his *Jesus Means Freedom* (subtitled *A Polemical Survey of the New Testament*). <sup>5</sup> There we see — though still in flashes — what Käsemann is really worried about. 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 sort of theology that allowed Naziism to look respectable ('find out what God is doing in our nation, and do it with him . . .'). <sup>6</sup> He opposes a

<sup>4</sup> See R. Morgan *The Nature of the New Testament Theology* (London: SCM, 1973).

<sup>5</sup> See n. 3.

<sup>6</sup> See his article on 'Justification and Salvation History' in *Perspectives on Paul* (hereafter *PP*; London, 1971), pp. 60-78, esp. 63ff. (ET of *Paulinische Perspektiven*, Tübingen, 1969.) On this, see my article 'The Paul of History and the Apostle of Faith', *TynB* 29, 1978, pp. 61-88, esp. 63f., 69f. See also *Freedom*, 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 *theologia 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 God who in Jesus became 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 conducting a war of slogans, of attitudes which he, and those he opposes, have characterized 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 the 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 their hopes on him at least 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 church and the theologians of his own time have never been taken seriously enough by those who had every occasion to do so.'<sup>7</sup> It might be thought that Käsemann is fighting out-of-date battles, seeking merely to exorcise ghosts from the past. I am not in a position to comment on that. 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<sup>8</sup> — unless we are to 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 heighten, 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 all the different sides of a theologian's existence. And because Käsemann remains, 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, powerful and dramatic, even for those like myself who, as 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 'theological existence today', his lifework has already provided a great stimulus and will no doubt continue to do so.<sup>9</sup>

Before launching into an exposition and critique of Käsemann's theological position, some remarks are in order about his commentary as a book and as a tool for studying Romans.<sup>10</sup> 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 follow 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 historical work and theological results.) Important theological discussions jostle with minor textual or verbal notes, without any signposts or crossheadings within the long sections into which Käsemann divides the epistle. Forgoing the writing of excursuses has some merit in giving apparent 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 running heads are very inadequate. In order to be able to *use* 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 Käsemann 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 concentrate, think hard, and read the 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.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. Friedrich, W. Pöhlmann and P. Stuhlmacher (eds), *Rechtfertigung: Festschrift für Ernst Käsemann zum 70. Geburtstag* (Tübingen: Mohr and 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 magnificent collection of work, and a worthy tribute.

<sup>10</sup> See too my forthcoming brief review (complementary to this one) in *Churchman*. For other important reviews of the commentary, see e.g. J. K. Riches in *SJT* 29, 1976, pp. 557-574; G. Sauter in *Verkündigung und Forschung* (Beihefte zu *Evangelische Theologie*) 21, 1976, pp. 80-94; K. P. Donfried in *Religious Studies Review*, 7, 1981, pp. 226-228. See too G. A. Lewandowski, 'An Introduction to Ernst Käsemann's Theology' in *Encounter* (Indianapolis, Indiana) 35, 1974, pp. 222-242.

*Texts*, ET London, 1976, pp. 224-227, 257, 271, 273; the whole of ch. 5, pp. 199-262, provides interesting background for this theme).

<sup>7</sup> *Freedom*, p. 29; see too e.g. pp. 46ff., 64, 81, etc.

<sup>8</sup> See the remarks of John Barton in *JTS* n.s. 31, 1980, pp. 572f.

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 not only wrestled with Paul but also with a wide range of commentators ancient and modern, as witnessed by the very full bibliographies at the head of each section (with English translations, where available, duly noted). The translation is not flawless, but Bromiley, who must be now vying with John Bowden for the *Guinness Book of Records* entry under 'Quantity of German Translation', has done a wickedly difficult job as well, perhaps, as anybody could have hoped.<sup>11</sup> For those who wish to discover what technical term underlies such peculiarities as 'his cosmic fallenness to the world' (p. 199), the page numbers of the German original are conveniently printed in the inner margin (the answer in this case is *Weltverfallenheit*). It is to be expected that the book will make a lasting mark on New Testament studies, raising new questions and re-opening old ones in fresh and helpful ways. However much one might disagree, one will find (as T. W. Manson said of Bultmann) that we learn not least when we are forced to articulate *why* we disagree.<sup>12</sup> And taking on Käsemann is like disagreeing with a mountain: there is a grandeur, a stature, an integrity about this total theological scheme. It will not do to niggle about details here and there, as though a few cheap exegetical disagreements or theological question-marks would undermine the whole thing. We must deal, as Käsemann himself emphatically does (in contrast with many English-speaking writers on Paul) with the large issues and their correlation.

### The background: apocalyptic

The over-all task which Käsemann has set himself, both in his commentary and his other writings on Paul, is clear: to place the apostle against the proper background in the history of religions, in such a way that his theological emphases stand out and can be heard afresh today. And as soon as we ask what the 'proper background' is, we realize just what a change has come over historical critical orthodoxy in the last generation. Paul used to be regarded as the great hellenizer, the man who found Christianity Jewish and left it Greek, the apostle who translated the gospel into terms that

the non-Jewish world could understand, into concepts that broke free from legalistic Jewish shackles. This model dominated German research all through the '20s and '30s (providing incidentally a silent support for quite different movements of thought), and continued to do so until W. D. Davies registered his protest in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*.<sup>13</sup> Since then the lines have not been so easy to draw. Already, however, Albert Schweitzer had attempted 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 Käsemann and his followers. 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 can only be understood in terms of apocalyptic. Käsemann has already outlined this position;<sup>14</sup> now the commentary shows us just what it means in practice, namely that 'Christianity is not just a Jewish sect which believes in Jesus as the Messiah. It is the breaking in of the new world of God characterized by the lordship of the Spirit' (p. 191). Käsemann finds in the apocalyptic writings a vision of God's triumph over the rebellious world, and of God's righteousness as *both* his saving power *and* his gift of salvation; and this understanding provides the key with which he unlocks the main theological problems of Romans.

Before developing this, it is important to note how the picture of early Christianity is thus modified. The problem remains as it ever did ('How could the doctrinal system of Paul arise on the basis of the life and work of Jesus and the beliefs of the primitive community: and how did the early Greek theology arise out of Paulinism?');<sup>15</sup> but instead of the old answer, that Paul *hellenized* the early Jewish kerygma (and so provided a bridge between Jesus and second-century Christianity) Käsemann is offering a new solution, that Paul exploited hidden depths in Jewish apocalyptic to break out of the early Jewish-Christian mould and create a gospel for the world. Unlike Schweitzer, who from an apocalyptic background deduced that 'being in Christ' (which he called, perhaps misleadingly, 'Christ-mysticism')

<sup>13</sup> 1st edn., 1948; 4th edn., with new introduction, 1980.

<sup>11</sup> I have my doubts about words like 'noninterchangeable' (p. 384) (especially as applied to God!); and, though it may sound somewhat incongruous to describe a Greek word as a barbarism, that is how I feel about 'exhomologesis' (pp. 386, 394).

<sup>12</sup> Quoted (from a review in *The Guardian*) on the back of the 1965 paperback edition of Bultmann's *Theology of the New Testament*, 1 (London: SCM).

<sup>14</sup> See particularly 'The Beginnings of Christian Theology' and 'On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic' in *NTQT*, pp. 82-107, 108-137. For the immediate controversy these writings and others aroused, see the papers in *ZThK* 58, 1961, translated in *JThCh* 6, 1969. For Schweitzer's classic statement, see his *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (ET, London, 1931, and next note).

<sup>15</sup> A. Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters* (ET, London, 1912), p. v.

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 whole scheme.<sup>16</sup> The link with the post-Pauline church then requires a toning down of Paul's polemic, and Käsemann finds this in the 'deutero-Pauline' and 'early Catholic' writings.<sup>17</sup> Questions remain about the viability of this whole outline; but there should be 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 *dikaiousunē 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.<sup>18</sup> Teaching experience suggests that, even though several accounts of Käsemann's position are available,<sup>19</sup> 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 usual one. This latter, associated with Bultmann, Conzelmann, Cranfield and others, holds that *dikaiousunē 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 and on the basis of faith. The 'righteousness' is predicated of the believer, and *theou* 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 soteriology which he sees as its context. In its place he suggests a new meaning for *dikaiousunē* and a new understanding of *theou*, 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.

1QS 11.12; CD 20.20; Test. Dan 6.10) is, according to Käsemann and his followers,<sup>20</sup> a technical term, and refers neither to a moral quality of God nor to a status or relationship which someone now has from 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 rule over the whole cosmos) and as *gift* (the same power, now given to the believer so that he is recaptured for radical obedience to God). *Dikaiousunē* is thus basically an activity of God, and *theou* is therefore a *subjective genitive*.

This leads inevitably to a new view of justification<sup>21</sup> 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)<sup>22</sup> acknowledgment of that triumph and of the consequent Lordship of Christ.<sup>23</sup> 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 cosmic, apocalyptic 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

<sup>16</sup> On Schweitzer's achievement, see W. G. Kümmel in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 269-289, and A. C. Thiselton in *ExpT* 90, 1979, pp. 132-137.

<sup>17</sup> See *Freedom*, pp. 122ff., etc.: 'An Apologia for Primitive Christian Eschatology' in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (London, 1964), pp. 169-195 (hereafter *ENTT*). (ET of articles from *Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, 1, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1960.) Also 'Paul and Early Catholicism' in *NTQT*, pp. 236-251.

<sup>18</sup> Now published in *NTQT*, pp. 168-182.

<sup>19</sup> Especially M. T. Brauch's appendix on 'God's Righteousness in Recent German Discussion' in E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1977), pp. 523-542. See too Riches, *op. cit.* (n. 10 above) and my 1980 doctoral thesis *The Messiah and the People of God* (copies in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and Tyndale Library, Cambridge), pp. 56-85.

<sup>20</sup> Such as Müller, Stuhlmacher, etc.; see Brauch, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> See O. Betz in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 17-36, on justification at Qumran: an interesting discussion of law and grace, and present and future justification, in the Scrolls.

<sup>22</sup> See U. Wilckens, *Rechtfertigung als Freiheit: Paulusstudien* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974); and G. Strecker in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 479-508 — a traditio-historical analysis of justification ideas in pre-Pauline and Pauline thought. Strecker finds different layers embedded in Paul, and (to my mind unsuccessfully) proposes to differentiate between them critically, emphasizing the centrality of justification as *liberation*.

<sup>23</sup> See the work of H. H. Schmid, represented in *Rechtfertigung* by an essay on the Old Testament entitled, characteristically, 'Rechtfertigung als Schöpfungsgeschehen' ('Justification as Creation-Event'), pp. 403-414.

becomes the centre of his whole polemical position.<sup>24</sup>

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 towards Roman Catholicism. Here again a certain amount of background knowledge may help. Käsemann is very conscious of the fact that some of his fellow-pupils under Bultmann have made a different pilgrimage to his own, and have found 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.<sup>25</sup> 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 critics such as himself represent the genuine Lutheran tradition, protesting against a *theologia gloriae*, a theology of the church triumphant, of worthy devotional practices, of bourgeois religiosity 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 Reformation heritage.<sup>26</sup>

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

<sup>24</sup> This theme crops up frequently in *Rechtfertigung*. See particularly D. Lührmann, 'Christologie und Rechtfertigung' (pp. 351-364) and P. Stuhlmacher's 'Eighteen Theses' on Paul's theology of the cross (pp. 509-526). M. Hengel's massive article 'Mors Turpissima Crucis' (pp. 125-184) has now been amplified still further and translated as a separate book (*Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly 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 30, as a 'freedom fighter' in the Argentine.

<sup>25</sup> See the typically cryptic *Freedom*, p. 91. Schlier's best known commentaries are his works on Ephesians (1957: he holds the epistle to be Pauline and indeed representative of true Pauline thought), Galatians (1965), and now Romans (1977). Sadly, none of these works is available in English.

<sup>26</sup> See *Freedom*, ch. 3; J. Barr in his *Explorations in Theology* (no. 7 in the SCM series of that title, 1980), pp. 30-51, and his introduction to the British edition of P. Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1979), pp. 9-12.

the creature repeatedly comes up against its limits after the fall, but precisely the religious person crashes and the pathway under man fails . . . he becomes entangled in his own desire for life which tries to snatch what can only be given and thus falls subject to the powers of the world. The pious person typifies as no one else can the nature of self-willed, rebellious, perverted and lost creation.<sup>27</sup>

This radical stance has not a little in common with the Barthian view of Christianity as something other than a religion, and with 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 exegesis but also to further 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, Israel's problem is that she is a type — perhaps *the type* — of *homo religiosus*. 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 'religious man', characterized by judgment and 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 parousia.<sup>28</sup>

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 good an exegete to deny any place to 'salvation-history' 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 suspiciously 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 as hard to transfer to the English-speaking world as the word *enthusiasmus* is to translate. 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

<sup>27</sup> P. 209, *ad Rom.* 7: 14ff.

<sup>28</sup> See the argument of O. Kuss, in his article on Romans 9: 5 (*Rechtfertigung*, pp. 291-303), regarding the whole argument of chs. 9-11 as significant for the meaning of the verse. Passages in Galatians also become important in this discussion: C. K. Barrett provides a very useful fresh study of Galatians 4: 21-31 in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 1-16. (Barrett and his wife are the dedicatees of the ET of the Romans commentary.)

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.<sup>29</sup> Against this triumphalism, just as against the 'pious' or 'ecclesiastical' sort, the *theologia 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 'nomist' and being an 'enthusiast'; and, if the answer is that they do indeed appear to be 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 puzzles those 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 or out of a desire to eliminate the 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 'devout' 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 positions — not 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 answer 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. On the other hand, the Spirit gives 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 healthy dose of *sachkritik* ('material criticism', *i.e.* the sifting of the material on the basis of a central theme, a *sachmitte*).<sup>30</sup> In one of his most significant non-excurses, placed under the heading of 10: 5-13, Käsemann states his position at some length. 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 functions *both* as 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 satisfied with the 'it is written'. 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 standpoint.<sup>31</sup>

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 Marcion was forced by the inner logic of his theology to cut out vv. 18-22, he is followed today by an existentialism which individualizes salvation and thereby truncates Paul's message by describing freedom formally as openness to the future. In fact it 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 the powers which most deeply enslave mankind. Its theological reduction derives from a world view which no longer knows what to do with Pauline apocalyptic, allows anthropological historicity to conceal the world's history, obscures the antithesis of the aeons in 1.20ff by natural theology and here through the assertion of mythology, and for this reason can no longer speak adequately of the dominion of Christ in its worldwide dimension.<sup>32</sup>

Here is the issue between Käsemann and Bultmann (and, with Bultmann, a good deal of what in English we call evangelicalism, though it would use different language). And here, too, is Käsemann's basic theological position. In the cross of Jesus Christ God has triumphed over the

<sup>30</sup> See particularly Morgan, *op. cit.* (n. 4 above), pp. 42ff., and W. Schrage's review of 'The Canon in the Canon' in recent German discussion, in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 415-442.

<sup>31</sup> Pp. 287f. See too the article 'The Spirit and the Letter' in *PP*, pp. 138-168, and the articles by J. Blank and F. Lang in *Rechtfertigung* (pp. 37-56, 305-320). *Cf.* too n. 26 above.

<sup>32</sup> P. 236.

<sup>29</sup> See J. Jervell's article on Paul as the 'Weak Charismatic' in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 185-198.

world: on that basis the ungodly can be justified and set free to hear God's word in a new way and to serve him in a new sort of obedience.

### The coherence of Romans

Possibly the most striking exegetical achievement to result from this theological understanding of Paul is that Käsemann integrates the Epistle to the Romans in a way quite impossible from a strictly Bultmannian position. Even if we may conclude that the job is still not complete, it is good to see programmatic statements like these:

Until I have proof to the contrary I proceed on the assumption that the text has a central concern and a remarkable inner logic 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.<sup>33</sup>

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 scheme of chs. 1-4, and to incorporate also the sacramental language of ch. 6;<sup>34</sup> 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 typical *homo religiosus*, the Jew-as-the-typical-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 actions': the '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.<sup>35</sup> Chs. 12-16 apply the theological positions thus outlined to problems in the community — not least 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 an index, my own home-made one runs to 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 parts of 8: 13-30 will 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 programme as the framework for his own mission — a programme which was never carried out and which, consequently, indicates theological misjudgments which cannot be adopted by those who come after him. Here is the paradox both of Paul and of Käsemann's exposition of him: 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 maintained as a unity but whose parts, even when they have fallen apart, have again and again had an impact on world history.'<sup>36</sup> Thus the Adam-Christ picture of 5: 12-21, and the vision of the final restoration of 'all Israel', are the remains of pre-Pauline apocalyptic speculation which the apostle should, for the sake of consistency, have forsworn — just as the (hypothetical) formulae in 1: 3f.; 3: 24f. reflect a pre-Pauline understanding which the apostle has now radically modified by supplying both internal alterations and a new context. Exegetical details thus reflect, at point after point, the basic history-of-religions thesis and polemical theological position. Paul's theology is only comprehensible, for Käsemann, 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 solutions which Paul himself propounded and the need for *sachkritik* in present-day exegesis of his writings.

<sup>35</sup> See especially G. Klein's article on Paul and the Jews in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 229-243. Klein strongly re-asserts the standard view of Paul's anti-Jewish polemic against those who, since the Second World War, have been trying to see Paul in a different light.

<sup>36</sup> P. 296.

<sup>33</sup> Pp. viii, 324.

<sup>34</sup> See also the article on Baptism and Justification by F. Hahn (*Rechtfertigung*, pp. 95-124). Hahn, like Strecker (above, n. 22) fails to convince me with his traditio-historical analysis which, in the nature of the case, is inevitably highly speculative. Ch. 6 also raises, of course, the question of the integration of the Pauline ethic with the doctrine of justification: on this, see the useful article (in English, keeping Barrett company) of L. E. Keck in *Rechtfertigung*, pp. 199-209.



### 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 pressing questions which Käsemann's large ideas force upon us — not least in their *effect upon* exegetical details.<sup>37</sup>

To begin with, there are all sorts of questions to be asked about Käsemann's use of the term 'apocalyptic' itself. It becomes clear (though only gradually) that this word has a particular *theological* meaning for Käsemann: it is, in fact, more a hermeneutical term than an historical one.<sup>38</sup> That is, it does not refer to a literary form, nor to the belief (shared by most Jewish apocalyptists) 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 metaphysical dualism (except in the sense implied 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 lordship 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 world-wide vision over against a particularist 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 hope, the question of God's plan for 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 had undertaken with the help of the category 'hellenism' — namely, that task of showing how Paul's theology transformed a

Jewish-Christian message into a gospel for the world. And the apparent rationale behind this — the vision of God as not only Israel's Lord but also the world's — is in fact irrelevant for this, because it belonged specifically in a nationalistic context. God's sovereign lordship is not revealed (according to the apocalyptists) in order to *save* the world, but precisely to condemn it and to deliver Israel. The very history-of-religions background to which Käsemann appeals 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 both cases pushed into the margin.

This becomes especially apparent in Käsemann's interpretation of *dikaio sunē theou*. He is well aware that a natural meaning of the phrase in early Christianity would include God's covenant faithfulness; and he thinks 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 to 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 'God's salvation-creating power'; in fact, God's righteousness is that because of which he is seen to be in the right 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 *nationalist* view of the covenant, does not reject covenant theology itself. On the contrary, the 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 Word precisely in calling Gentile and Jew alike, on the basis of faith in the crucified and risen Jesus Christ, into true membership in Abraham's family.<sup>39</sup> The difference between Paul and the Jewish writers who appeal to the same concept is that Paul claims to understand the covenant correctly now that he sees it in the light of Christ. I agree with Käsemann that the 'apocalyptic' background is all-important, and that it has been vitally modified by Christology: but I think that this suggests a richer view than his, a view which treats Israel and the covenant with continuing seriousness. And within this context the way is opened for a rather different exposition of

<sup>37</sup> I have explored several of the relevant areas in my doctoral thesis (above, n. 19).

<sup>38</sup> See Sauter, *op. cit.* (above, n. 10), p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> See G. B. Caird's review of Sanders' *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* in *JTS* n.s. 29, 1978, pp. 538ff.

justification and of Paul's whole critique of Israel.<sup>40</sup> 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 the world is surely his *kingdom*, not his righteousness (and however closely the two are correlated, as in Matthew 6: 33, they are hardly to be identified); and the gift, and power, that *creates* salvation is surely, for Paul, the Spirit. Käsemann has perhaps been using a Pauline phrase to refer to a *different* (Pauline) concept, or even two different concepts. Hence there follow both the initial plausibility and appeal, and the subsequent puzzles, in his account.

A fuller understanding of the apocalyptic background would have also pointed towards a more satisfactory solution of the *religionsgeschichte*, theological and exegetical problems of 5: 12-21. The point about Adam is that, in Jewish writings such as the Scrolls, *Adam's* glory would be inherited by the true *Israel*.<sup>41</sup> By saying that it is in *Christ* that Adam's sin and its effects are undone, Paul is saying that God's plan for Israel has been fulfilled in the achievement of Jesus. Abraham's people (Rom. 4) have indeed been the place, and the means, of God's dealing with the problem of Adam's sin (3: 23): but this people of Abraham are now to be understood not *kata sarka* but as the people who believe in Jesus Christ. And from this perspective the difficult and complex blend of 'anthropology', 'sacramentalism' and the problem of the law in Romans 6-8 all fall into place. Ch. 7 deals, not with the 'pious' man whose fault is attempting to keep the law, but with the Jew who, despite the great privilege of possessing the law, finds, like Adam, that the commandment is the place where sin gains a foothold (*cf.* 5: 13f.). The problem is not 'the hidden Jew in all of us' (there are, perhaps, some ghosts of pre-war Germany that even now need to be exorcized here), but rather the hidden 'Adam' in Israel.

Thus Romans 5-8, by transferring to the Messiah and thence to his people all that the apocalyptists hoped would be true of Israel (notice how this, unlike 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: what, 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);<sup>42</sup> 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 *zōē ek nekron*. Once more, Israel is not merely an example of *homo religiosus*: she is the bearer of God's promises, in whose paradoxical fate we see, reflected on a large screen, both the problems of Adam (as Käsemann sees) 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 untold blessing for the Gentiles (11: 11ff). This view arguably ties 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 disagree with many of his detailed solutions; but that he has posed the questions in the right way — by seeing 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, for me, is whether Käsemann has in fact 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.' I have suggested that the loose ends which remain in Käsemann's scheme are there because he has not carried through his apocalyptic understanding to its natural conclusion. Seeking to make Paul relevant by abstracting him from the context of *Israel's* hope, Käsemann (like Bultmann) has laid himself open to the charge of letting Paul say only what the exegete wishes to hear. To restore the 'Israel' dimension, both in the background material and in Paul, will not make the apostle less relevant for the twentieth century, but more. Nor will the 'cosmic' vision be lost, or even modified, since it is precisely Israel's hope for herself (that the world will be renewed with herself in the position of Adam, under God and over the world)

<sup>40</sup> See my article in G. Reid (ed.), *The Great Acquittal: Justification by Faith and Current Christian Thought* (London: Collins, 1980), pp. 13-37.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., 1QS 4: 23; CD 3: 20; 1QH 1: 15; 17: 15; 4QPpPs37 3: 1f.; for the whole position, see my thesis, pp. 34f.

<sup>42</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 200-210.

which has now been transferred to, and fulfilled in, Jesus Christ. And within this new, and old, vision we can hold together, as Käsemann never quite does, both the characteristically Pauline critique of Israel and the law, and the equally characteristic

affirmation that, in the revelation of the righteousness of God, the law itself — the charter of God's true covenant purposes for Israel — is not abolished, but rather (though always under the sign of the cross) fulfilled.

---