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A THEOLOGICAL STUDY OF SECOND THESSALONIANS:
A COMPREHENSIVE STUDY OF THE THOUGHT OF THE
EPISTLE AND ITS SOURCES

Janice Kay Fraser

Thesis submitted to the University of Durham
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Durham
July, 1979

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to build up a picture of the Thessalonian community, its beginning and early problems, as these are reflected in 2 Thessalonians. It is entitled a "theological study" because the main concerns are the meaning and interpretation of the epistle; historical and linguistic questions are not of primary importance. We follow through the birth of the community, its structure and its problems. Section A begins by examining 2 Thess 2.13f where we find the idea of election, which logically and chronologically precedes conversion, and proceeds to the founding of the community through Paul's mission. Section B turns to the apocalyptic passage, 2.1-12, and this section contains the bulk of the thesis. A discussion of apocalyptic literature in general attempts to define the essence of apocalyptic; the results of this investigation are then applied to 2 Thess 2.1-12 to discover how and why Paul has used apocalyptic here. Many interpretations of 2.1-12 are outlined and assessed in turn, and finally our preferred interpretation is explained. In Section C we consider first the apocalyptic error itself, its nature and source. Then the problems of persecution and idleness are discussed. These latter two problems are studied with a view to discovering how far they have contributed to the apocalyptic error and disturbance. Three excursuses follow the main body of the thesis. The first considers wider issues of apocalyptic - the meaning of apocalyptic and its lasting value and truth. The second excursus is a criticism of the hypothesis that 2 Thessalonians is a non-Pauline imitation of 1 Thessalonians, as this theory is

argued by W. Wrede. The third excursus is a brief comment on the place of prayers within the epistles and especially in 2 Thessalonians, from the point of view of their psychological effect on the readers.

Abbreviations

Periodicals

Anglican Theological Review	ATR
Biblical Research	BibRes
Bulletin of the John Rylands Library	BJRL
Catholic Biblical Quarterly	CBQ
Expository Times	ExpT
Harvard Theological Review	HTR
Journal of Biblical Literature	JBL
Journal of Ecclesiastical History	JEH
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	JEvThSoc
Journal of Religious Studies	JRS
Neue Kirchliche Zeitschrift	NKZ
New Testament Studies	NTS
Novum Testamentum	NovT
Recherches de Science Religieuse	RSR
Revue Biblique	RB
Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses	RHPR
Revue de l'Histoire des Religions	RHR
Scottish Journal of Theology	SJT
Studia Evangelica	StudEv
Studia Theologica	StudTh
Texte und Untersuchungen	TU
Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft	ZNTW
Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche	ZThK

Reference Works

W.F.Arndt and F.W.Gingrich, <u>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</u> (CUP, 1957)	AG
J.B.Bauer (ed.), <u>Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology</u> (Sheed and Ward, London and Sydney, 1970-)	EBT

- C.Brown (ed.), New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, (Paternoster, Exeter, 1975-8) DNTTh
- G.A.Buttrick (ed.), Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible (Abingdon, Nashville, 1962-6) IDB
- J.D.Douglas (ed.), New Bible Dictionary (IVP, London, 1962) NBD
- K.Galling (ed.), Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft 6 vols. (JCB Mohr, Tübingen, 1957-62³) RGG³
- J.Hastings (ed.), Dictionary of the Bible (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1898-1904) HDB
- J.Hastings (ed.), Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics (T & T Clark, Edinburgh, 1908) ERE
- G.Kittel (ed.), Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964-76) TDNT
- H.G.Liddell and R.Scott, A Greek-English Lexicon (revised and edited by Jones and Mackenzie. Clarendon, Oxford, 1940⁹). Liddell and Scott
- J.H.Moulton and G.Milligan, The Vocabulary of the New Testament (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1914-29) Moulton and Milligan
- L.Pirot, Dictionnaire de la Bible (Librairie Litouzey et Ané, Paris, 1928-72) Pirot
- C.Roth, Encyclopaedia Judaica (Keter Publishing House, Jerusalem, 1972) EJ
- I.Singer, The Jewish Encyclopedia (Funk and Wagnalls Co. New York and London, 1904) JE

Other abbreviations

Abbreviations of books of the Bible follow the practice of the Revised Standard Version.

Abbreviations of the Dead Sea Scrolls follow the practice of E. Lohse Die Texte aus Qumran (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1964).

Apocryphal books:

Ascension of Isaiah	AscenIs
Apocalypse of Baruch	ApBar
Sibylline Oracles	Sib
Testament of Dan	T.Dan
Testament of Levi	T.Levi

Commentaries on 1 and 2 Thessalonians are indicated in the footnotes by the author's surname and "comm": further details are to be found in the bibliography. Bibliographical details of commentaries on other books are included in the footnotes.

CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
A. THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA	3
I. Election and Call: an exposition of 2 Thess 2.13f	3
1. Introduction	3
2. Election	5
(a) εἶδατο	
(b) ἠραγαθημένοι	
(c) ἀπαρχὴν / ἀπ' ἀρχῆς	
(d) εἰς σωτηρίαν	
(e) ἐν ἀγαθῶν Πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας	
3. Call	17
(a) καὶ ἐκάλεσαν ὑμᾶς	
(b) διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν	
(c) εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ	
4. Effectiveness of election and call	23
5. Conclusion	30
II. Paul's mission at Thessalonica	32
1. Paul at Thessalonica	32
2. Missionary preaching	35
3. Conversion	52
4. The traditions taught to the Thessalonians	59
III. The church at Thessalonica	73
1. Ἐκκλησία	73
(a) Introduction	
(b) Arguments from OT usage and etymology	
(c) The church as an event or entity	
(d) NT usage of Ἐκκλησία	
(e) Main viewpoints on the local/universal issue	

i. Development	
ii. Dual sense	
iii. False distinction	
(f) 2 Thess 1.1,4	
2. The structure of the church at Thessalonica	90
(a) Offices: 1 Thess 5.12	
(b) ἀδελφοί	
(c) Apostolic authority	
(d) Imitation	
B. APOCALYPTIC TEACHING AT THESSALONICA	108
I. Apocalyptic literature and 2 Thessalonians	108
1. What is apocalyptic?	108
(a) Identification	
(b) Context and environment	
(c) Characteristics and context	
2. The essence of apocalyptic	115
(a) The characteristics are not the essence	
(b) The message is the essence	
(c) Relevance beyond context	
3. Is 2 Thess 2.1-12 apocalyptic?	130
(a) Characteristics	
(b) Context	
(c) Message	
(d) 2 Thess 1	
(e) Disarmed apocalyptic	
II. 2 Thess 2.1-12: The political interpretation	142
1. Introduction	142
2. Forms of the general political-historical interpretation and criticism	142
(a) Forms of this interpretation	

(b) Criticism	
3. Arguments for and against the interpretation of the <i>κατέχου/κατέχων</i> as the Roman empire and emperor	154
(a) Arguments for	
(b) Arguments against	
4. Summary and conclusions	171
III. 2 Thess 2.1-12: The mythological interpretation	176
1. The mythological interpretation	176
2. Criticism of this interpretation	188
3. Conclusion	198
IV. 2 Thess 2.1-12: Miscellaneous interpretations	199
1. Political variations	199
2. The collective or general interpretation	201
3. Miscellaneous individual interpretations	208
V. 2 Thess 2.1-12: the interpretation of the <i>κατέχου</i> as the preaching of the gospel	249
1. Introduction to this interpretation	249
2. Criticism	251
VI. 2 Thess 2.1-12: the interpretation of C.H. Gibling	264
1. Introduction	264
2. Criticism	266
(a) Signs and conditions	
i. Signs of the End do not necessarily imply a datable End	
ii. The distinction made by Gibling between sign and condition does not hold	
iii. Negative conditions are not elsewhere substantiated	
(b) Threat to faith	
i. Are the Thessalonians threatened?	
ii. Is the main concern of the passage truth versus error?	

(c) The κατέχων and Rebel as two parts of the same process of pseudo-charismatic, anti-faith activity	
i. κατέχων and Rebel as on the same 'side'	
ii. The κατέχων as a false prophet within the community, and as the cause of the error	
iii. The κατέχων being ousted before the Rebel comes	
(d) The Rebel as a theological symbol, rather than a concrete personality	
(e) The ἀτακταί as the cause of the error	
3. Conclusion	284
VII. 2 Thess 2.1-12: A suggested interpretation	285
1. Results of critical examination of interpretations	285
(a) Man of Sin	
(b) The κατέχων / κατέχων	
2. The suggested interpretation of the Man of Sin and the κατέχων / κατέχων	288
(a) Man of Sin	
(b) κατέχων / κατέχων	
i. outline of interpretation	
ii. the role of Michael in Jewish and early Christian tradition	
iii. main objections to this theory	
3. Conclusion	300
C. POSSIBLE CAUSES OF THE APOCALYPTIC PROBLEM AT THESSALONICA	302
I. The apocalyptic error at Thessalonica	302
1. Introduction	302
2. Nature of the error	302
(a) Imminence	
(b) Gnosticism	

(c) The Day as a period	
(d) Presence	
3. The source of the error	313
4. Reconstruction of the error and the situation	318
II. The Thessalonians in affliction: 2.Thess 1	321
1. Introduction	321
2. Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ Θεῷ πάντοτε κατὰ τὴν ἀδελφίαν, καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν...	32
3. What is the sign (ἐνδειγμα) of v.5?	325
4. Retributive justice, v.6-8	326
5. Is the suffering of the Thessalonians expiatory (v.5)?	328
6. Did the Thessalonians think they were suffering the Messianic Woes?	329
7. Conclusion	333
III. The ἑτακτοί : 2 Thess 3.6-11	335
1. Introduction	335
2. The apocalyptic error leads to the problem of the ἑτακτοί	336
3. The ἑτακτοί problem was not caused by the apocalyptic error	341
4. Conclusion	348
CONCLUSION	350
Excursus I: The truth of apocalyptic	352
Excursus II: The hypothesis of W. Wrede on the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians	364
Excursus III: Why does Paul quote or mention prayers in his letters?	374
Bibliography	379

INTRODUCTION

Scholarly work on 2 Thessalonians has consisted for the most part of articles and books on sections of the epistle or on its authenticity, and commentaries. We lack an overall theological study of the epistle, since commentaries concentrate on textual details, studies on portions of the letter do not build up a picture of the whole, and in work on authenticity the theological content is used merely as an argument for or against Pauline authorship. The main concerns of this thesis are therefore the meaning and interpretation of the epistle; historical and linguistic questions are briefly considered in the course of the study whenever the argument turns on them, but they are not of primary importance as in a commentary. For the purpose of the study it is assumed that 2 Thessalonians is Pauline and follows 1 Thessalonians. Arguments in favour of this view which seem to me to be substantially correct and convincing are advanced by Rigaux¹ and Kümmel². The results of the present study of the theology of the epistle tend to confirm its authenticity and traditional date.

The "apocalypse" of 2.1-12 has received much attention; however, interpretations differ considerably and there is widespread confusion about the purpose of the passage and the nature and meaning of Christian apocalyptic as a whole. A discussion of apocalyptic, and of 2 Thessalonians as apocalyptic, therefore clarifies the issues before a

¹Rigaux comm. p.124-52.

²W.Kümmel Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Quelle und Meyer, Heidelberg 1973), p.227-232.

comprehensive and detailed critical survey of interpretations is attempted.

This thesis therefore aims to build up a picture of the Thessalonian community, its birth and early development, as reflected in 2 Thessalonians, from a theological rather than a historical point of view.

A. Establishment of the Church at Thessalonica

I. Election and Call: an exposition of 2 Thess 2.13f

1. Introduction

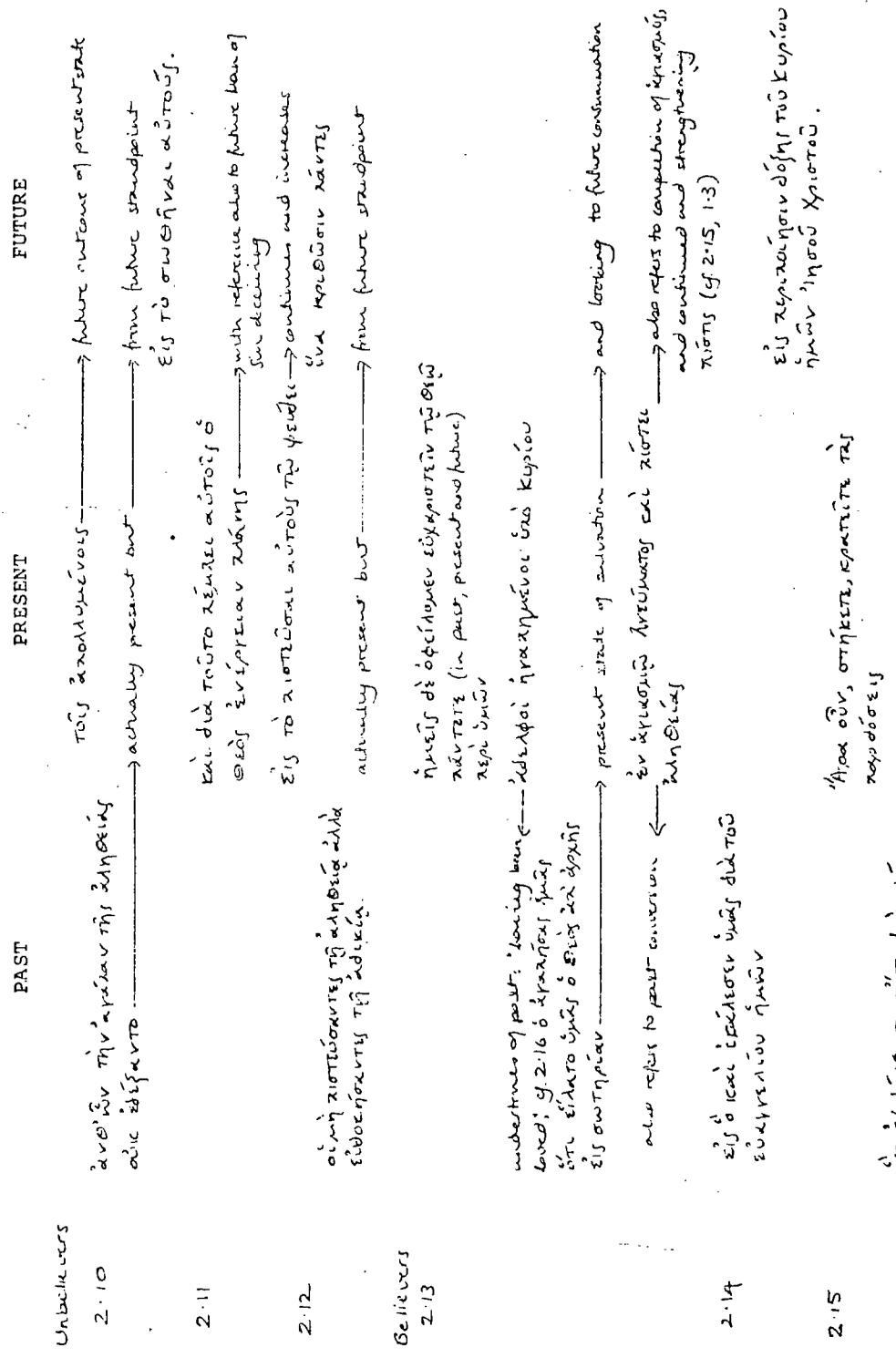
These two verses are significant in the epistle on various accounts. They include several important theological concepts in close juxtaposition, thus revealing their interrelationship; they correspond to the previous three verses, 2.10-12, by dealing with the destiny of believers as opposed to non-believers in the light of the preceding apocalyptic passage; they stand alone as a unit, although they are vitally connected to the surrounding context; and they embrace the whole time sequence of past, present and future, showing links between the three and complex interweaving of reference (see diagram A). As Paul writes, he is reviewing the past, expounding the present and above all looking to the future, and aiming at every point to encourage and reassure the community. His thoughts range in the space of these few words from the beginning of time to the eternal future, and the significance of the present can only properly be perceived when viewed in relation to past and future. Lastly, these verses have a significant internal structure, which forms a loose pattern with two triads.

The elements are action, means and purpose; the second and third elements are reversed in the second triad, and an extra purpose phrase is inserted between the triads, serving to emphasise the first triad and link it closely with the second (see diagram B)¹. Each triad highlights one central

¹ Cf. P.T. O'Brien, Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of Paul (Leiden, Brill, 1977), p.185: "the action of God, the persons concerned, the means employed, and the ultimate end to be achieved are set in two contrasting series".

Diagram A

This diagram shows the time sequence in two corresponding units, 2.10-12 and 2.13-15. v.15 is included in order to show the strongly emphasised return to the present, where the writer's thanksgiving takes place (v.13a). The arrows indicate a double or triple time reference, explicit or implicit. The columns do not necessarily indicate the same stage of past or future.



idea: election and call respectively, which themselves are very closely linked as concepts. In this section we will therefore concentrate on elucidating the various theological terms as deriving significance from the central concepts. The main questions dealt with are these: when does election take place (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς); why (ἡρακλημένοι); by what means (ἐν ἀρισμῷ Πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας); to what end (σωτηρία); how were the Thessalonians called (εὐαγγέλιον); what is the goal of the whole procedure (δόξα). In addition, we shall consider the relationship between election and call, and the effectiveness of each.

2. Election

a) εἴλατο

This is an unusual word to use for the concept of divine election to salvation. It is common in secular Greek as meaning "to choose", and is used in this non-technical sense in the NT: Paul chooses life or death (Phil 1.22); Moses chooses to throw in his lot with the Israelites rather than the Egyptians (Heb 11.25). In the LXX it occurs 12 times: Deut 26.17f (the people choose Yahweh, and he the people); Jos 24.15 (the people choose Yahweh); 1 Sam 19.2 (Jonathan choosing David); 2 Sam 15.15 (the king chooses/decides); 1 Chr 21.10 (David chooses one of three things from God); Job 34.4 (choosing judgment); Is 38.17 (God chooses Hezekiah); Jer 8.3 (choose death rather than life); Ezek 26.16 (take up crowns); 2 Maccabees 11.25 (deciding). Only two of these refer to divine election: Is 38.17 states individual election explicitly, but the context is Hezekiah's prayer for recovery from illness, so it is unlikely that a pre-temporal choice

Diagram B

A	ὅτι εἴλατο ὑμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἀπ' ἀρχῆς	action
B	εἰς σωτηρίαν	purpose
C	ἐν ἀγιασμῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας	means
B	εἰς ὃ	purpose
A	καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὑμᾶς	action
C	διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν	means
B	εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ	purpose

The variation within the pattern preserves style, and lays emphasis upon the final phrase as ultimate goal of the whole complex, which has been anticipated twice in the previous εἰς phrases. The two "A" clauses are clearly the foci of the unit, pointing to its themes of election and call. One takes place in the remote past, the other in the more recent past; both have present and future consequences; and both "pasts" are strongly attracted towards the future by the threefold εἰς.

is in mind; rather it is a temporal choice to let Hezekiah live longer. Deut 26.17f describes the mutual choice by Israel and Yahweh of each other: v.18 states the election of the nation by God to be his people.

The LXX more often uses ἐκλέγομαι for election by God of the whole people, of a place (Jerusalem), of a person (e.g. Saul, David, the Servant, Abraham). By frequent usage, this becomes the technical term and is carried over into the NT where it is again the most common term used to express divine election.

Paul uses a variety of vocabulary for the concept of election. We find ἐκλέγομαι in 1 Cor 1.27ff, Eph 1.4; ἐκλογή in Rom 9.11, 11.5,7, 1 Thess 1.4; ἐκλεκτός in Rom 8.33, 16.13; ἀρροφίζω in Rom 8.29f, 1 Cor 2.7, Eph 1.5,11; τιθέναι in 1 Thess 5.9. The occurrences of ἐκλέγομαι and cognates in Rom 9-11 are probably influenced by the frequent LXX usage to refer to election. Elsewhere there are too few references, and too diverse, to draw conclusions about habitual use of certain vocabulary. There is therefore no a priori reason why ἀίρεσις should be surprising in 2 Thess 2.13, and it may have been used to recall Deut 26.18 and possibly Is 38.17.

Rigaux² explains this usage as intended to recall 1 Thess 1.4, where ἐκλογή occurs ~~followed~~^{preceded} by ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ as here εἶλατο is followed by ἡγαπημένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ Κυρίου. This point seems obscure: it would have been more apposite had the writer used ἐκλέγομαι at 2 Thess 2.13.

In the OT, the primary object of election is the community of Israel (cf. especially Deuteronomy and Isaiah).

² Rigaux comm. ad loc.

Within this, individuals are elected to particular offices (judges, kings, prophets). At the exilic period, the emphasis changes to a chosen remnant who are still faithful to the covenant. As the concept was gradually individualized, it became both narrower and potentially wider, for it was no longer necessarily limited to the Israelite nation. In the intertestamental period however, the Qumran sect held a rigidly narrow doctrine of election: they alone were the chosen remnant. They also stressed merit and superiority (1 QM 10.9f, 1 QS 8.1-11) which is explicitly denounced in the OT (Deut 7.7f, 9.6). In the NT, the concept of election is extended to all men. This universalism is especially prominent in Paul, who whilst affirming the special privileges of Israel (Rom 9-11) nevertheless directs his preaching efforts towards Gentiles, speaking of them also as elect (eg. 1 Cor 1.27f, 1 Thess 1.4)³.

b) ἡρασημένους

In the LXX it is common to find the verb ἀγαλᾶν in election contexts, especially in Deuteronomy and Isaiah, where the ideas of God's choice of Israel and his love for her are conceptually very close.

eg. Deut. 4.37 διὰ τὸ ἀγαλῆσαι αὐτὸν τοὺς κατέρας σου καὶ ἐξελέξατο τὸ σκέραμα αὐτῶν

Deut. 7.7f ἐξελέξατο Κύριος ὑμᾶς... καθὼς τὸ ἀγαλᾶν Κύριος ὑμᾶς

³ This review of the development of the election concept is necessarily brief and therefore highly simplified. For a more detailed background, reference should be made to works such as H.H. Rowley, The Biblical Doctrine of Election (Lutterworth, London, 1950), and J. Munck Christ and Israel: an interpretation of Rom 9-11 (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1967, trans. I. Nixon).

Is 44.2 μὴ φοβοῦ παῖς μου Ἰακώβ, καὶ ἠγαπημένος Ἰσραὴλ ὃν ἐξελεξάμην

It is emphasized that God chose Israel only because he loved her, not because of her size or prior merit:

Is 51.2 ὅτι εἶς ἦν, καὶ ἐκάλεσα αὐτὸν... καὶ ἠγάπησα αὐτὸν

Deut 7.7f οὐχ ὅτι πολυαληθεῖτε παρὰ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη... ἐξελέξατο Κύριος ὑμᾶς... ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὸ ἀγαπᾶν Κύριον ὑμᾶς

The NT also links the two:

Col 3.12 ὡς ἐκλεκτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγαπῶν καὶ ἠγαπημένοι

1 Thess 1.4 εὐδοτε, ἀδελφοί ἠγαπημένοι ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ, τὴν ἐκλογὴν ἁμῶν

Jude 1 τοῖς ἐν Θεῷ ἀγαπῶν καὶ ἠγαπημένοι καὶ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τετηρημένοι κλητοῖς

It is therefore natural to find election of the beloved in 2 Thess 2.13, where it serves to remind the Thessalonians that they have only God to thank for their apprehension of the truth instead of delusion (cf. 2.11) and their destiny of glory (2.14) instead of eternal separation from God (1.9).

c) ἀπαρχὴν / ἀπ' ἀρχῆς

The correct reading of this word is difficult to decide on textual grounds. Each reading has considerable support, with A supporting ἀπ' ἀρχῆς and B supporting ἀπαρχὴν ⁴. Moore⁵ comments that "the attestation for 'from the beginning' is slightly better". It is advisable, however, to decide between the two on grounds of sense and usage elsewhere rather than attestation.

⁴ See Rigaux comm. ad loc. for a complete list of manuscripts.

⁵ Moore comm. ad loc.

ἄραρχῆ is used frequently in the LXX, translating these Hebrew words: לֶחֶם fat, choicest part; רִאשִׁית beginning, first; תְּרוּמָה contribution, offering (for priests); תרומה tithe; and זֶבַח תְּרוּמָה wave offering. By far the commonest usage is for the sacrifice of the first part of the harvest, or setting aside of a particular part of an animal for the priests before sacrificing it. Dibelius argues for the reading ἄραρχῆν in 2 Thess 2.13 and interprets it with qualitative, not temporal connotations. This avoids the problem of the Thessalonians not being the first converts, even in Macedonia; but it is not supported by the LXX use of ἄραρχῆ .

The LXX uses the phrase ἀπ' ἀρχῆς frequently, with five basic meanings:

long ago/ from old: Is 48.8 οὕτως ἀπ' ἀρχῆς ἤνοιξά σου τὰ ὦτα

63.16 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τὸ ὄνομα σου ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ἔστι

beginning of a period or distance; 2 Sam 14.26 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς

ἡμερῶν εἰς ἡμέρας

Ezek 42.12 κατὰ τὰ θυρώματα ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τοῦ περιλάτου

first in order: Amos 6.7 ἀπ' ἀρχῆς δυναστῶν

as at the beginning: Zech 12.7 καὶ σώσει Κύριος τὰ σκηνώματα Ἰουδα,

from the beginning: Is 43.12f καὶ ἐγὼ Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ἔτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς

'Long ago' and 'from the beginning' are the most common meanings. Both make vague reference to the past, but often the exact stage of the past is ambiguous: it can be creation, birth, olden times in general, or the birth of Israel as a nation, or a point in the recent past of no theological significance (eg. 2 Sam 14.26). With this vague usage we may compare our own English idiom 'ages ago'.

It is impossible, therefore, to determine from the LXX usage what the exact reference of ἀπ' ἀρχῆς in 2 Thess 2.13

would be: indeed, it may be intentionally ambiguous, not fixing God's elective decree at any temporal point, but simply placing it before the event of the Thessalonians' call, or in the remote past.

In Isaiah especially the phrase is used as part of God's self-vindication: he is from of old, or spoke from of old, and foresaw the present then, he has always been God, and so on. It underlines God's sovereignty, power and independence of any man or god. Yahweh is over, beyond and before the people.

In the light of this, we may paraphrase 2 Thess 2.13f thus (if ἀπ' ἀρχῆς is the correct reading): "God chose you long ago in his sovereignty, quite independently of you; but this choice did not impinge on you until he called you through our preaching".

In secular Greek also, the reference of the phrase can only be decided by its meaning in context:

Pindar (Pythian Odes 8.25) Τέλειαν δ' ἔχει δόξαν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς

Aeschylus (Supplices 344) εἶπεο γ' ἀπ' ἀρχῆς πραγμάτων κοινῶν ἦν

Plato (Theaetetus 206d) ὁμῆ' ἐνείης ἢ κωφός ἀπ' ἀρχῆς

In these instances it refers respectively to creation, the beginning of an enterprise, and birth.

Ἀπαρχή occurs in the NT five times in Paul and twice elsewhere:

Rom 8.23 τὴν ἀπαρχὴν τοῦ Πνεύματος

11.16 εἰ δὲ ἡ ἀπαρχὴ ἁγία, καὶ τὸ φύραμα

16.5 ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀσίας εἰς Χριστόν

1 Cor 15.20 Χριστὸς ... ἀπαρχὴ τῶν κεκοιμημένων

16.15 ἀπαρχὴ τῆς Ἀχαΐας

Jas 1.18 ἀπαρχὴν τῶν αὐτοῦ κρῖσμάτων

Rev 14.4 ἀραρχὴ τῷ θεῷ καὶ τῷ Ἀρνίῳ

It may be seen that ἀραρχὴ is rarely used without a qualifying genitive or dative. The exception is Rom 11.16, but here ἀραρχὴ is being used literally as the firstfruits offering from the dough, whereas all the other instances above are metaphorical uses. Where ἀραρχὴ is used metaphorically, the context explains what kind of firstfruits are in mind. In 2 Thess 2.13, ἀραρχὴ would be an unexplained metaphorical usage. Various suggestions have been made for the meaning of such a metaphor: the Thessalonians were firstfruits of the mission in Macedonia - but the Philippian mission preceded them; the addressees were those first converted in Thessalonica - but there is insufficient evidence to support a theory of the letter being written to a subsection of the community; they were firstfruits of the Gentiles - but again, the Thessalonians were not the first Gentiles converted. Best considers that a variant might have been influenced by Jas 1.18 and Rev 14.4, where ἀραρχὴ refers to the early Christians in general, and the 144,000 martyrs. Paul was writing too near the time and too specifically in this context, to take an overall view like this⁶.

Ἀρχὴ ἀρχῆς is common in the NT, with a similar range of meanings to the LXX. It can mean the beginning of creation (Mt 19.4, 8, 24.21, 2 Pet 3.4); the beginning of Jesus' ministry (Jn 15.27, 16.4. (ἐξ ἀρχῆς)); Lk 1.2 may mean from Jesus' ministry, since it mentions eyewitnesses, or from the beginning of the mission when the traditions began to be spread by eye-witnesses; or conversion to the Christian faith

⁶ Best comm. ad loc.

(1 Jn 2.24, 3.11, 2 Jn 5,6). Paul only once uses a similar phrase: ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (Phil 4.15). He uses other phrases to denote 'from eternity/creation': ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων 1 Cor 2.7; ἀπὸ τῶν αἰώνων Col 1.26; ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου Eph 1.4. Since these are all different, however, we cannot rule out the possibility that ἀπ' ἀρχῆς was in his vocabulary. It is the 'lectio difficilior', being unique in Paul, whereas ἀαρχῆ occurs elsewhere in Paul, which may have brought about a scribal correction.

It seems most likely on the above grounds that 'απ' ἀρχῆς is the correct reading. Setting aside textual evidence and usage, the sequence of thought also argues for ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. There is then a logical development: "God chose you in eternity (or the beginning of the world, or their birth - it makes little difference) and subsequently and accordingly called you when we preached the gospel to you".

d) εἰς σωτηρίαν

This is the first of three 'εἰς' phrases in the unit. The repetition of εἰς indicates the development within the unit, and emphasises the idea of movement towards a goal. Σωτηρία is the goal of election. The second phrase, εἰς ὃ ... refers not only to the immediately preceding phrase (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστει ἀληθείας) but to the whole preceding clause from ὅτι εἶλατο, and leads into the second half of the unit which is concerned with the historical call of the Thessalonians. Εἰς ὃ therefore shows that in the call, the whole elective purpose, including its goal and means, is put into effect on the historical, practical level. The third phrase, εἰς περιποίησιν δόξης rounds off the unit by describing the climactic ultimate goal of election and conversion.

Rigaux calls σωτηρία here a middle term ("moyen terme") between election as its source, and glory as its ultimate end⁷. Most commentators observe that it points forward to δόξα but is to some extent a present experience⁸. We may describe it as an inaugurated and developing process: the following phrase summarises both how it begins and the vital features of its continuing development.

On this understanding of σωτηρία, it spans all three divisions of the time sequence: having commenced in the past (from the standpoint of writer and recipients) at the Thessalonians' conversion, it continues in the present to lead towards its consummation, the sharing of the Lord's glory. In a proleptic sense it also originates from the remoter past, being the very purpose of divine election. "σωτηρία and its cognates seem uniformly, with St. Paul, to have an eschatological significance. The beginning of the saving process, indeed, may be so described, and any particular stage in its development ... the apostle ... keeps ever in view the events of the last time"⁹.

ε) ἐν ἀρισμῷ πνεύματος καὶ αἰσθητῆς ἀληθείας

This phrase describes both the means by which and the state in which salvation is realized: any distinction between

⁷ Rigaux comm. ad loc.

⁸ Cf. Rom 10.10 στόματι δὲ ὁμολογεῖται εἰς σωτηρίαν
11.11 ἀλλὰ τῷ αὐτῶν καρδιακῶματι ἡ σωτηρία τοῖς ἔθνεσιν
2 Cor 6.2 ἰδοὺ νῦν ἡμέρα σωτηρίας
Phil 2.12 τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν καταπραΰνεσθε
Cf. also the use of the present participle σωζομένων for salvation 'in progress' in: 1 Cor 1.18, 2 Cor 2.15.

⁹ H.A.A. Kennedy St. Paul's Conception of the Last Things (Hodder, London, 1904), p.46f.

means and state is a false one, since each implies the other. Frame¹⁰ points out that the phrase is dependent on εἶλατο εἰς σωτηρίαν which implies that the means as well as the goal of salvation is decreed by God.

Ἁγιασμῶ is not a designation of the Spirit, but of his activity in the believer. Being himself holy, the Spirit can sanctify. Πνεῦμα is here the divine Spirit rather than the human spirit (cf. 1 Thess 5.23 where God is the sanctifier): the anarthrous πνεῦμα is habitually used in the NT of God's Spirit. The NT knows of sanctification effected by the Father (1 Thess 5.23), Son (1 Cor 1.30) and Spirit (1 Pet 1.2).

O. Procksch¹¹ describes ἁγιασμός as "the living form of the Christian state", a moral form which springs from the atonement and which is essential to give a vision of Christ. Other uses of ἁγιασμός in Paul are:

Rom 6.19 οὕτως νῦν καυχῆσθε τὰ μέλη ὑμῶν δοῦλα τῆ δικαιοσύνη εἰς ἁγιασμόν.

1 Cor 1.30 [Χριστός]... δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμός καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις

1 Thess 4.3, 7f τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμός ὑμῶν... οὐ γὰρ ἐκέλευσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐν ἁγιασμῶ... τὸν θεὸν... δίδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον εἰς ὑμᾶς.

The progress of believers towards righteousness by sanctification is parallel to the non-believers' increasing iniquity (Rom 6.19, cf. 2 Thess 2.10-14); sanctification stems from Christ's redemptive work (1 Cor 1.30); to disregard God's will of sanctification is to treat lightly his gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 4.3, 7f), because the Spirit is holy.

ἴστυς is used here in the sense of acceptance of the

¹⁰ Frame comm. ad loc.

¹¹ O. Procksch "ἁγιασμός" TDNT I, p.113.

gospel truth. It is an act, not simply intellectual acceptance but including and implying ὑπακοή cf. 2 Cor 9.13: δοξάζοντες τὸν θεὸν ἐπὶ τῇ ὑποταγῇ τῆς ὁμολογίας ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ
 Rom 1.5 ἐλάβομεν χάριν καὶ ἀποστολήν εἰς ὑπακοήν πίστεως
 16.26 εἰς ὑπακοήν πίστεως εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη

Ἀλήθεια is used here in the sense of true teaching, the content of faith. Philo uses it thus in describing a proselyte: μεταναστὰς εἰς ἀληθείαν καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἐνὸς τιμίου τιμὴν ἀπὸ μυθικῶν κλασματικῶν καὶ κολυβαρχίας

(De specialibus legibus 4,178). It is often synonymous with the gospel in the NT (2 Cor 4.2f), and as believers have faith in the truth and faith in the gospel (Phil 1.27), so they obey the truth (Rom 10.16) and the gospel (Gal 5.7). Col 1.5 defines the gospel as the word of truth: ἐν τῷ λόγῳ τῆς ἀληθείας τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.

In the verses immediately preceding our unit, ἀλήθεια is contrasted to ἀδικία and ψεῦδος, the former being the mark of the Christ and the two latter the marks of the Antichrist. The unusual phrase τὴν ἀρχαίην τῆς ἀληθείας which virtually parallels πιστεύσαντες τῇ ἀληθείᾳ in 2.12 brings out the total self-dedication involved in believing the truth. The object of love and source of pleasure (2.12b) changes from ἀδικία to ἀλήθεια.

It would be a crude simplification to label ἀγιασμοῦ as the work of God in the believer and πίστις as the believer's part; nevertheless, the double-sided phrase does point to the importance of active co-operation between God and man in salvation. τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε. θεὸς γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐνεργεῖα ἐν ὑμῖν (Phil 2.12f).

Diagram A has shown that this phrase extends over the whole time sequence. Sanctification and faith are the initial means of effecting redemption: the believer makes the truth the basis of his life, and as he accepts the gospel proclamation of Jesus' death and resurrection and responds to it by repentance, the Spirit cleanses and renews him, beginning the work of sanctification. This sanctifying work of the Spirit is mentioned first probably because without a prior influence, men would be unable to have faith: faith itself is the gift of God (Eph 2.8).

The Christian life also continues by means of continued sanctification and faith towards the goal of glory. The more sanctified the believer is, the more Christlike he is and therefore the more he partakes in God's glory; faith also must be maintained throughout, protected and strengthened, as the writer declares is already happening to the Thessalonians (1.3 ὑπερπεφάνει ἡ πίστις ὑμῶν) and must continue to happen (2.15 κρατεῖτε τὰς παραδόσεις ἃς ἐδιδάχθητε).

3. Call

a) καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὑμᾶς

In the OT, men are called to repentance (eg. Jer 3.12ff), to a specific office (eg. the Servant, Abraham, Moses, Samuel) and to salvation either for an individual or all Israel. The concept of calling is closely linked to election, for only the chosen are called. Is 41.9 links them as virtually synonymous: ἐκάλεσά σε, καὶ εἶπά σου, παῖς μου εἶ, ἐξελεξάμην σε But the distinction is usually maintained, with $\gamma\beta\gamma$ / γ ἐλέγματος stressing the divine decision and intention more than $\gamma\beta\gamma$ / γ καλέω:

election Deut 7.6, 10.15, 18.5, Is 7.15, 41,8, 43.10 etc;
call 45.3, 51.2, Ex 3.1-12, 1 Sam 3.3ff, etc.

In the NT, the call to salvation is extended to all men, only some of whom respond. Paul regularly uses *καλεῖν* for the call to God extended to men through the preaching of the gospel, which is effective for salvation if responded to.

Rom 8.30 οὓς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν

the historical call (*ἐκάλεσεν*) follows election
(*προώρισεν*)

9.11 ἵνα ἢ κατ' ἐκλογὴν προθέσῃ τοῦ Θεοῦ μένη, οὐκ
ἐξ ἔργων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος

the call carries out the purpose of election.

9.24 ἃ χρηταύμασεν εἰς δόξαν, οὓς καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς

1 Cor 1.9 πιστὸς ὁ Θεός, δι' οὗ ἐκληθήτε εἰς κοινωνίαν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ αὐτοῦ

the call marks and occasions entry into the
Christian community.

7.17,24 ἕκαστον ὡς ἐκέληκεν ὁ Θεός, οὕτως περιπατεῖτω...
ἕκαστος ἐν ᾧ ἐκλήθη, ἀδελφοί, ἐν τούτῳ μενέτω παρὰ Θεοῦ

Gal 1.6 θαυμάζω ὅτι οὕτως ταχέως μετατίθεσθε ἀπὸ τοῦ
καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον

they were called through the preaching of the gospel.

Col 3.15 ἡ εἰρήνη τοῦ Χριστοῦ... εἰς ἣν καὶ ἐκληθήτε ἐν ἐνὶ σώματι

1 Thess 2.12... τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ καλεσοῦντος ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν αὐτοῦ βασιλείαν
καὶ δόξαν.

the present calling is with a view to (*εἰς*)

kingdom and glory.

5.24 πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς, ὅς καὶ ποιήσει.

The call in 2 Thess 2.14 is clearly to salvation, which has already been stated as the goal of election. This implies

also the call to repentance, for the gospel proclamation could include this (cf. Acts 2.38). Here then, we see the eternal purpose of God (v.13) being put into effect (v.14) in the historical event of the call. For the divine decree and offer of redemption to become practically effective in the individual, there must be a free response and appropriation: hence the need for a call as well as the independent and prior choice by God.

b) διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν

The call is mediated through 'our gospel'. This does not imply a special version of the gospel, but rather that the writer is conscious of the apostolic commission to preach the gospel and to protect it from deviation. (cf. Gal 1.6 *μετατίθεσθε ἄλλο τὸ καλέσαντος ὑμᾶς ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ εἰς ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον, ὃ οὐκ ἔστιν ἄλλο.*) Paul often speaks of τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν/μου (2 Cor 4.3, 1 Thess 1.5, Rom 2.16, 16.25, 2 Tim 2.8, cf. 1 Cor 15.1, Gal 1.11, 2.2): he has a particularly strong awareness of his identification with the gospel as an apostle.

The content of the gospel is not here described, but this is not unusual as the epistles tend to assume it, being addressed to believers. Only the occasional brief and incomplete summary is found (eg. Rom 1.1ff, 1 Cor 15.1ff). Whether εὐαγγέλιον here means the content of the gospel or the act of preaching (cf. 2 Cor 8.18: *ὁ ἕκαστος ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ διὰ πασῶν τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν*) makes little difference to the sense: the preacher pronounces the call of God by expounding the kerygma. 1 Cor 9.14 contains both aspects together: *οὕτως καὶ ὁ Κύριος διέταξεν τοῖς ἐκκλησιαστικῶν ἐκ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ζῆν.*

It is the response of the individual which determines his

salvation or condemnation, cf. 2 Thess 1.8 ἐκδικήσιν τοῖς μὴ εἰδόσιν θεῶν καὶ τοῖς μὴ ἀλακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ.

If the preaching of the gospel is the locus of God's call to salvation, does that mean that all who hear the preaching are being called? If so, then the call may be rejected, since not all do respond. If not, and it is only those who have been previously chosen who are called, then salvation is restricted to a certain circle, which would seem to contradict the general NT emphasis on the universal availability of salvation. It is difficult to be sure on this point: it is not sufficient to hold that since κλητοῦ is used meaning 'believers' in the NT epistles, only those converted were called, for we have no epistle to non-Christians. If such an epistle existed, might it conceivably read "We weep when we remember how you rejected the call of God in our preaching"¹²? This question of the relative extent of the categories 'called' and 'chosen' will be raised again in section A. I 4.

c) εἰς περιλοιήσιν δόξης τοῦ Κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

Δόξα is used in the LXX to translate the Hebrew דָּבָר which is primarily applied to God. Its root meaning is weight or value, and this is retained in the sense of impressiveness: the sight of Yahweh's דָּבָר always evokes awe, or even fear, and a deep sense of the gulf between God and man.

דָּבָר is the divine nature and its manifestation. It is used of the presence of God on Sinai, in tabernacle and temple, and in prophetic visions (eg. Is 6.3, Ezek 1.28).

¹² Even 2 Cor 2.14-16 does not indicate whether those who are perishing are doing so because they failed to respond to the call of Paul's preaching or because they were not called at all. (καλεῖν is not used here)

Τῆς δόξης is also that which is ascribed to God by man in acknowledgment of his being and in extolling him.

The NT use of δόξα retains its special meaning as the divine nature, but goes further than the OT in ascribing to Christ. It is rarely used in connection with the incarnate Jesus, and then always refers ahead to his parousia (eg. Mt 19.28, Mk 8.38) or to times when the glory was partially revealed (Luke's birth and transfiguration narratives), or in John's gospel where his earthly life is seen from the standpoint of his exaltation. By his resurrection however, which itself was accomplished by the Father's glory (Rom 6.4), Jesus is glorified (1 Pet 1.21 Θεὸν τὸν ἐπελεῖψαντα αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν καὶ δόξαν αὐτῷ δοῦντα) and glory is thenceforth ascribed to him in doxologies (Heb 13.21, 1 Pet 4.11, Rev 5.12f).

In the OT, the divine glory was seen by the people rather than shared in (cf. Lev 9.6, Ex 34.29f). The eschatological hope is also to see the Lord's glory (Is 35.2, 66.18), and for the world to be filled with it (Ps 72.19, 57.5,11). No distinction between Yahweh becoming the Τῆς δόξης of Israel and Israel being created for Yahweh's Τῆς δόξης is maintained (cf. Is 43.7, Zech 2.5).

The apocalyptic literature changes the emphasis from merely seeing δόξα to reflecting and participating in it: "they shall not be able to look on the faces of the righteous, because the Lord of Spirits shall cause his light to shine on the faces of the saints and the elect righteous" (1 Enoch 38.4); "clothe him in the clothes of my glory" (2 Enoch 22.8). This is taken up in the NT

and becomes part of the believers' identification with Christ, which extends from his death and resurrection to his exaltation (Rom 8.17 *συνκληρονόμοι... συνκλᾶσσομεν... συνδοξασθῶμεν*). Phil 3.21 speaks more explicitly of the believer's body being changed from *ταρσένωσις* to *δόξα* , as he participates in Christ's resurrection life. Kittel comments that participation in the *δόξα* is "simply part of the general statement of salvation history concerning the connection and parallelism between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection and new aeon of believers"¹³. There is a mutual act of glorification which is brought out in 2 Thess 1.12, reflected in the ambiguity of 2 Thess 2.14, and which corresponds to the OT's blurring of distinction between Israel glorifying Yahweh and vice versa. It is as the believer contemplates the glory of God in Christ that he becomes glorious and reflects the *δόξα* back to God: cf. 2 Cor 3.18 *ἡμεῖς δὲ πάντες ἀνακαλυμμένῳ προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι¹⁴ τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν, καθάπερ ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος.*

2 Cor 4.6 *ἐλάμψεν ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν χάρις φωτισμὸν τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ Χριστοῦ.*

The sharing of *δόξα* is still an eschatological hope in the NT: it is *τὴν μέλλουσαν δόξαν* (Rom 8.18), but it is the more certain for being decreed before the ages (1 Cor 2.7 *ἢν προώρυσεν ὁ Θεὸς χάρις πῶν αἰώνων εἰς δόξαν ἡμῶν* cf. Rom 8.28f) and is already evident in the present as the Holy Spirit applies the divine *δόξα* in his transforming work in the believer (Eph 3.16 *κατὰ τὸ μέτρον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ συνάμεινον ἐφάπτεσθαι διὰ τοῦ πνεύματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν ἕσω ἄνθρωπον*). "Because eschatology consummates the divine

¹³ G. Kittel "δόξα" TDNT II, p.233-253: p.250.

¹⁴ *κατοπτρίζω* here may mean "see as in a mirror" rather than "reflect". Cf. C.K. Barrett The Second Epistle to the Corinthians (London 1972) ad loc.

action, it has its roots in the divine decree. One might say that if the δόξα of the believer is really the fulfilment and goal of the divine κἀλεῖν, then in the very nature of the case it has the same origin as the latter"¹⁵.

In 2 Thess 2.14, δόξα is mentioned with a primarily future eschatological sense; but as the elucidation of σωτηρία it embraces also the present aspect, which is more evident in 1.12. There it stands in a double context: of steadfastness under persecution which brings glory to God now; and of the glory that will result from this situation when the Day comes.

H.H. Rowley in his book The Biblical Doctrine of Election emphasises that election is always to service, not primarily to a privileged position. On the surface, 2 Thess 2.13f seems to give the goal of election not as the present function or service of the believers, but as their final salvation and glory. This is however only a difference in emphasis. The goal of glory will only be reached by a life of service: ἀγιασμός and πίστεως imply obedience, and the reference to δόξα in 1.12 shows that it is by their faithful witness that the Thessalonians receive glory and ascribe it to God.

4. The Effectiveness of Election and Call

According to G. Molin¹⁶, in the OT God's call affects only those who are chosen, so that the circles of 'called' and 'chosen' are equal; in the Synoptics, 'called' is the larger category within which some are chosen; and in Paul, the call is interpreted as efficax, so that the called must

¹⁵ Kittel, op.cit., p.250.

¹⁶ G. Molin, "Election", EBT III, p.954-8: p.957f.

inevitably respond (Rom 8.30, 11.29). *κλητοῖ* is used as a synonym for Christian. J. Murray¹⁷ however holds that the elect are all those called, which includes those within Israel and the church who will be rejected at the judgment. The confusion here concerns the relationship between God's call and his choice, the role of man's freewill, and the notion of election and/or call being efficax.

It is often ambiguous whether a scholar is using efficax to denote initial effect (conversion) or final effect (ultimate salvation) or assuming that both are necessarily involved. As already observed above, the argument that *κλητοῖ* = Christian in Paul is invalid, owing to the nature of Paul's extant writings. If he believed that only those who responded by conversion were called, then 'called' is equivalent to 'chosen'. This seems to be Calvin's view¹⁸: "As if calling were not clearly commended as efficacious in the express purpose of God ... God chose those whom he justified that he might at length glorify them (Rom 8.30) - however [Pighius] may mangle this sentence, he can never stretch its efficacy to cover all men. (French adds: "It follows then that St. Paul denoted a certain number of called")". If this holds for Matthew, then his 'many called', of whom only a few are chosen (22.14), are called by men and not by God, so that preaching is not itself the call, rather it carries the call to some.

The Jews, despite being both elect and called to salvation,

¹⁷ J.O.F. Murray, "Election" HDB I, p.678-81: p.680.

¹⁸ J. Calvin, Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God (James Clarke, London, 1961, trans. J. Reid), p.114.

had not all responded to the call, and Paul even describes some of them as at least temporarily "cut off" (Rom 11.17,20). This does not necessarily mean that God's elective purpose for an individual may be thwarted: election in the case of the Jews was of a nation, not of all individuals by blood descent (cf. 11.7b). The call of God to Israel remains irrevocable (11.29) but even that verse does not explain how effective the call is, nor exactly to whom it applies: Israel may here be a 'spiritual' entity, not equivalent to the original nation¹⁹.

The problem of the tension between effective election and freewill is sometimes solved by stressing foreknowledge, so that God simply foresees who will respond to his call. In retrospect, they are then described as the chosen. This however reduces election to an act of omniscience, not an act of will, which is the distinctive sense of election as against call. It also robs election of an important function, which is assurance: there would be no great comfort in God's having (~~passively~~) foreseen how one would respond. It is possible to understand divine influence as enabling freewill to act rather than compelling action: "the action of the divine will on the human was not to overwhelm it but to restore its power of action ... the love of Christ is indeed a constraining motive (2 Cor5.14) ... and surrender to that love is the last act for which a man could dream of claiming any credit to himself. It is the gift of God (Eph 2.8).

¹⁹ For discussion of this controversial passage, see commentaries. The problems of interpretation are too complex to be discussed in detail here.

Yet the refusal to surrender is not due to defect of grace. It is possible to receive the grace of God in vain"²⁰.

If the chosen are a subset of the called, and the choice only is effective, the question of effective rejection is raised, and the point of calling those who cannot respond is in doubt. Calvin's view is that "being depraved, they could do nothing but sin. Yet they sinned not by extrinsic impulse but by the spontaneous inclination of the heart, knowingly and voluntarily ... If you ask the reason why God corrects the vice in his elect but deems the reprobate unworthy of the same remedy, it is hidden in God himself. Hence these two principles agree splendidly with each other: each man by his own unbelief is the author of his condemnation, and all destitute of the Spirit of God rush blindly against Christ"²¹. According to Rowley²², it is possible to forfeit election by failing to serve in the specific way which was the purpose of one's election. This preserves the moral element and prevents false complacency. In our context (2.10ff), the lost have refused to love the truth before being deluded: they have only themselves to blame.

To investigate how effective election and call are in the NT we will briefly survey the main passages concerned.

There seems little doubt that in the gospels, more are called than respond: the whole ministry of Jesus evokes decision both for and against him, and the parable of the wedding feast (Mt 22.1-14) explicitly teaches that καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι

²⁰ Murray, op.cit., p.681.

²¹ Calvin, op.cit., p.116f.

²² Rowley, op.cit., passim.

εἶσιν κλητοῖ, ὅλιγοι δὲ ἐκλεκτοῖ. Even among those invited from the streets, one was rejected for lack of wedding garment.

The epistles use κλητοῖ for Christians only, referring to their conversion and continuance in the Christian life, so that we cannot tell whether the call is conceived of as extending beyond those who respond. It is worth examining more closely the chief 'predestinarian' passages.

Rom 8.30 οὓς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν· καὶ οὓς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἔδικαίωσεν· οὓς δὲ ἔδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἔδοξασεν.

Albeit not a statement of systematic theology, this is presumably intended to convey some positive truth. It may be understood as referring to the normal sequence of events ("it happens in this order, with all these elements included, not in any other way") rather than as an inexorable process ("once chosen there is no escape"). This is the view of Sanday and Headlam²³. Leenhardt²⁴ interprets the predestination as concerning not the choice of some individuals to be saved, but the choice of how salvation should be carried out: "the content of the divine plan of love realized in the person of his Son, and with the means of its realization: it is not concerned with the inclusion or exclusion of whomsoever". It is certainly correct that the divine plan and means were decreed beforehand, but in view of the great hymn of assurance following (8.31-9), it is unlikely that Paul had no thought

²³ W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, A critical and exegetical commentary on the epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh, 1895) ad 10

²⁴ F.J. Leenhardt, L'Épître de St. Paul aux Romains (Delachaux and Niestlé, Neuchâtel, 1957), ad loc.

of the persons involved. Cranfield²⁵ interprets *καλέω* here as efficax on the grounds that *καλέω, κλήσις* and *κλητός* are always efficax (cf. Rom 9.24, 1 Cor 7.17ff, Rom 1.6f, 1 Cor 1.2,24); the call and conversion are two sides of the same coin. ~~[As mentioned above, however, this is not certain since Paul writes only to those who have been both called and converted. Cranfield's approach implies that Paul had no conception of the call being ignored or refused, which accords ill with Paul's personal experience of opposition and rejection]~~ For C.H. Dodd, this verse springs from the experience of grace. Looking back, a man "feels more and more that he has become what he is by no act or activity of his own, that grace came to him without his own will or power ... even his most intimate, his freest acts of decision and assent become to him, without losing their quality of freedom, something that he experienced rather than did"²⁶. Again, this certainly contains truth, but the implication remains that the freewill decision was, at least, heavily influenced. It may be necessary to interpret this verse according to the overall impression from elsewhere in Paul.

Gal 1.15 εὐδόκησεν ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρὸς μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἀποκαλέσει τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί, ἵνα εὐαγγελίσωμαι αὐτὸν ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν

This links the setting apart, call, and commission so closely as not to consider the possibility of failing to respond to the call or accept the commission. It must however be set alongside Phil 3.14, where *κλήσις* is a future goal, and the context is Paul's determination to persevere lest

²⁵ C.E.B. Cranfield, A critical and exegetical commentary on the epistle to the Romans, (T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1975⁶), ad loc.

²⁶ C.H. Dodd, The Epistle of Paul to the Romans (Moffat New Testament Commentary, 1932), p.141, translating from Otto

he should fail to reach it; and 1 Cor 9.27, which envisages the possibility of Paul's failing to attain the goal even after preaching the gospel. Since Paul entertained the possibility of himself falling away, it follows that his initial response was no more inevitable than his perseverance was. Despite being chosen as apostle to the Gentiles, he might have failed either to enter into this function or to fulfil it adequately, and therefore forfeited salvation. The possibility of unfaithfulness in service apparently continued throughout his life.

2 Tim 1.9 τοῦ σώσαντος ἡμᾶς καὶ καλέσαντος κλήσει ἁγία, οὐ κατὰ τὰ ἔργα ἡμῶν ἀλλὰ κατὰ ἰδίαν πρόθεσιν καὶ χάριν, τὴν δοθεῖσαν ἡμῖν ἐν ἰησοῦ ἀπὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων

Here, πρόθεσις and χάρις are not necessarily directed ἀπὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων to individuals: the context makes it more likely here than in Rom 8.30 that God's eternal plan of salvation is in mind (ie "this way: by the death of Jesus, and in no other way"). which plan is now revealed and brought about, so that one can be called into it by the preaching of the gospel (v.11). The πρόθεσις is not then "I will save Jim", but "I will offer salvation on the basis of grace, not works". Ἡμᾶς includes Paul and Timothy but is not restricted to them: it embraces Christians in general.

Rom 9.11 ἵνα ἢ κατ' ἐλογίην πρόθεσις τοῦ θεοῦ μένη, οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων ἀλλ' ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος

This verse does not mean that the called are elect and therefore must respond: the point is rather that the choice is not according to merit but grace (call).

Rom 11.29 ἀμεταμέλητα γὰρ τὰ χαρίσματα καὶ ἡ κλήσις τοῦ θεοῦ

It is significant that this is about the election of Israel, a people, not individuals. Individuals do of course form a part of the historical working out of the purpose, but the overall purpose expressed in 11.25-32 is to save the true Israel. Nearly all commentators agree that *πᾶς Ἰσραηλ* means Israel as a whole. There is no question of an individual Jew's freedom of choice being removed.

In 1 Thess 2.12 and 5.24 the present continuous tense of *καλεῖν* is found. In 2.12, the context is conversion, where the aorist of *καλεῖν* might be expected²⁷. In 5.24, the context is a forward look to the parousia and the believer's perseverance till then. The calling happens continually: it is not only a decisive event at the beginning of the Christian life. This implies that the option of responding or not also continues.

Gal 1.6 describes the Galatians as turning away from him who called them (*τοῦ καλέσαντος*) to another gospel (*ἕτερον εὐαγγέλιον*). The call of God was effective as regards their conversion, or it would be nonsense to speak of their turning away after an interval; but it was not irreversible. They can desert to a perverted gospel. Paul speaks even more strongly in 5.2: to be circumcised means *Χριστός ὅμως οὐδὲν ὠφελησέει*. So initial effect does not necessarily entail final effect.

5. Conclusion

In summary, there are not sufficient grounds for asserting as Molin does that Paul interprets the call as

²⁷ There is in fact a variant giving the aorist *καλέσαντος*. Rigaux suggests that it is influenced by Gal 1.6. He considers the present tense to be the better reading (comm. ad loc).

finally efficax whether as regards conversion or final salvation, any more than other parts of the Bible do.

The doctrine of election is never used in the NT as grounds for superiority or complacency, and it is never stated that unbelievers were rejected by God in eternity. Rom 11, with its pruning metaphor, emphasises the peril of thinking oneself secure; Rom 8.30-39 is followed by the discussion of the past failure of the Jews to fulfil their election; even Paul himself, with his strong consciousness of apostolic office and special visionary call, does not base his security on the past but presses on to be found faithful.

Election is used as grounds for assurance (Rom 8.31-9) because it shows that the believer's standing is not dependent on his strength alone to stand, but also on the prior love and faithfulness of God (1 Thess 5.24 $\alpha\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\omicron}\nu\varsigma \delta\epsilon \kappa\alpha\lambda\omega\upsilon\varsigma \upsilon\mu\acute{\iota}\nu, \acute{\epsilon}\varsigma \kappa\alpha\iota \kappa\alpha\iota\acute{\eta}\sigma\epsilon\iota$). The emphasis on God's initiative in calling according to a pre-temporal decision stresses that it is not due to human merit but to free grace.

In 2 Thess 2.13f, the possibility of false complacency is immediately ruled out by the paraenesis in v.15, exhorting the Thessalonians to stand firm and hold on: but even this emphasis on their activity is laid alongside a prayer for God's help which reminds them of what he has done for them (comfort, hope, grace) and will do (comfort, establish their hearts). It is impossible to draw a rigid distinction between the divine and human roles in vv.13-17.

A. Establishment of the Church at Thessalonica

II. Paul's mission at Thessalonica

1. Paul in Thessalonica

Although the purpose of this section is not to reconstruct the historical scene of Paul's mission in Thessalonica and its results, it is necessary to ask two historical questions of the sources before turning to the theological import of Paul's preaching and teaching. These questions concern the length of Paul's stay and the nature of his audience. Luke's account in Acts 17 states the duration as three sabbaths (which could imply a stay of nearly five weeks in all). From Phil 4.16 we know that Paul received aid from the Philippians more than once¹ whilst in Thessalonica. The distance between the two cities being 95 miles, this indicates to some that a longer stay than that recorded by Luke took place. In addition, the Thessalonian letters themselves give the impression of a large response to the missionary preaching, sufficiently remarkable for the news to spread quickly; of an extended period of teaching the converts, who are constantly reminded that they are already instructed on certain points²; and of time for affection and intimate acquaintance to grow between Paul and his companions and the Thessalonians³.

According to Luke's account, Paul's audience was simply those who heard him speak in the synagogue: mostly Jews,

¹ But see Frame's view below.

² Cf. 1 Thess 2.11, 5.2, 2 Thess 2.5f (the question of where prior knowledge and present knowledge are indicated in this chapter is dealt with below) 3.7.

³ Cf. 1 Thess 2.8f, 2 Thess 3.7-9.

therefore, with a few Gentile godfearers and proselytes. From the letters alone, however, one would conclude that Paul preached mainly to Gentiles, or at least that the vast majority of his converts were Gentiles. There are relatively few direct OT references and much vocabulary is noticeably non-Jewish, especially 1 Thess 1.9f, where the Thessalonians' conversion is described.

Efforts to solve these contradictions mostly grant Luke the benefit of the doubt whilst pointing out that his account is obviously incomplete and does not exclude either weekday preaching to Gentiles or a further period after the three sabbaths when Paul turned to the Gentiles. Best⁴ is unusual in maintaining that Luke's account is in error through ignorance: having but scanty information about the Thessalonian mission, Luke simply assumed that Paul followed his customary habit of preaching first to the Jews and using the synagogue as a natural locus of activity, and spoke along the usual lines for a Jewish audience (i.e. proving that Jesus was Messiah, and rose from the dead). Frame and Neil however consider that a three week stay would fit with Acts 17, the Thessalonian letters, and Phil 4.16: the preaching to Gentiles could have occurred mid-week, or Neil allows that Luke's three weeks might refer only to the Jewish mission and that a Gentile mission followed. In Frame's opinion, Phil 4.16 need imply only one messenger between Philippi and Thessalonica: "both (when I was) in Thessalonica, and repeatedly (ἀναξ καὶ ἄλλοις) (when I was in other places) you sent ..." ⁵ Frame also points out that the original

⁴ Best comm. p.5.

⁵ Frame comm. on 1 Thess 2.18.

congregation may not have been very large: the names mentioned elsewhere in the NT, Aristarchus, Secundus and Demas, may not have been among the first converts, and only Luke's *λίθος ἄλυσ* (Acts 17.4) indicates a large number. With a small group, intensively instructed, three weeks could have been enough for Paul to write back as he does. On the other hand, Rigaux, Milligan and von Dobschütz all consider that a stay of some months better fits the evidence, though conceding that Luke need not be absolutely wrong in reporting three weeks' synagogue preaching. The prevailing view is thus that Paul probably did stay longer than three weeks and did preach outside the synagogue as well as inside it. Neil's case for the majority of converts being pious Gentiles within the synagogue is not convincing: "this type of pagan - repelled by the laxity of conventional morality, unsatisfied by idol-worship and drawn by the high seriousness of the Jewish ethical code and the purity of its monotheism, proved to be the most fruitful ground for the activities of Christian missionaries. Christianity offered them on a religious and moral plane what had attracted them to the synagogue, without the nationalistic bias, legalistic restrictions, and ritual demands of Judaism"⁶. Would pagans of this calibre have seized the excuse to stop daily work as some of the Thessalonians did? More importantly, converted Gentile godfearers would not be turning to God from idols (1 Thess 1.9f): they had already done so in looking to Judaism. This vocabulary would only be appropriate if Paul

⁶ Neil comm. p.x.

is condensing their progressive conversion from idolatry through Judaism to Christianity: but the context demands that Paul is speaking of the immediate impact of his own preaching, which would not bring them to Christ by way of Judaism. There must therefore have been a sizable body of Gentile converts who had nothing to do with the synagogue. As Rigaux points out⁷ however, Paul's deep anxiety for the community in his absence (1 Thess 3.5,10) as to whether they would survive at all, argues against a lengthy stay. Rigaux suggests two to three months as long enough for preaching and teaching to take place, but short enough for the immaturity of the converts to cause Paul concern.

2. Missionary preaching

Paul declares the call of the Thessalonians to have been *διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἡμῶν* (2 Thess 2.14) and the evidence of their election to be the reception of *τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν* (1 Thess 1.5) as the word of God. This raises the question of what *τὸ εὐαγγέλιον* consisted of: what did Paul preach at Thessalonica? Did it differ from what he preached elsewhere, or from what others preached?

The first step towards answering these questions is to ask a further question: what did the pre-Pauline preaching consist of?⁸

A. Harnack delineates three stages of development in the apostolic preaching to Jews⁹: 1) the kingdom of God is

⁷ Rigaux comm. p.25.

⁸ This section does not aim at an exhaustive survey of the field of primitive Christian mission: merely to present a representative span of views in order to set in context the discussion of the particular preaching of Paul at Thessalonica.

⁹ A. Harnack, The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries (Harper, New York, 1962. Trans. Moffat, from 1908 edition). p.87f.

at hand, therefore repent (Mt 10.7f); 2) the risen Jesus is Messiah (cf. Mt 10.32) and will return from heaven to establish his kingdom; 3) the whole OT is interpreted as fulfilled in Jesus Christ; the inward disposition and moral principle is formulated in accordance with the possession of the Holy Spirit in the Messianic community. This led to seeing the law as inadequate, and connecting forgiveness of sins with the death of Jesus the Messiah. Harnack sees the first instance of this stage in Paul's speech in Acts 13. As far as v.38, the speech represents typical preaching to Jews, but v.39 ἐν τούτῳ αὐτὸς ἀποτιθεὶς δικαιοσύνην is distinctively Pauline, as the addition of justification by faith shows.

Harnack deduces the lines of preaching to Gentiles from 1 Thess 1.9f, 1 Cor 12.2 and Acts 17.22-30. He leaves open the question whether these references correctly summarize Paul's own preaching to Gentiles or not. Even in the case of 1 Cor 12.2 and 1 Thess 1.9f, Paul may be using common terms rather than the actual terms in which he preached¹⁰. Indeed, in the case of Corinth, Paul explicitly states that he "decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (2.2). In 1 Thess 1.9f we may also note that contextually it refers to what other Christians¹¹ are

¹⁰ cf. F. Laub, Eschatologische Verkündigung und Lebensgestaltung nach Paulus (Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 1973), p.36: 1 Thess 1.9f is a "type" of the primitive proclamation to Gentiles. Cf. also P-É Langevin, "Le Seigneur Jesus selon un texte prépaulinien, 1 Thess 1.9f" Sciences Ecclésiastiques XVII (1965) p.263-82. 1 Thess 1.9f is prepauline, and Paul is giving a resumé of the formulae he recited in preaching.

¹¹ If the subject of v.7 continues through v.9, which seems likely. It is hard to imagine non-Christians rejoicing in the welcome given to the gospel at Thessalonica, and the birth of the church there. If v.9 does however include non-Christians, that would not affect this point.

saying about the Thessalonians, rather than necessarily how Paul himself would describe their conversion, let alone how he preached, or how the Thessalonians themselves would express their conversion¹². From these three references, then, Harnack lists the main points of Gentile preaching thus: one living and true God; Jesus the Son of God and Judge who saves us from the wrath and is therefore Lord; we owe faith and service to God and faith and hope to his Son as Lord¹³. Harnack makes an important point in observing that "from the very first, morality was inculcated within the Christian church in two ways: by the Spirit of Christ and by the conception of judgment and recompense"¹⁴. Both these (Spirit and judgment) had a future perspective, and set the present over against the future, giving a motive for self-control. This motive is one of the four chief principles which Harnack finds in the church's mission of the first three centuries¹⁵. The vital links between mission, faith and morality will be explored further under section A II 3 on conversion.

To C.H. Dodd we owe the first extensive and detailed examination of the early church's preaching and teaching, which categories he distinguishes sharply as kerygma and didache. He outlines the Petrine and Pauline kerygmas as

¹² Even if this is not Paul's own vocabulary it seems to be at least acceptable to him: he does not use it to criticize or contradict.

¹³ Harnack, op.cit., p.89.

¹⁴ Harnack, op.cit., p.96.

¹⁵ Ibid.

seen in Acts: Petrine, Acts 2.14-36,38f, 3.12-26, 4. 8-12

- 1) The age of fulfilment has dawned
- 2) through the death and resurrection of Jesus;
- 3) because of his resurrection, Jesus is exalted at the right hand of God as the Messianic head of the new Israel.

- 4) The Holy Spirit in the church is the sign of Christ's present power and glory.

- 5) The Messianic age will soon be consummated by Christ's return.

- 6) Appeal for repentance; offer of forgiveness and the Holy Spirit; promise of salvation.

The differences in the Pauline kerygma are as follows:

- 1) Jesus is called Son of God, rather than by titles from Second Isaiah. But "Son of God" is deeply rooted in the Synoptics, and "Son of God with power" carries much the same idea as "Lord and Christ".

- 2) Christ died for our sins: the Petrine kerygma does not explicitly connect forgiveness of sins with Christ's death, but Paul includes this in what he received from tradition (1 Cor 15.3), and the Petrine kerygma calls Jesus the Servant, thus opening the way to interpreting his death according to Is 53. Acts 8.32-5 suggests that Philip did this.

- 3) The exalted Christ intercedes: this is also found in Heb 7.25 and implied in Mt 10.32, so it may not be just Pauline. It is another way of saying that forgiveness is offered in his name.

Points of the Petrine kerygma found in Paul although not in the summaries of "my gospel" include: the Holy Spirit

as sign of the new age, the "earnest" theology (2 Cor 1.22, 5.5, Eph 1.13f); and the calling and election of the church as the Israel of God (cf. Acts 3.26f, 2.3-9).

Explicit reference to Jesus' ministry, his miracles and teaching is absent from Paul, although we cannot argue from this silence that he never mentioned them. His speech in Acts 13.18-41 is similar to Acts 10, referring to John the Baptist, Jesus' ministry and the trial before Pilate: it is not inconceivable that this is Pauline, since his acquaintance with Apollos would draw the Baptist to his attention, and 1 Tim 6.13 (from the Pauline circle if not Paul himself) alludes to Pilate¹⁶.

Thus although Dodd clearly sees distinctions between the two preachers, he also shows that these may not have been as extensive as is sometimes thought, and were not of a fundamental order.

Dodd's thesis of a fixed apostolic kerygma aroused considerable opposition, not least from the Bultmann school on the grounds that it is the encounter with Christ through the preaching which elicits faith, rather than doctrinal assertions in themselves. This criticism is only partly valid: in defining the content of preaching one is not necessarily asserting that the latter elicits faith - only that it forms the specific content or direction of faith. More apposite as criticism of Dodd¹⁷ is the view that the message would vary

¹⁶ C.H.Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments (Hodder, London, 1963), p.21-30.

¹⁷ Represented for example by Cadbury, Schweizer and Moule.

in presentation and also in content to a certain extent according to the background and understanding of the listeners, and to the occasion when preaching took place. This is a valuable corrective on seeking the definitive kerygma of the NT, but it remains true that for the Christian mission to exist at all there must have been a basic core of common doctrine. M. Green¹⁸ emphasises the differences between the various Acts speeches (Peter's speeches corresponding with 1 Peter, Pauline touches in Paul's, the Areopagus speech paralleling Rom 1-2¹⁹, the Lystra speech paralleling 1 Thess 1) to maintain that the similarities are due not to a fixed common kerygma but to the fact of preaching the one gospel. Green argues that it is not correct that Luke (in Acts) does not see atoning significance in the death of Jesus, whereas this becomes the central tenet of Paul's gospel, because:

1) the seriousness of sin is stressed in Acts by the demand for repentance, punishment of sinners and reminders of judgment, eg. 3.19, 10.42, 17.31.

2) Men are responsible for their sin, even when it is noted that God overrules wickedness for his own purpose, eg. 2.23, 3.13.

3) Salvation from God alone is repeatedly emphasised, eg. 2.21, 9.27, 5.30f. Jesus' death was planned, and baptism is something done for a man, not by him: salvation is given.

¹⁸ M.Green, Evangelism in the Early Church (Hodder, London, 1970), p.68f.

¹⁹ In fact, these are quite distinct conceptually: Rom 1-2 argues that the heathen have refused to worship God and turned instead to idols, whereas in the Areopagus speech Paul declares that the Gentiles worshipping an "unknown god" are in fact worshipping the true God without realizing it.

4) Cross and resurrection are often put in immediate juxtaposition to the offer of divine forgiveness, eg. 8.32f, 3.13,26, 4.27-30.

5) Jesus is often identified with the Suffering Servant, always in the context of suffering and vindication. "No passage in the OT was more commonly used by Christians than this to explain their Lord's expiatory death"²⁰.

6) The death of Christ is a ransom, 20.28.

7) Jesus died on a tree: a plain allusion to Deut 21.21-3, showing a vicarious understanding of the cross²¹.

Not all Green's points carry equal weight: Jesus is only called the servant in 3.13 and 4.27; and the death on a $\xi\lambda\omicron\nu$ (5.30, 10.39, 13.29) does not necessarily carry the full vicarious significance of Gal 3.13. However, Green has demonstrated that Luke's understanding of the death of Christ does not contradict Paul's. He substitutes "common gospel" for "common kerygma": it is the substance of the message rather than the form and language in which it is conveyed that all preachers shared; and he upholds the distinctiveness of individual presentation which need not involve contradiction.

Did Paul therefore conceive of his gospel as being different from anyone else's? Dodd is rather ambiguous on this point. It has already been mentioned that he draws connecting lines between the Pauline and Petrine kerygma, narrowing the gap: but he also states that by "his" gospel Paul meant "not necessarily the gospel-common to all or most early preachers. For Paul, as we know, claimed a high degree

²⁰ Green, op.cit., p.74.

²¹ Green, op.cit., p.73f.

of originality in his presentation of the gospel, and the claim is clearly justified"²². Later, however, Dodd states that Paul believed his gospel to be essentially the same as that of the primitive apostles (cf. Gal 1.11-18, 1 Cor 15.1ff), illustrating this from Romans, a letter written to a church which Paul had not founded. Any data there must be assumed common to other apostolic preaching²³. Since Paul could not have received the traditions of the gospel more than seven years after Jesus' death, "Paul's preaching represents a special stream of Christian tradition which was derived from the main stream at a point very near its source"²⁴. Paul's gospel was therefore idiosyncratic but not fundamentally different.

E. Molland²⁵ denies that Paul's gospel was a special one: the context of the term is Paul's mission - "the gospel that I have preached and still preach" - and its psychological source is his strong consciousness as an apostle with a gospel to preach. A. Fridrichsen²⁶, however, finds a distinction between

²² Dodd, op.cit., p.9.

²³ In the summary 1.1-4, Davidic descent is an additional comment, cited as part of a recognised formula.

²⁴ Dodd, op.cit., p.16.

²⁵ E. Molland, Das Paulinische Evangelion (Oslo, Avhandlingar Utgitt av der Norske Videnskaps - Akademie 1. II Hist-Filos. Klasse 1934 no.3).

²⁶ A. Fridrichsen, The Apostle and his Message, Indjudning till Theologie Doktorpromotionen vid Uppsala Universitet (Uppsala, Almgust & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB, 1947).

the Petrine and Pauline gospels which is due to the division of the mission field into Jewish and Gentile areas. Peter interprets the gospel from a Jewish viewpoint, while Paul interprets it from a Gentile viewpoint, emphasising the conclusion that salvation is universally available on the same basis. This was not however a point of conflict; so long as each preached to the appropriate group of people, all was well; only "in a Pauline congregation the Petrine gospel would of necessity appear as 'a different gospel'"²⁷. Only if the Petrine gospel were imported into a Gentile situation would it be a Judaizing gospel, and therefore no gospel at all. Fridrichsen later complicates his theory by adding that the mission field was divided not simply into Jews and Gentiles but geographically, so that Paul was sent to the Jews in his area as well as the Gentiles, showing that the Jewish church, in Paul's opinion, was limited to the Holy Land²⁸. This calls into question Fridrichsen's whole theory, since not only were there Jews in the Gentile world, and therefore in Paul's audience and in his congregations, but Jews were also mixed with Gentiles in the Holy Land. Both Peter and Paul would be preaching to Jews and Gentiles. The division of labour apparently decided upon, as Gal 2.9 recalls, seems impossible to put into practice: and indeed the situation related in Gal 2.11-14 demonstrates that it was not strictly adhered to.

Green compares Paul's gospel to Mark's. Apparent differences include Paul's emphasis on judgment explicit in the gospel: Rom 2.16, 10.16,21, 2 Thess 1.8 (but compare

²⁷ Fridrichsen, op.cit., p.11.

²⁸ Fridrichsen, op.cit., p.12

Mk 8.35f, 16.16); and on the *δύναμις* of the gospel, the power of moral reform: Rom 1.16, 1 Thess 1.5f (but compare Jesus' *δυνάμεις* in Mark). Genuinely Pauline distinctive emphases are: 1) the forensic language of justification, which safeguards God's initiative in providing salvation; 2) the final and absolute nature of the gospel, which is the gospel of truth, hope, power, immortality and the glory of God (Col 1.5, 23, 1 Thess 1.5f, 2 Thess 1.8, 1 Tim 1.11); 3) the ethical implications of having the divine grace at work within²⁹.

G. Friedrich's view on *εὐαγγέλιον ἡμῶν* is that this is not a special gospel: Paul emphasises that there is only one gospel (Gal 1.6) which he shares with the other apostles. It is his own because he is entrusted with its declaration and closely identifies himself with it: "what happens to him cannot be considered apart from his task as a preacher of the gospel"³⁰. Similarly, O. Piper³¹ describes Paul as "bound" by the gospel, so that he cannot take liberties with it. Paul has been made part of the gospel, with a particular function in its proclamation to Gentiles. Neil interprets "our gospel" simply as "the gospel which we believe and preach"³², presumably distinguishing it from the many gospels of the Roman world (emperors' decrees, etc.) rather than from other apostles' gospels. Moore also understands "our gospel"

²⁹ Green, *op.cit.*, p.55.

³⁰ G. Friedrich, "εὐαγγέλιον" *TDNT* II p.721-35. P.734, cf. Phil 1.16, 1.17, 2 Tim 1.8.

³¹ O.A. Piper, "Gospel", *IDB* II p.442-8. P.445.

³² Neil comm. on 2 Thess 2.14.

as "very loosely possessive"³³ meaning merely the gospel which we preached. Best³⁴, however, takes ἡμῶν in a stronger sense as indicating the historical occasion on which Paul offered the gospel to the Thessalonians; not, however, as affecting the authorship or origin of the gospel. J. Massie³⁵ makes the reference yet more specific, as "laying stress on some particular point which it has been his way to expound with special fullness as having been emphatically borne in upon him at the time of his preaching, or as closely affecting the case of the people to whom he is writing". In 1 Thess 1.5f, the stressed element is Christ the Judge; in Rom 2.16, it is judgment of all alike by their inward attitudes; in 2 Tim 2.8, it is the glorified state of Jesus the man and Christ the king. Thus the phrase is context-bound and does not indicate distinction between the content of Paul's gospel and others'.

The consensus of opinion seems to be that the use of the first person possessive pronoun (even when singular), with εὐαγγελίου does not imply a totally different gospel; opinions differ on how distinctive Paul's message was, but in essence it seems clear from his own testimony that it accorded with the other apostles' preaching, whilst all the

³³ Moore comm. on 1 Thess 1.5.

³⁴ Best comm. ad loc.

³⁵ J. Massie, "Gospel" HDB II p.233f: p.234.

early preaching naturally varied according to situation and audience.

Do we then find in 1 Thess 1.9f a summary of Paul's actual preaching as adapted to the Thessalonian context? Those who would answer in the affirmative include Harnack, von Dobschütz, Dibelius, Lueckenberg, Oepke, Neil, Dewailly, Rigaux, Morris and Masson; dissidents include Wohlenberg, Milligan, Frame, and Plummer. The first group disagree among themselves about whether this type of message is specifically Pauline or typical of the whole early church including Paul. J. Munck³⁶ offers an unusual interpretation of 1.9f: Paul is mentioning particular things in his introduction to the letter which are now important to maintain in their Christian lives. 1.10 anticipates the new teaching in 5.1-11 and 4.13-18 which is intended to reassure the Thessalonians that they are not destined for wrath but salvation, whether they die before the parousia or not. 1.9 may anticipate 4.1-8 where we see how hard it was for Gentiles to understand the new gospel, especially its moral implications; the Thessalonians needed to realise that the apostolic instruction was the will of God whom as Christians they were to serve, and could not be disputed. Munck himself is very hesitant about his second point, and the evidence for it is extremely thin: Paul could, to say the least, have made himself more clear. He is not habitually slow to draw explicit moral application from doctrinal teaching. On the first point, it will be argued below (in section A II 4 on traditions)

³⁶ J. Munck, "1 Thess 1.9f and the missionary preaching of Paul" NTS 4 (1962-3), p.95-110.

that 5.1-11 is not new teaching. Even if 1.10 does anticipate 4.13-18, however, this does not rule out the possibility of rescue from wrath having been part of Paul's preaching which he saw fit to repeat here as a timely reminder.

As Green points out³⁷, the indictment of idolatry in religious propaganda need not surprise us, being a stock feature of Jewish apologetic and Greek satires on the gods, "as cheap as blackberries in that age"³⁸. It would therefore be quite appropriate for Christian preaching to start at the point of denouncing idolatry, or at least contrasting its monotheism with polytheism, when addressing Gentiles, and there seems no reason why Paul should have differed in this respect. Having propounded monotheism, the preacher would continue with the regular apostolic kerygma³⁹.

Although it is often maintained that 1 Thess 1.9f omits all the distinctive Pauline emphases⁴⁰ and therefore cannot

³⁷ Green, op.cit., p.126-30.

³⁸ Harnack, op.cit., p.292.

³⁹ This does of course assume that Paul preached separately to Gentiles in Thessalonica, as well as, (or rather than, if Luke's account is deemed totally incorrect) to the Jews in the synagogue.

⁴⁰ According to C. Clemen ("Paulus und die Gemeinde zu Thessalonich", NKZ 7 (1896) p.139-164) the doctrine of justification by faith instead of works is absent from 1 and 2 Thessalonians because it would be an inappropriate emphasis for a Gentile church (cf. Laub, op.cit. p.43). Presumably he considers that the number of Jews in the Thessalonian church was minimal. He is interpreting "works" simply as works of the Jewish law, which may be a rather narrow application of Paul's doctrine, although it was its primary focus. Pagan religious men may also have been motivated by a desire to gain righteousness by external observations or actions. R.M. Evans' comment on the apparent omission is more apposite: justification by faith, not works, was not yet an issue ("Eschatology and Ethics: a study of Thessalonica and Paul's letters to the Thessalonians", Ph.D.thesis, Basel 1967, p.151). When this Pauline emphasis appears in Galatians it is called forth as polemic against Judaizers.

be a summary of his preaching, the essential elements are in fact implied if not stated, although the language is unusual⁴¹:

1) the living and true God: which God?

2) his Son, raised from the dead, Jesus: who was Jesus, and why and how did he die? (resurrection presupposes death!)⁴²

3) who rescues us from wrath: what causes wrath? How does Jesus rescue from it?

4) from heaven: the return of Jesus and judgment⁴³. If Rigaux is correct in seeing 4.14 and 5.9 as formulae of the kerygma⁴⁴, 4.14 reinforces point 2 ("Jesus died and rose again"), and 5.9 reinforces points 3 and 4 (not destined for wrath but for salvation).

Little more can be definitely said about the content of Paul's actual preaching in Thessalonica: to list all the doctrine in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, or to define the primitive kerygma, or to extract the whole range of Pauline doctrines from his epistles, all serve only to assist guesswork and can be misleading by collating the maximum number of possibilities rather than the maximum number of certainties.

⁴¹ For an analysis of 1 Thess 1.9f, cf. Langevin *op.cit.*, who concludes that it is of pre-Pauline origin and formed part of Paul's recitation of the kerygma at Thessalonica.

⁴² Cf. D.W. Williams, "The imitation of Christ in Paul with special reference to Paul as a teacher" (Columbia Ph.D., 1967) who comments that although the crucifixion is absent from 1 Thess 1.9f, the resurrection is "one of its crucial [sic!] elements" (p.153).

⁴³ Laub *op.cit.*, asserts that although in 1 Thessalonians salvation is emphatically linked with the parousia, the epistle is not over-futuristic; the Thessalonians are now beloved and chosen, sanctified and have the Spirit (p.47f) and are sons of the light and the day (p.43).

⁴⁴ Rigaux comm. p.177.

In 2 Thess 3.1, we have Paul's description of the activity of the word of the Lord, here meaning the gospel message since Paul refers to its effects among the Thessalonians. They are to pray that elsewhere as among them, the word *τρέχει καὶ δοξάζεται*. The image of a race probably derives from the OT, especially Ps 147.4: *ἕως τέρους δραμεῖται ὁ λόγος αὐτοῦ* and is a favourite with Paul (cf. the runner, Phil 2.16, Gal 2.2, 5.7, the prize, 1 Cor 9.24, Col 2.8, 3.15, the crown, 1 Thess 2.19, 1 Cor 9.25, 2 Tim 2.5). The two main ideas in this use of imagery seem to be speed and efficacy. The progress of the gospel should not be slow but rapid, without hindrance, which illustrates the early sense of urgency to proclaim the gospel everywhere. It is a race which is continually in progress - hence the present tense - not only in spreading further through the world but in the word's taking continual effect amongst the churches. L-M. Dewailly observes, for instance, that it is the word which makes the love of Father and Lord "tangible"⁴⁵. Neil understands the word here as an almost independent force, sweeping the world, regardless of the preachers' eloquence, physical power, or lack of either. Whether *δοξάζεται* is a separate concept dropping the imagery of the race, or forms a hendiadys with *τρέχει* (so "run gloriously") little alters the sense. The gospel is glorified as it makes rapid progress. The glory may be in the speed of its progress or in its radical effects upon the converts: "the word of the Lord is glorified when it is accepted by true faith, so that it begins to adorn the lives of believers"⁴⁶. "Paul means that when the gospel is

⁴⁵ L-M. Dewailly, "Course et Gloire de la Parole", RB 71 (1964), pp.25-41. P.31, cf. 1 Thess 1.4, 2 Thess 2.13.

⁴⁶ Hendriksen comm. ad loc.

allowed to spread freely and is properly received, the results speak for themselves, as had happened at Thessalonica"⁴⁷. Dewailly⁴⁸ argues that the agent in glorification here is God, not the individual as he accepts the word. The distinction is a minor one, however: the individual can only glorify the word (accept it and be changed by it) by virtue of the divine action in him (glorifying the word). Paul's mode of expression here makes it abundantly clear that the efficacy of the mission is due to the word preached rather than to the preacher. He is not necessarily conceiving of the word as a personal force: this may be a literary device to add vividness. The word is the vehicle of God's activity, and the preacher is the mouthpiece of the word. Only as the spoken words are received as divine communication (1 Thess 2.13) can they take effect: the very recognition of their divine origin glorifies God as originator, and the effect on the converts also glorifies God by demonstrating his word as faithful and true. Dunn⁴⁹ emphasises the central importance for Paul of the charismatic quality of his preaching, that is, that his words and their effect owed little to him. It was the Spirit who grasped and convinced his hearers (1 Thess 1.5). The gospel was experienced not as human words from without but as divine energy from within (2.13). In 1 Cor 2.6f Paul contrasts human word and divine

⁴⁷ Neil comm. ad loc.

⁴⁸ Dewailly, op.cit., p.34f.

⁴⁹ Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit (SCM London, 1975), p.226.

power: the term $\lambda\omicron\delta\epsilon\lambda\gamma\iota\varsigma$ is unique in the NT but is a technical term in Greek rhetoric denoting a compelling conclusion drawn from accepted premises. Paul's point is that his $\lambda\omicron\delta\epsilon\lambda\gamma\iota\varsigma$ had nothing to do with rhetoric: the Corinthians were grasped by divine power, independently of Paul's style and logic. Similarly, "it is power in weakness, through weakness, that distinguished Paul's understanding of charism from that of his Corinthian opponents"⁵⁰.

It is difficult to decide whether the power with which the gospel came to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1.5) was manifested in miracles, or in powerful transformation of lives, or both. Paul often speaks of power in the context of mission and conversion (cf. 1 Cor 2.4, 2 Cor 6.7), but he does not mention healings or exorcisms explicitly, which often accompany the gospel preaching in Acts (cf. Mk 16.15f, Heb 2.4). This may be due to his tendency to play down exhibitionism and sensationalism. More important than physical healing was spiritual healing, the transforming power of the word and the Holy Spirit, and initially the power of God as effecting communication via Paul's words and life, "getting through" to people. Miracles are however not ruled out by Paul's silence, and the addition of $\lambda\eta\rho\omicron\phi\omicron\rho\iota\alpha$ to $\delta\upsilon\lambda\alpha\mu\iota\varsigma$ in 1 Thess 1.5, if it refers to the Thessalonians' conviction rather than, or as well as, to Paul's assurance⁵¹ may indicate

⁵⁰ ibid.

⁵¹ We might possibly paraphrase this verse thus: "that which was communicated from us to you was not only word, but power and the Holy Spirit and full conviction"; or, "our words came across powerfully by the Holy Spirit and imparting full conviction". If the preachers were not already convinced of the truth of their words, no conviction in the listeners would be effected: it is therefore unnecessary to limit the reference of $\lambda\eta\rho\omicron\phi\omicron\rho\iota\alpha$ to either the preachers or the Thessalonians.

that *δυναμις* has at least a wider meaning than merely effective communication. In Rom 15.19 *ἐν δυνάμει* is spelt out as signs and wonders, and further defined as the power of the Holy Spirit.

In concluding this section on missionary preaching, it is interesting to note that Piper⁵² points out that the church itself is also a proclamation of the gospel. The universal goal of the gospel is seen in the way it is spread and in the Christians' love; its power in the signs and wonders and growth of the church, and the fruits of faith and love. When the church is at fault, the word is disparaged (Tit 2.5). The word authenticates itself by taking control of the lives of believers so that they become witnesses. The life of the church is therefore the gospel of the glory of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4.4, 10f, Phil 1.20).

3. Conversion

At this point it would be useful to look at the phenomenon of Christian conversion. The NT, especially the epistles, frequently refers back to a juncture when the readers did something, or underwent something, which constituted a decisive break in their lives. Some of the references in the following survey are not explicit but nevertheless illustrate a presupposition of what it is to be or become a Christian.

⁵² Piper, op.cit., p.448

- Rom 4.24 ^Τπιστεύουσιν ἐπὶ τὸν ἐργάζοντα Ἰησοῦν cf 1 Tim 1.16
- Rom 6.17 ὑπακούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε τὸν δουλοῦν διακρίτης
- Rom 16.7 γέγοναν ἐν Χριστῷ
- Rom 16.26 εἰς ὑπακοὴν πίστεως cf Rom 1.5
- 1 Cor 1.21 σώσασθε τοὺς πιστεύοντας
- 1 Cor 15.2 [τὸ εὐαγγέλιον] δι' οὗ καὶ σώζεσθε... εὐκατέχετε cf 2 Thess 2.13
- Gal 1.9 εἴ τις ὑμᾶς εὐαγγελίζεται παρ' ὃ κατελάβετε cf 1 Thess 2.13
- Gal 2.16 εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν cf 1 Jn 5.10
- Gal 5.7 τίς ὑμᾶς ἐπέκοψεν ἀληθείᾳ μὴ κείσεσθαι
- Eph 1.13 ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς ἀληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες cf Col 1.6
- Col 1.6 ἠκούσατε καὶ ἐπέγνωτε τὴν χάριν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν ἀληθείᾳ cf Eph 1.12f
1 Tim 2.4, 4.3
- 1 Thess 1.6 δεξιόμενοι τὸν λόγον ἐν ἐπιπέσει πολλῆ μετὰ χάρως cf 1 Thess 2.13
- 1 Thess 2.13 παρελθόντες λόγον... ἐδέξασθε... καθὼς ἀληθῶς ἔστιν λόγον Θεοῦ, ὃ καὶ ἐνεργεῖται ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν cf 1 Thess 1.6
- 2 Thess 1.8 μὴ ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ cf Rom 16.26,
Gal 5.7
- 2 Thess 1.10 ἐπιστεύθη τὸ μαρτύριον ἡμῶν ἐφ' ὧν cf 1 Jn 5.10
- 2 Thess 2.10 τὴν ἀρὰν τῆς ἀληθείας οὐκ ἐδέξαντο εἰς τὸ σωθῆναι αὐτοὺς
- 2 Thess 2.12 οἳ μὴ πιστεύσαντες τῇ ἀληθείᾳ ἀλλὰ εὐδοκήσαντες τῇ ἀδικίᾳ cf 1 Tim 4.3
- 2 Thess 2.13 εἰς σωτηρίαν ἐν ἀγκιστρῷ πνεύματος καὶ πίστεως ἀληθείας
- 1 Tim 1.16 πιστεύειν ἐπ' αὐτῷ εἰς ζωὴν αἰώνων cf Rom 4.24
- 1 Tim 2.4 σωθῆναι καὶ εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας εἰσεῖν cf 1 Tim 4.3
- 1 Tim 4.3 τοῖς πιστοῖς καὶ ἐλεγκτικῶσι τὴν ἀλήθειαν cf 1 Tim 3.4,
2 Thess 2.12,
Col 1.6
- 2 Tim 3.7⁵³ μνηστὸτε εἰς ἐπίγνωσιν ἀληθείας εἰσεῖν δυναμένα
- 2 Tim 3.14⁵³ ἐν οἷς ἔμαθες καὶ ἐπιστῶσης

⁵³These verses may be applicable only to the teaching of Christians, not the first presentation of the gospel.

2 Pet 1.1 ἰσοτύμων ἡμῖν λαχοῦσιν λίστην

1 Jn 5.10 πιστεύων εἰς τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ θεοῦ... πιστεύων cf Gal 2.16,
τῷ θεῷ... ἀελλίστευκεν εἰς τὴν μαρτυρίαν 2 Thess 1.10

The range of vocabulary employed is bewildering, and there are few close parallels within the N.T. Similarities are indicated by the list of comparable references on the right. Some vocabulary crops up in varying forms quite often: faith, truth, hearing, receiving, understanding.

Εὐαγγέλιον is not often used. Obedience is also rare in this context, though it is interesting that occurrences other than in 2 Thess 1.8 are in Romans and Galatians, the "justification epistles", where faith is stressed above all and contrasted to works. This dispels any notion of the faith concerned being merely intellectual acceptance without re-orientation of life; and it may incidentally demonstrate that the phrase ὑπακούουσιν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ cannot be used as evidence of non-Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians on the grounds that Paul would rather say "believe the gospel". Other phrases from 2 Thessalonians, believing the truth and love of the truth, are not found elsewhere, but the Pastorals mention knowing the truth, and Galatians has obeying the truth. In Ephesians, hearing the word of truth and believing in Christ (or possibly in the gospel) are juxtaposed: ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς, ἀκούσαντες τὸν λόγον τῆς κληθείας, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τῆς σωτηρίας ὑμῶν, ἐν ᾧ καὶ πιστεύσαντες...

The survey shows that there was no technical vocabulary formulated at this stage. The emphasis on the word, gospel, hearing, receiving, and so on, demonstrates the vital connection

between preaching and conversion: a logical connection, since the object of the believer's faith is Jesus Christ about whom they could not know without being told. Gospel, word and truth are all, as it were, the immediate objects of faith, all implying the ultimate object, which is their content, Jesus Christ.

Nock, while writing on religious conversion in general, offers this definition⁵⁴: "by conversion we mean the reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and that the new is right. It is seen in its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him by the prophetic religions". Conversion to Judaism or Christianity is different in kind from conversion to a pagan religion: "a man used Mithraism, but he did not belong to it body and soul: if he did, that was a matter of special attachment"⁵⁵. In fact, the term conversion can only properly be used of Judaism or Christianity. Green also makes ^{this} point⁵⁶: ancient religions were not exclusive. Even the mysteries only excluded the uninitiated; the initiated did not have to give total allegiance to the mystery. "Du jour où tel est devenu chrétien, sa vie entière a été changée. Il n'est pas seulement converti à un nouveau culte: il a inauguré une existence

⁵⁴ A.D.Nock, Conversion: the old and the new in religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo (Clarendon, Oxford, 1933), p.7.

⁵⁵ Nock, op.cit., p.14.

⁵⁶ Green, op.cit., p.146.

nouvelle"⁵⁷. As far as way of life is concerned, Nock⁵⁸ holds that the real novelty of Christianity lay not so much in actual conduct as in motivation for good conduct, and in giving power to act in the way required of a Christian. The truth of this will depend partly on the kind of ~~person~~ *people* converted, to which stratum of society they belong: some at least of the early church had to change their conduct radically (cf. 1 Cor 6.9-11) and in Thessalonica itself, Paul thought it necessary to instruct the converts that sanctification involved sexual morality (1 Thess 4.3-7). But Christianity did differ from pagan philosophers (eg. Epictetus) in giving the power for the moral reform it demanded. Nock also states that the peculiar doctrines of Christianity were that Jesus suffered voluntarily for men as the basis of deliverance, and that this was pinned down to a precise time⁵⁹.

Green observes that conversion is in fact in mind wherever turning to Christ in repentance and faith is mentioned (Acts 3.26, 15.19, 6.20, 9.35, 11.21, 14.18, 26.18). The turning is away from wickedness or idols to God or the Lord. Baptism was very closely connected, probably occurring normally straight after conversion. What is said of baptism therefore goes for conversion as well: it is incorporation into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12.13), purification (2 Pet 1.9), justification and sanctification (1 Cor 6.11), initiation into the realm of the Spirit (Rom 6.1ff), participation in Jesus' death and resurrection (Eph 1.13f). Baptism signified once-for-all incorporation into Christ, which involves

⁵⁷ G. Bardy, Le Conversion au Christianisme durant les premiers siècles, (Aubier, Paris, 1949), p.147.

⁵⁸ Nock, op.cit., p.218.

⁵⁹ Nock, op.cit., p.234.

membership in the community of Christ and a life of holiness as he is holy (1 Pet 1.15f). This factor of holiness is much emphasised by Green: "the qualities of his (ie. Christ's) character had to be seen in the life of any man who had undergone a genuine conversion"⁶⁰. Mission and holiness of life are strongly linked in the NT and second century literature (cf. 1 Pet 3.15f, 1 Thess 2.1-14): "it was the quality of his life, his self-sacrifice, his caring, that convinced the Thessalonians that what he proclaimed was not the word of men but the word of God"⁶¹; "Paul emphasises two conditions. There must be a clear proclamation of Jesus as Messiah and Lord; and it must be backed up by the lives of men who are not self-centred in their approach, but are willing to be entirely at the service of the Corinthians (cf. 2 Cor 4.1-5) with their lives open to inspection at every point"⁶². If the conduct of the missionaries is as important as their actual preaching, then it follows that conversion involves moral reform as well as entry to faith in the preached truth. The converts' conduct in its turn then makes an impact on their neighbours so that the mission is continued through them. This is especially the case with faithfulness under persecution and martyrdom: "de toutes les vertus pratiquées par les chrétiens, celle qui frappe le plus justement les païens, celle qui, dans certains cas au moins, les gagne le plus immédiatement à la religion de l'évangile, c'est la

⁶⁰ Green, op.cit., p.184.

⁶¹ Green, op.cit., p.178.

⁶² Green, op.cit., p.179.

fermeté devant la mort et la constance avec laquelle ils supportent les plus cruels supplices. Il y a là pour eux, quelque chose qui les dépasse"⁶³. It must not be thought however that conversion is solely a matter of moral change: R. Schnackenburg expresses the correct perspective well when he says that conversion is not just reappraisal of stance towards the world, or moral reawakening: it is a supernatural rebirth which must express itself in corresponding conduct⁶⁴. The Christian's purity is possible only through the grace of God, redemption by Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit (eg. 1 Cor 6.9-11, Eph 2.3-10, Col 1.21-3, 2.13, 2 Thess 2.13). There is in fact an obligation to act according to the new nature which is theirs through baptism: Rom 8.12ff, Gal 5.25. Schnackenburg suggests that Paul may avoid the old covenant term *ἐπιστρέφειν* (eg. LXX Deut 4.30, 30.10, Ps 22.27, Lam 3.40, Joel 2.12f), preferring to coin new phrases - live according to the Spirit, put on the new man, and so on⁶⁵.

Piper makes the important observation that immediate acceptance of the gospel (therefore conversion) is the exception rather than the rule (cf. Mt 11.6f, 13.57, Rom 9.33, 1 Pet 2.7f) because it is so contrary to human expectations and wishes that it gives offence. We certainly do see

⁶³ Bardy, op.cit., p.155.

⁶⁴ R. Schnackenburg, Christian Existence in the New Testament, (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 1968), p.54.

⁶⁵ Paul never elsewhere uses *ἐπιστρέφειν* for the beginning of faith, which is the Acts usage (9.35, 11.21, 14.15, 15.19, 26.18,20). According to Laub(op.cit., p.29f) Paul is probably using a particular tradition known to Luke, almost a stereotyped formula; this is possible but unsubstantiated.

especially in Acts and the epistles a clear-cut distinction between those who accept the gospel and those who do not, the latter often being involved in active suppression or persecution of the former. In such a situation, conversion would be an unmistakable act of moving from one 'camp' to another. We may also underline Piper's term "immediate": although on occasions such as Peter's Pentecost speech there seems to have been an immediate, overwhelming response, Paul is more often engaged in lengthy discussion as well as simple proclamation: a certain degree of intellectual persuasion was necessary before conversion.

Ultimately, however, if we ask why conversion happens, we have to attribute it to the work of the Holy Spirit. The only reason why Paul's preaching in Thessalonica was effective was that God spoke through it and therefore some of the listeners heard it from God (1 Thess 2.13). The Spirit acts through the preaching of the word (2 Thess 2.14).

4. The traditions taught to the Thessalonians

"None of the other authors of the NT has placed such an accent on the significance of the Christian tradition as (Paul) does"⁶⁶. Twice in 2 Thessalonians, Paul refers to *τα παραδοθέντα* which he has taught the Thessalonians. Before he left Thessalonica, he instructed the young church in certain Christian teaching. Judging from Acts, where return visits are made to upbuild the churches, this seems to have been

⁶⁶ R. Schippers, "Pre-Synoptic Tradition in 1 Thess 2.13-16" Nov.T. 8 (1966), p.223-34, p.224.

standard practice; and indeed if the churches were to survive alone after a brief visit from a missionary, they would need to gain as much knowledge about their new faith as was possible at the time. The idea of *κατάδοσις* is therefore prominent in the NT although the word itself does not always occur: cf. 1 Cor 11.2, Lk 1.2, Rom 6.17, 1 Cor 4.17, 11.23ff, 15.1ff, Col 1.7, 2.6-8, 2 Pet 2.21, Jude 3, Eph 4.20. The same term is used in Greek-speaking Judaism for rabbinical teaching, which the gospels report Jesus as rejecting, and the associated verbs are also identical to Jewish usage (*κρατέω* 2 Thess 2.15, *κατέχω* 1 Cor 11.2, 15.2; *στήκω* 1 Cor 15.1, 2 Thess 2.15; *καταλαμβάνω*, *καταδίδωμι* 1 Cor 11.2, 23, 15.3, 1 Thess 2.13, 2 Thess 2.15, 3.6, Rom 6.17; Gal 1.9, 12, Phil 4.19, Col 2.6, 8; cf. Josephus, *τα δ' εκ κατάδοσεως των πατέρων... την δ' αὐτῶν κατάδοσιν... τῆ των ἀρεοβυτέρων κατάδοσει* 67.

The distinction between Christian and Jewish use is plain: Jesus rejects the traditions of men added to the divine revelation, and Christian tradition is emphatically from the Lord, not human in origin. As Cullmann observes⁶⁸ Paul often uses *κύριος* instead of *κατάδοσις* when referring to authoritative teaching received by tradition: 1 Thess 4.15, 1 Cor 7.10, 25, 9.14. In 1 Cor 11.23, Paul could equally well, and we might think more correctly, say "I received from the church"

67 Antiquities 13.297, 408, 10.51. For bibliography on the transmission of traditions in Judaism cf. Rigaux on 2 Thess 2.15.

68 O. Cullmann, The Early Church, (SCM, London, 1953), p.60-62.

the eucharistic tradition. The reason he does not is that the Lord is seen as the real author of the whole tradition which develops in the church, not only as its chronological beginning. It is "the united testimony of all the apostles which constitutes the Christian paradosis, in which the Kurios himself is at work"⁶⁹. "Transmission by the apostles is not effected by men, but by Christ the Lord himself, who thereby imparts this revelation ... only the entire paradosis, to which all the apostles contribute, constitutes the paradosis of Christ"⁷⁰. Cullmann's interpretation of 1 Cor 7.10 is that the "exalted Lord now proclaims to the Corinthians, through the tradition, what he had already taught his disciples through his incarnation on earth"⁷¹. But this excludes fresh revelation from the exalted Lord by prophecy, for example, and it is doubtful whether Jesus gave these detailed instructions to his disciples during his earthly ministry. Cullmann is helpful in his distinction between human and divine origins of tradition⁷² but the authorship of the exalted Lord may not be limited to his effecting the transmission via the church: it may include additional revelation. The balance between remembering and passing on, and fresh revelation, is expressed well in Jn 14.26: the Spirit has a dual role with regard to paradosis,

⁶⁹ Cullmann, op.cit., p.68.

⁷⁰ Cullmann, op.cit., p.73

⁷¹ Cullman, op.cit., p.68.

⁷² Cf. F. Büchsel, "Paradosis", TDNT II, p.172f, who also makes this point.

to remind and to teach all things - presumably including all things necessary as situations change and new needs arise.

Rigaux distinguishes between two kinds of tradition: the apostolic message or gospel (1 Thess 2.13, 1 Cor 15.1-11, Gal 1.11f, Col 2.6-8); and customs, Christian codes of behaviour (1 Cor 11,2, 2 Thess 3.6, 1 Thess 4.15, 1 Cor 7.12,40, 11.23-5) although he adds that it is impossible to make a strict division between the two senses⁷³. Paradosis always means that which is handed on, never the mediator or the process of transmission⁷⁴.

The contents of the tradition probably included Jesus' words and works, short formulae of such important elements as the Lord's Supper, Christological statements and a list of resurrection appearances. It would embrace both doctrinal and moral precepts. In Cullmann's view⁷⁵ the first paradosis was limited to a summary of the kerygma, but gradually included words of Jesus and narrative. The extent to which traditions were fixed by Paul's time is difficult to determine. Büchsel⁷⁶ merely says that tradition was then in process of acquiring fixed verbal form. Certain passages in the epistles seem to be quoting recognised formulae - definite examples are 1 Cor 11.23f and 15.1ff -

⁷³ Rigaux comm. on 2 Thess 2.15.

⁷⁴ R.P.C.Hanson, Tradition in the early church (SCM, London, 1962), p.10.

⁷⁵ Cullmann, op.cit., p.64f.

⁷⁶ Büchsel, op.cit.

and where there is close correspondence between passages, as demonstrated for example by Selwyn in his commentary on 1 Peter, this may be due to common tradition rather than common co-authorship⁷⁷.

There is often reluctance among scholars to accept that the traditions were early fixed, and the process of defining them is assigned to the latter part of the NT era, when the primitive period had passed and the main concern had become the defence of the true gospel against heresy. This is an unnecessary hesitation: as Büchsel⁷⁸ points out, there is no opposition between pneumatic piety and a high estimation of tradition. Neither is there a conflict between πίστις and παράδοσις, since πίστις requires and rests on παράδοσις: it is faith in an historical person⁷⁹. Cullmann has shown that the whole point of a differentiation between Jewish and Christian tradition is that the latter is not a human conception, a sign of degeneration and corruption, but is divinely authorized and controlled. From a purely practical point of view, it was very necessary for the early preachers to share a common message: one of Paul's strongest lines of self-defence is that his message was fully approved by the Jerusalem apostles (though not humanly derived, of course, cf. Gal 1.11f with 2.7-9). As has been shown under "conversion", doctrine and morals are so closely linked that error on either count was grave and

77 Selwyn sees Silvanus' influence also as causative here: E.G. Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (Macmillan, London, 1947²), p.9-17.

78 Büchsel, op.cit.

79 A. Richardson, An introduction to the theology of the New Testament, (SCM, London, 1958), p.37.

therefore not tolerated by the NT writers. K. Wegenast argues that Paul was not interested in the exact transmission of tradition for its own sake; for him, the gospel was the norm over all tradition⁸⁰. Paul was not a servant of the tradition but its master: "Paulus ist auch dann nicht ein Diener der Tradition, wenn er paränetische Überlieferung vorlegt, sondern nimmt sie dankbar in Dienst, wenn sie ihm für die Ermahnung der Gemeinden dienlich sein kann"⁸¹. In Judaism, the wording of traditions must be retained exactly; the name of the originator or last person in the chain must be quoted; all teaching must be able to prove that it belongs to the tradition to be valid; and only an ordained Rabbi may transmit tradition⁸². Paul however uses traditions without referring to their origins and does not hesitate to interpret them⁸³. The discovery of traditions in the NT, and especially the Jewish terminology of transmission, should not lead us to assume immediately that Christian traditions were identical in kind to Jewish traditions, and open to the same criticism. There are qualitative, methodological and theological distinctions. Williams also makes a point of distinguishing between Jewish and Christian tradition, and examining Paul's use of tradition on its own merits: "Paul uses the terms of transmission because he transmits.

⁸⁰ K. Wegenast, Das Verständnis der Tradition bei Paulus und in den Deuteropaulinen (Neukirchener Verlag, 1962), p.50.

⁸¹ Wegenast, op.cit., p.120.

⁸² Wegenast, op.cit., p.30.

⁸³ Wegenast, op.cit., p.91.

Whether we call this rabbinic, or Pharisaic, or Hellenistic makes little difference"⁸⁴.

Dunn highlights another function of the kerygmatic tradition: as a criterion for testing charismata, especially teaching within the community. In his view, the role of teacher was 1) to pass on tradition received from the founding apostle, especially the kerygma and words of Jesus (Rom 16.17, 1 Cor 4.17, 11.2, Col 1.28, 2.7, 2 Thess 2.15, 3.6). This was very important because of Paul's consciousness of continuity. 2) To interpret tradition, and thus develop it. This would include interpretations of the LXX as prophecies of Jesus, and of the kerygma for new situations and issues. The teacher only had authority under the tradition⁸⁵. Likewise, "the range of possibly authentic experiences of inspiration has been narrowed to those experiences which affirm or accord with and do not deny the kerygmatic tradition of Jesus. This means that in Paul's view the Spirit has been limited or has limited himself in accord with the yardstick of Jesus"⁸⁶.

Turning more specifically to 2-Thessalonians: the reference to *καταδόσεις* in 2.15 is usually understood to mean traditions in the widest sense, embracing both doctrine and ethical instruction (and despite the preceding eschatological passage, not limited to eschatological

⁸⁴ Williams, op.cit., p.186.

⁸⁵ Dunn, op.cit., p.282.

⁸⁶ Dunn, op.cit., p.319.

teaching); 3.6,10 refer more specifically to ethical traditions about daily work, both Paul's example and his teaching being in mind (cf. 1 Thess 2.9, 4.11). 2.5 is evidence of doctrinal teaching on eschatology (cf. 1 Thess 5.2). Paul does not delimit the scope of $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\delta\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ in 2.15 and 2.5 precisely because he has already taught it in Thessalonica and the readers know to what he is referring⁸⁷. We can therefore only deduce a certain amount. The question about exactly what the developed traditions contained is irrelevant: 2 Thessalonians is an early letter, so only the first essentials may be implied. We cannot even assume that $\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\delta\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ in 2 Thessalonians is what Luke reports early preaching to have contained, because the former includes the

⁸⁷ Cf. D.W. Kemmler, Faith and human reason. A study of Paul's method of preaching as illustrated by 1-2 Thessalonians and Acts 17.2-4 (Leiden Brill 1975). According to Kemmler, Paul bases his call to the Thessalonians not on the fact that his traditions have divine authority but that "he has then and again now tried to make them intelligible" (p.195). This is an odd argument: presumably the counter-teaching also aimed at intelligibility - this is no special claim to respect. Kemmler insists on the importance of $\nu\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ - Paul appeals to his hearers' intelligence in his preaching and teaching. This is why his media are words and letters. The traditions provide intellectual anchoring for the gospel itself (p.206). This is true so far as it goes, but Kemmler exaggerates the distinction between gospel and tradition - a certain amount of $\nu\omicron\upsilon\tau\epsilon\iota\varsigma$ is necessary to receive the gospel in the first place - and the role of reason in the teaching of traditions. Paul taught by example as much as by precept (cf. 2 Thess 3): this is the whole principle of the imitatio Christi (see below A III 2d on imitation). He appealed to the whole man, not just to the mind. In Thessalonica, there was both confusion of mind and emotional distress (2 Thess 2.2) and Paul's letter aims at remedying both problems.

instruction of Christians, and the Acts speeches are missionary preaching: hence we find such 'extras' as detailed ethics and eschatology in 2 Thessalonians. Neither can we assume that all the initial teaching is reflected in the letter (or in 1 and 2 Thessalonians), because it only repeats such *καρὰδοσῆς* as was necessary to repeat because it had been forgotten or disregarded: the rest was unnecessary to repeat. Some will come through incidentally, but we cannot argue from silence that a tradition that one would expect to find (eg. the redemptive significance of cross and resurrection) was not taught at all. It may not be mentioned because it had been so thoroughly taught that the Thessalonians could make no mistake about it. So we can use 1 and 2 Thessalonians to glean hints of the original but it is impossible to build a complete proven reproduction of all that Paul taught.

The method we will now follow is to deduce some of what Paul had taught at Thessalonica by drawing out the specific references to repeated teaching in the letters, and to deduce what he did not teach as that which is referred to as specifically new.

1 Thess 1.5, 2.1f, 5-12: the Thessalonians know (*καὶ οὖτως οἴδατε*) how Paul and his companions behaved with them, how they preached, worked and taught.

1 Thess 5.1-11: they know that the Day will come like a thief (*ἀκρυβῶς οἴδατε*).

2 Thess 3.6-12: they have been given a tradition of how to live and work, with a specific command that the idler shall not eat.

1 Thess 3.4f: they already know that affliction is the lot of a Christian.

1 Thess 4.2-6: they have been given instruction about sanctification, especially sexual morality.

1 Thess 4.11: they have been charged to work with their hands.

1 Thess 4.13-18: in view of the opening (οὐ θλίβομεν δὲ ὑμῶν ἄγροσίην) and of the comment at the beginning of the next section that on this fresh subject they need no instruction, 4.13-18 must be new teaching, probably in answer to a query about the destiny of dead Christians.

1 Thess 5.11: this verse is very similar to 4.18, but it does not indicate that 5.1-11 is therefore also new teaching: only that there is something in the section which is new. V.10 supplies the solution: Paul is drawing together 4.13-18 and 5.1-9 to conclude that the destiny of all Christians, whether dead or alive at the parousia, is life and not wrath.

2 Thess 2.1-12: v.5 is usually held to be the point of transition from previous knowledge to fresh teaching. This would give v.1-4 as repeated teaching and v.7-12 as new⁸⁸. But v.7-12 contain much that they must have known:

⁸⁸ v.6 is a problem: is this knowledge gained between Paul's original instruction and this letter? - unless ὁ ὅτι refers to when the restraining takes place, not when they know (καὶ ὁ ὅτι τὸ κατέχον οἴδατε); or it may be non-temporal, "now then ...".

the parousia, destruction of the wicked and final destiny are in ch.1 without any hint of being fresh teaching; and the parousia and wrath (implying punishment of the wicked) are in 1 Thessalonians. In fact, 2.7-12 introduces very little new material after v.3-6: its purpose is more expansion with details. The mystery of lawlessness may be new, but the man of lawlessness has already been mentioned, and his revelation (? v.6). Possibly his effect on people had not been taught before. To separate old and new teaching at v.5 because of the reference there to previous teaching is unfounded: Paul may be simply interrupting himself to rebuke them. If so, he is just filling in details and bringing out implications explicitly, since the Thessalonians have missed or forgotten the point⁸⁹. Hence the emphasis on how unavoidably obvious the parousia of the lawless one will be, and the impossibility of its having already occurred.

The repeated teaching therefore consists of:

- 1) ethic of work 1 Thess 2.9f, 11f,
2 Thess 3.6ff
- 2) suddenness and signs of the parousia,
1 Thess 5.1-11, 2 Thess 2.3-12
(v.3-5?)
- 3) affliction 1 Thess 3.4

⁸⁹ Cf Kemmler, *op.cit.*, p.209: Paul's concern is "to urge his 'message' again in the face of their crisis - but only in that he again spells out and interprets anew this tradition of his in its implications for the present situation". Here Kemmler's emphasis on understanding the implications of the already accepted tradition for the present situation is valuable.

4) sanctification from sexual immorality

1 Thess 4.1-8.

The new teaching is:

1) destiny of dead Christians 1 Thess 4.13-18, 5.11

2) expansion of apocalyptic teaching (? 2 Thess 2.7-12).

The repeated teaching is strikingly appropriate for the Thessalonian situation: their environment would have two effects, ethical and religious. Ethically, it would influence them towards sexual immorality (if most converts were Greeks, then Jewish ethical standards cannot be assumed) and also towards idleness⁹⁰. Religiously, it would pressurize the Christians by some degree of persecution, hence providing occasion for teaching on judgment and parousia, with emphasis on its certain coming and how to recognise its nearness.

2 Thess 2.15 shows that there has been some instruction by letter. The aorist ἐπιδάξαμεν shows that 2 Thessalonians is not in mind: apart from the possibility of non-extant letters previous to 2 Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians must be meant. There must therefore be some new instruction in 1 Thessalonians, which we have in fact found, at 4.13-18; unless εἴτε ... εἴτε in 2 Thess 2.15 is not an exclusive either-or but a loose expression, even meaning both-and. Repetition would not be superfluous: in Phil 3.1, Paul refuses to apologise for repeating himself, because it is all to their good.

⁹⁰ If the theory of B. Kaye is correct, there is a local social problem with disorderliness which pre-dated Paul's arrival. ("Eschatology and Ethics in 1 & 2 Thessalonians", NovT, XVII, p.47-57), Cf. Section C.III.3.

The two main items of 'old' teaching in 2 Thessalonians (on apocalyptic and idleness) are generally seen as the main purpose of writing. This seems to indicate that the purpose of this letter (or of all the epistles?) is [^]reminder rather than fresh teaching. It is interesting that of the two questions answered in 1 Thessalonians one is answered simply by [^]reminder (5.1-11⁹¹). According to Aus⁹², 2 Thess 1 is just as vital to the purpose of the letter as ch.2: the first chapter prepares the Thessalonians for the disappointment that the parousia is not as close as they think. But even this thesis does not make new teaching the purpose of the letter, since already in 1 Thessalonians they have been taught, for the second time (at least) the necessity of suffering. Perhaps they had grasped that affliction is a sign of the End, and jumped to the conclusion that the End must be upon them, forgetting the preliminaries: thus ch.1 confirms what is right in their thinking, while ch.2 reminds them of the forgotten factors. If [^]reminder is the main purpose of writing, we could say that all but explicitly new teaching had been previously taught⁹³.

⁹¹ Cf. A.Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric (SCM, London, 1964), p.22: "Paul writes always as one thwarted by absence and eagerly anticipating meeting or reunion". Paul prefers the immediacy of oral teaching and writes only reluctantly: even then, he tends to appeal to past oral teaching rather than to use a literary medium for new teaching.

⁹² R.D.Aus, "Comfort in judgment: the use of Day of the Lord and theophany traditions in 2 Thess 1" (Ph.D. thesis, Yale, 1971), p.37f.

⁹³ Cf. Williams, op.cit., who states that the general purpose of 1 Thess 4-5, apart from further instructions on the dead, is to remind the Thessalonians about what was already received, rather than to record it for them (p.240).

This method only leaves us with minimum conclusions, after which we can only work on supposition. Such basics as the triad of faith, hope and love (1 Thess 1.3, 3.6,12, 4.9f, 2 Thess 1.3f, 2.16, 3.5,15) and the general summary in 1 Thess 5.14-22 are unlikely to have been omitted in the initial teaching.

A. THEOLOGICAL ISSUES IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH
AT THESSALONICA

III. The Church at Thessalonica

1. ἐκκλησία

a) Introduction

We have so far examined the pre-history of the Thessalonian church: the divine election and the historical mission of Paul to Thessalonica, his preaching and teaching and the phenomenon of conversion. The result of this election and the call through Paul's mission is that Paul can write to the Thessalonians as an ἐκκλησία : τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων . The word occurs only twice in 2 Thessalonians and Paul does not discuss his doctrine of the church in this epistle. The way the word is used in 1.1 and 1.4, however, raises a question which we may consider by comparison with other biblical uses. In 1.1, ἐκκλησία is used for the Thessalonian congregation, and in 1.4 it is in the plural, referring to several or all churches: ἡμᾶς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐνκαυχᾶσθαι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τοῦ Θεοῦ ...

This leads us to ask whether ἐκκλησία originally meant a local church and the concept of a universal ἐκκλησία found in Ephesians and Colossians is a later development, or whether ἐκκλησία could be used in both senses from the beginning; or indeed whether the distinction is a valid one in the NT.

b) Arguments from OT usage and etymology

In order to argue that ἐκκλησία was chosen by the Christian community as a title for themselves because of its specific, localized sense, some scholars¹ use

¹ eg. L.Coenen, "Church", DNTTh, I, p.291-307.

evidence from its usage in the LXX. The two Hebrew words for the congregation of Israel are there translated differently: סְבִיבָה may be translated by ἐκκλησία or συναγωγή whereas קְהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל is only translated by συναγωγή (eg. סְבִיבָה Gen 49.6, Num 22.4, 2 Sam 20.14, 1 Kings 12.21; קְהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל Ex 12.3, Num 13.26, 31.12ff, Jos 9.18ff). סְבִיבָה means the summoned people: an assembly, whether political, religious or social; קְהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל is a more permanent term for the covenant community all the time. It can be deduced from this that ἐκκλησία in the LXX means a particularized assembly, not an abstract, constant phenomenon. This may be supported by the etymology of the word, which is derived from ἐκ-καλέω , to call out: the ἐκκλησία is constituted afresh every time by God's call. Hence the Christians' choice of ἐκκλησία is based on its distinctive meaning in the LXX.

There are however weaknesses in this line of argument.

i) Etymologically, συναγωγή means "a coming together", and logically therefore it would better translate סְבִיבָה than קְהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל and would equally well render the Christian idea of assembly. Deductions from etymology are frequently misleading: the development or root meaning of a word is not necessarily its current meaning, which is determined more by usage than by its past history².

ii) The distinction between סְבִיבָה and קְהָל יִשְׂרָאֵל in the OT is not as clear as might appear. In Ex 16.1ff and Num 14.1ff the two are used in juxtaposition and referring to the same thing, i.e. as synonymous. Also, סְבִיבָה can be translated

² Cf. J. Barr, The Semantics of Biblical Language (OUP 1961).

by ἄλλοις or ἀληθῶς, which are theologically untechnical terms (ἄλλοις : Ezek 16.40, 17.17; ἀληθῶς Ex 12.6, 2 Chr 31.18). If there were only one Greek translation for each Hebrew word, there would be a stronger argument for equivalence and distinct meanings: but the fact that שָׁבַע is variously translatable detracts from the theological distinction between συναγωγή and ἐκκλησία.

iii) Setting aside the linguistic argument, the distinction between שָׁבַע and אָסַף is tenuous on logical grounds. The assembling on a particular occasion presupposes that those who assemble have something in common on the basis of which they come - especially as the assembly is not always called by Yahweh or his representative (eg. Num 14.1ff: the people assemble to rebel against Yahweh). Israel exists as a community whether or not she is assembled. It may be conceded that the existence of the community was first constituted by God's call, but thereafter it continues to exist, rather than being totally dissolved inbetween physical assemblies.

iv) The argument from OT usage overlooks the simplest explanation of the Christians' choice of ἐκκλησία rather than συναγωγή : instead of complicated theological reasoning it may have been because the Jews were using συναγωγή for themselves, and the Christians needed a different word for their own distinct communities³.

c) The church as event or entity

Coenen⁴ uses the argument from OT usage to

³ Cf. D.E.H.Whiteley, The Theology of St. Paul, (Blackwell, Oxford, 1972), p.186.

⁴ Coenen, op.cit.

define the church as an event, not an entity. The Christians avoided $\pi\tau\upsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha\gamma\omega\gamma\eta$, the permanent abstract term, in favour of $\delta\eta\lambda\omicron\upsilon\tau\eta\ \acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ which emphasises the happening of an assembly. $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ is a concrete concept, an actual gathering constituted and instigated by the call of God; it is an event in which God fulfils his election by his call. Hence when $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\omega\ \kappa\upsilon\rho\acute{\iota}\omega$ is added to the $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ of a place (cf. 1 Thess 1.1, 2 Thess 1.1) the idea of the church as an event is linked to the idea of a local church. The coming together is an essential element: Paul did not and could not spiritualize "church". It has location, existence and being in definable geographical limits.

Coenen lays a welcome emphasis on the tangible, concrete nature of the church as against abstract theorizing; but what is meant by calling the church an event? It is true that God's call to individuals originally constitutes the church, and continues to swell it, but the church is nevertheless an entity: it does not cease to exist when not gathered. One could say that whenever the church met, it did so in response to God's call; but proximity is not constitutive of the church - the source of its life is the constitutive element. We could speak of a church which included Christians who had never met. Too much has been based on the etymology of $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ and the distinction between $\delta\eta\lambda\omicron\upsilon\tau\eta$ and $\pi\tau\upsilon\lambda\omicron\upsilon$, as criticized above.

d) NT usage of $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$

The usage in 2 Thessalonians is clearly primarily local: Paul is referring to the church of the Thessalonians and churches in other places; and at the other end of the

scale, the usage of Ephesians and Colossians is primarily universal (Col 1.18,24, Eph 1.22f, 2.19-22 (ἐκκλησία not used here) 3.21, 5.25-33). However, this does not exclude the possibility that the word might be used in both senses from the beginning of the Christian mission, so that the usage of 2 Thessalonians does not imply that Paul had no concept of a universal church when he wrote that epistle. Equally, the writer of Ephesians and Colossians⁵ may simply not happen to refer to local groups of believers as churches, possibly because the emphasis is laid on the universal aspect. Colossians does refer to local groups (1.2,4,6f, 2.1, 4.13,16) and Ephesians is written as to a particular group (1.1⁶,13,15, 2.11 etc.). Many other NT occurrences of ἐκκλησία are ambiguous and could be local or universal in sense. We shall survey these briefly to illustrate the difficulty of defining the precise sense.

Acts 5.11: ὅλην τὴν ἐκκλησίαν can be taken as all Christians, since such an event would be spread about quickly; the number of Christians would still be relatively small and probably mostly in Jerusalem (although we do not know how many of those converted at Pentecost went home and spread the gospel there); and the addition of "all who heard" implies that others outside the church heard too, who would surely be secondary recipients of news. The whole

⁵ This is not the place to discuss whether Paul wrote Ephesians and Colossians; for the purpose of this chapter we assume that they at least represent Pauline thought.

⁶ A variant (ADG/plat sy) inserts ἐν Ἐφέσῳ.

church was localized at this stage - in or near Jerusalem.

Acts 8.3: ἔλυμαίνετο τὴν ἐκκλησίαν κατὰ τοὺς οἴκους

There are various possibilities for interpreting this verse:

i) ἐκκλησία refers to all who met in various homes, ie. the sum of housechurches everywhere.

ii) Saul went to individual Christians' homes, not just to houses where a church met.

iii) the local church was no more localized than a whole city: in Jerusalem (or Antioch, or Rome) was the church, meeting in several locations. 8.1 does specify Jerusalem as the area of persecution; but even if only one city is referred to, to use the singular instead of the plural for many congregations indicates (iii) at least, and certainly opens the way for (i) the ἐκκλησία as all local congregations, however widespread.

Acts 12.1,5: this need only refer to the Jerusalem church, since James and Peter would be in Jerusalem, and as far as Herod was concerned the church would be a Jerusalem phenomenon⁷ since it started there and little is happening publicly elsewhere; but it is ambiguous and could well include the Christians at Antioch who have just been mentioned as ἡ ἐκκλησία (11.26).

Acts 20.28: Paul is exhorting the elders of a particular church, in Ephesus, but he speaks of the Lord obtaining the church by his blood, which is generally applicable. The thought may be broadened to see the elders taking part in the feeding of the whole flock by feeding the Ephesian flock.

⁷ Cf. C.H.Dodd, New Testament Studies, (Manchester University Press, 1953), p.57f.

1 Cor 10.32: the general principle of the chapter is to give no offence to anyone. Jews and Greeks are universal categories, so logically ἐκκλησία may be too. But the whole verse could also be instruction for local practice only: "offend neither the Jews nor Greeks around you, nor the church around you".

1 Cor 12.28: it is very hard to determine whether this is a continuation of general principles, or a specific application to Corinth. V.4-26 is general, then v.27 brings it down to the readers very directly, and a natural sequence would continue by applying the body metaphor to the ministries at Corinth⁸. But v.28 may be applying the body metaphor to the sphere of the church (in general). To insist on its referring only to Corinth involves accepting that all the ministries mentioned were present at Corinth - including apostles⁹. The thought moves most smoothly if

⁸ Contrast R.Schnackenburg, The Church in the New Testament (Burns and Oates, London, 1965), p.145, who almost reverses our interpretation: ch.12 addresses the Corinthian church with the body metaphor, though with the greater society in mind (v.13) and finally widens to include the whole church (v.28). But this is questionable because the body metaphor of v.12,14-26 is unapplied: it talks only in terms of the human body, then is applied in v.27 to the Corinthians or the whole church.

⁹ Cf. Whiteley, op.cit., p.187.

v.27 is seen as application to the whole church (though addressed in this context to the Corinthians) which v.28ff go on to spell out. The individuals at Corinth are addressed as belonging to the whole church and the local church as such is set aside for the moment. It would however be possible to read the whole chapter as referring directly and only to the Corinthian church. This problem arises because the teaching is true of the church both as universal and local.

1 Cor 14.4f: this verse holds similar ambiguities to the one above. This is a general principle about tongues and prophesying, but in practice it is a section of the church, ie. the local church, which is edified by prophecy and interpretation.

There are other ambiguous uses, but the above are enough to demonstrate that ἐκκλησία is often used without clear reference to either the local or universal church.

e) Main viewpoints on the local/universal issue.

i) Development.

According to this view, the early Christians first called each local group a "church", and only later worked out a theology of a universal church, united across its geographical dispersion. 1 and 2 Thessalonians represent the early undeveloped use, and Ephesians and Colossians the later doctrine. L. Cerfaux¹⁰ holds that the use of ἐκκλησία for a church in one area is the result of the foundation

¹⁰ L.Cerfaux, The Church in the Theology of St. Paul (Herder, Freiburg, 1969).

of the Antioch church as against the Jerusalem church: suspicion of the Gentiles disallowed "church of God" to be used of Antioch, but the latter nevertheless called itself an ἐκκλησία, as a double of the Jerusalem church. Paul entered this situation and adopted the practice of calling local communities churches¹¹. As Gentile Christians were accepted, awareness of overall unity grew, ἐκκλησία was used for the universal church and the concept developed to the sophisticated view of Ephesians and Colossians. Cerfaux is ambiguous about whether there was development in Paul's thought or not: he gives the impression both that Paul uncritically took over the Antioch practice and that he had the "higher" doctrine in mind all along. It is not certain that Jerusalem did deny Antioch the title "church of God": Cerfaux quotes only Acts 11.22, 13.1, which refer

¹¹ Cf. Schnackenburg, *op.cit.*, p.57, who cautiously remarks, "perhaps the term (church of God) was originally peculiar to the first community in Jerusalem ... and was extended". Later he says Paul first used the term only for the Jerusalem church (Gal 1.13, 1 Cor 15.9, Phil 3.6 Vulgate) and then secondarily for the Jewish Christian churches (1 Thess 2.14, probably 1 Cor 11.16) and finally for the Corinthian church (1 Cor 1.2, 10.32, 11.22, 2 Cor 1.1) "certainly in the sense of its being representative of the church as a whole". But this development is uncertain: the first three references are to Paul's persecuting, where he may not be saying "I persecuted the church in Jerusalem" but generally "I persecuted Christians"; and then in 1 Thess 2.14, 1 Cor 1.1, 2 Cor 1.1, the location of the churches of God is specified (in Judaea or Corinth) to clarify which church is meant. It is possible that for Paul from the beginning, "church of God" could be anywhere, and he only specified where if a particular church was in mind.

to the church in Jerusalem and Antioch respectively without any hint of rivalry or discord. Both references follow the Peter and Cornelius incident, which had already been reported to and accepted by the Jerusalem circumcision party.

The development view is severely criticized by Ridderbos and Schmidt. H. Ridderbos¹² finds many definite references to the universal church in Paul apart from Ephesians and Colossians: 1 Cor 12.28 ("one can hardly deny the meaning of Gesamt-Gemeinde"¹³); the persecution passages 1 Cor 15.9, Gal 1.13, Phil 3.6; Paul did not use "church of God" for the Jerusalem church, and he did attack more than the Jerusalem church - Acts 9.2, 26.11, Gal 1.17. These references are unconvincing: the complexity of interpreting 1 Cor 12.28 has been pointed out above, and the Acts verses do not prove that Paul persecuted more widely than Jerusalem. All refer to Damascus, which he did not actually reach as a persecutor, and it looks as if that was his first venture beyond Jerusalem, especially as he emphasises obtaining the warrant. In Acts 26.11, "even to foreign cities" is followed by "thus I went to Damascus": this is too thin evidence for previous expeditions beyond Jerusalem. In intent, Paul probably meant to visit further areas, but his programme was cut short. The most that Ridderbos' references prove is that Paul was aware even before his conversion of the existence of Christians outside Jerusalem. This is hardly equivalent to a doctrine of the universal church.

¹² H. Ridderbos, Paul: an outline of his theology, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975).

¹³ Ridderbos, op.cit., p.329.

When Ridderbos argues against development in Paul's thought, however, he is more convincing. Ἐκκλησία is a redemptive-historical concept, the true people of God, the manifestation of the Messianic congregation of the future. The primary idea is therefore universality, local churches being secondary, and only called churches as the ἔκκλησις is revealed and represented in them. Apart from Ephesians and Colossians, Paul is concerned in his epistles with localized concrete issues, and this is reflected in his terminology - hence the local church usage. But when he appealed for unity and peace in a church, he based his appeal on the unity and peace of the whole body (1 Cor 12, Rom 12): "he regards and addresses these local churches according to what they are as manifestations and representations of the people of God in general"¹⁴.

K.L. Schmidt¹⁵ argues that there is no sense of precedence between churches to be found in Acts; the singular and plural forms are used indiscriminately. The fact that the same word is used by Gentile and Jewish congregations shows the unity between them: there is one ἔκκλησις present in all the places mentioned. He sees the decisive aspect in the epithet τοῦ Θεοῦ which is understood even where it is not mentioned: the assembler, not those assembled, is the vital factor. Ἐλη added at 5.11 and 15.22 simply underlines what is implicit elsewhere: ἔκκλησις is not quantitative but qualitative. Paul, likewise, does not develop from plural to singular,

¹⁴ Ridderbos, op.cit., p.330.

¹⁵ K.L.Schmidt, "ἔκκλησις" TDNT, III, p.501-36.

nor even see differentiation as we tend to: they are juxtaposed at 1 Cor 14.35,33, Gal 1.13,22, 1 Cor 10.32, 11.16. In Colossians a small housechurch is called ἐκκλησία even in the context of a discussion on the nature of the one church (4.15). Τοῦ Θεοῦ is appended both to singular and plural, which is significant in that we would tend not to say "churches of God". All that Paul says to the Corinthian church (6.4, 11.18, 14.34) he applies to the church as a whole, not just a local church. Schmidt thus emphasises the similarity between Acts' and Paul's concepts of the church. The collection for the poor at Jerusalem was a recognition of the special authority of the leaders of the first community, "an obligation to those at Jerusalem who represented the first assembly of God in Christ"¹⁶. Paul was no innovator, forming a new view of the church in opposition to Jerusalem.

ii) Dual sense

Other scholars hold that both the local and the universal sense of ἐκκλησία were present from the beginning. Thus A.M. Ramsey¹⁷ traces the unity between the churches right back to the one God who initiated them. He points out that it is events which create the fellowship; those events are the common ground between churches and the rationale behind them; behind the events stands the God all the churches worship. Primarily, the church is

¹⁶ Schmidt, op.cit., p.508.

¹⁷ A.M. Ramsey, The Gospel and the Catholic Church (Longmans, London, 1936).
Green and Co.

one race, based on these events and the God active in them: the local church represents that race, though not as a section of it. "The ἐκκλησία in a place is the one race as existing in that place"¹⁸. He quotes P.T. Forsyth with approval: "the local church was a church through representing then and there the universal church"¹⁹. Many take this view, maintaining that although the most common use is local, yet the universal concept is always there, since each church can be said to be the whole church. "Each ekklesia is a full and perfect manifestation of the ekklesia"²⁰ "There is no separated Christianity ... no division into separate groups linked only externally by a common profession of faith in Jesus Christ and common religious rites and practices, which were later to be conceptually linked by an emerging theology of the church... the multiplicity of historical phenomena, all the differences of local organisation, all the shades of difference in the formulation of theological teaching, cannot conceal the hidden [sic] ground of unity"²¹. Similarly, A. Richardson argues that since the church is an organic entity, it is

¹⁸ Ramsey, op.cit., p.47.

¹⁹ P.T.Forsyth, Lectures on the Church and the Sacraments,/p.40. (London, 1917)

²⁰ H.Küng, The Church (Search Press, London, 1968), p.86.

²¹ Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.14f.

not a question of arithmetical unity. The whole church is present at every local congregation and meeting, however small²². "Locality, nationality, particularity are essential marks of the universal church: the local congregation is the embodiment at a given time and place of the church of all the world and of all the ages. The contradiction of universality is not locality but denominationalism"²³. G.E. Ladd also represents this view: "the local congregation is the church; the totality of all believers is the church". Each local church represents the whole, and "each congregation functions in its community as the universal church functions in the world as a whole"²⁴. Whiteley, however, disputes the "unnecessary mystification"²⁵ of the idea that the whole church is present in each congregation. The whole power of Christ is indeed present in each, but the church itself does not yet transcend its earthly limits. Each congregation has a function analogous to that of the universal church in the world, and is in a state of solidarity with Christ and the whole church²⁶.

F.J.A. Hort²⁷ shows that the practical implications

²² A. Richardson, An introduction to the theology of the New Testament, (SCM, London, 1958), p.288.

²³ Richardson, op.cit., p.289.

²⁴ G.E. Ladd, Theology of the New Testament, (Lutterworth, London, 1975), p.537.

²⁵ Whiteley, op.cit., p.189.

²⁶ Whiteley, op.cit., p.190.

²⁷ F.J.A. Hort, The Christian Ecclesia, (Macmillan, London, 1898), p.119-22.

of a universal church are present throughout Paul's writings, even where the idea is not explicitly spelt out. Paul counteracts tendencies to isolationism and independence: he condemns Corinthian practice by contrasting it with other churches, 11.16, 14.33,36, 16.1, 7.17, 4.17; he gives thanks for love between the churches and reports the spreading news of faith and growth, 1 Thess 1.7f, 4.9f, 2 Thess 1.3f, 2 Cor 3.2, Rom 1.8, Col 1.4; he encourages hospitality between churches, Rom 12.13; he conveys mutual greetings, 1 Cor 16.19, Rom 16.4,16, Phil 4.22; he made the churches share in his work by sending him on, 1 Cor 16.6, 2 Cor 1.16, Rom 15.24. Schnackenburg also observes that "Paul admonished and educated all his churches to Christian concord and also promoted harmony between the mother-church in Jerusalem and his new foundations (cf. the great collection). In that way he made an essential contribution, both theological and practical, to the formation of a common consciousness of the church as a whole"²⁸.

iii) False distinction

A third alternative is that we may be making a false distinction. The reason why it is possible to argue for either a developing concept or a dual sense may be that the early Christians themselves were not consciously using ἐκκλησία to exclude or include either sense - they may not have considered the issue. Hence the extreme difficulty of defining the reference of 1 Cor 12.28 and 14.4, where

²⁸ Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.82.

the presuppositions of the exegete seem the only criterion for deciding whether the church there is local or universal. As Ridderbos observes (i) above) the primary sense is dictated by the context; but we may add that it is our retrospective view which distinguishes between primary and secondary meanings, or indeed asks the question "local or universal?" at all. Our word "church" has developed many more meanings since NT times: it can refer to a local congregation, a building, a world-wide denomination, or all Christians of whatever denomination or nationality, and we therefore look for definitions in the NT usage which can only be found by imposing our categories in some measure on the text. We should beware both of theologizing about the early usages (when we may be guilty of reading back later formulations) and of using an argumentum e silentio to deny all but the most restricted local sense to the early usages.

f) 2 Thess 1.1,4

It would scarcely be possible to argue that 2 Thessalonians is unpauline in its use of ἐκκλησία . The word is used explicitly only in a local sense, but each time it is further defined by ἐν θεῷ or τοῦ θεοῦ which shows the underlying raison d'être and therefore the unity between all belonging to and in the one God. Milligan²⁹ holds that the phrase τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ Θεσσαλονικέων is more localized than the Corinthian form, τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ τοῦ θεοῦ τῆ οὔσης ἐν κυρίῳ.

²⁹ Milligan comm. on 1 Thess 1.1.

The former is a local gathering of believers, whereas the latter is the one church as represented in that place. This is a precarious distinction: in both cases, locality is mentioned to define the addressees, and the choice of phrase is simply a matter of style and variation. The form of address in other epistles is not consistent enough to call the Thessalonian form unique: only when there are two letters to one place is the form identical (Corinthians and Thessalonians), otherwise it varies for no apparent reason. The difference between the Corinthian and Thessalonian forms is that one uses the name of the people and the other the name of the place. There seems no grounds to argue that one is more localized than the other. Hence Best states, avoiding the distinction, "Thessalonians defines the Christian community as that found in Thessalonica; it is not a community on its own but part of the whole people of God"³⁰.

It is assumed in 1.4 that the churches are interested in one another and concerned about the spread of the gospel and of the church: Paul spreads news about the Thessalonians, and in 3.1 he asks them to pray for his mission elsewhere. Even if the universal picture of Ephesians and Colossians lies still in the future, the seeds are here in the close relations between communities and their common faith in the same God and Lord (1.1). The idea of the universal church is implicit; it is not explicit either because that issue had not occurred, or because the letter is thoroughly situation-orientated.

³⁰ Best comm. on 1 Thess 1.1.

2. The structure of the church at Thessalonica

a) Offices: 1 Thess 5.12

This verse is the only direct reference in the Thessalonian letters to leaders (τοὺς... ἀποστοταμένους ὑμῶν). They are described by three participles κοπιῶντας, ἀποστοταμένους, and βουλοῦντας. Are these three kinds of leader, or two with the latter pair spelling out the first, or a broad description of the varying activities of the leaders? Most commentators understand it as one set of people with several functions in the community, since one article serve the three participles¹. Κοπιῶ is used elsewhere for Paul's great efforts in mission and pastoral care, and also for manual work (eg. Gal 4.11, 1 Cor 15.10, Phil 2.16, 1 Cor 4.12, Eph 4.28). Ἀποστοταμεναι can be translated "lead, preside", or "care for, protect"² and the choice of translation is affected by one's understanding of those concerned as official leaders or as giving spontaneous service to one another; although even the latter interpretation implies that some individuals tended to be more involved in care for the community than others. "Leading" is an imprecise term: it could mean simply looking after³, or administration and organisation⁴. Hort interprets ἀποστοταμένους as "helpful leadership in Divine things"⁵. D.W. Williams interprets it

¹ Best, Frame, Milligan comms. ad loc.

² Best comm. ad loc.

³ Neil comm. ad loc.

⁴ Frame comm. ad loc.

⁵ F.J.A.Hort, The Christian Ecclesia (Macmillan, London, 1898), p.127.

as the activity of directing rather than an office of director. "Although the church needed some order, it had not yet created officials"⁶. Νεὺς ὀρετοῦντας is not teaching, but admonishment addressed to the will to produce a change in behaviour⁷: it is used for a father's instruction to his son in the LXX (Is 3.13, Wisdom of Solomon 11.10).

Ἐν κερσίῳ may be added to specify which sphere of leadership is meant - those at the forefront of Christian communities might well be of lower social class or younger age than those under them in the fellowship of Christ. Alternatively it could be a gentle reminder that Christian leadership is not a matter of personal ambition but is a gift and command from Christ. The latter might be the case if the Thessalonians were criticizing or depreciating leaders and Paul is speaking to a particular issue⁸ rather than giving general instruction whilst foreseeing the likelihood of a problem arising in this sensitive area⁹. Frame deduces from κοινοῦντας that the

⁶ D.W.Williams, "The imitation of Christ in Paul with special reference to Paul as teacher" (Columbia Ph.D., 1967), p.238. He compares Dibelius comm. p.30, Delling, Worship in the New Testament (1962), ch.10.

⁷ Best comm. ad loc.

⁸ Frame comm. ad loc.

⁹ Best, Moore comms. ad loc.

leaders were workers opposed to idlers¹⁰, but is unclear whether he means that all leaders were workers and all the rest of the community were idling, or whether the leaders were such by virtue of their diligence in work. The text does not specify whether the work is daily wage-earning work, or efforts in pastoral or administrative care in the Christian community, but the structure and context of the verse indicates that the latter is more likely. Admittedly "Christian" work should also arouse the idlers' respect, but there are no grounds for dividing the community into two clear sections, working leaders as against idle followers.

All three terms are too general and untechnical to permit precise definition and delimitation. The functions are moreover such as the whole community would have responsibility for. E. Schweizer¹¹ argues that "brethren" in v.12a,14 must refer to the same people, and since v.16-18, 23-25 could not possibly apply only to a section of the community, the whole passage must apply to them all. This

¹⁰ Frame comm. ad loc. Cf. R.M. Evans, "Eschatology and Ethics: a study of Thessalonica and Paul's letters to the Thessalonians;" Th.D., Basel, 1967 p.96ff: Evans sees the polarity of worker/idle as parallel to authority/under authority and 2 Thess 3.15 as a warning not to accentuate the distance between the authorities and the idle. If there were such a crisis of authority in the community, however, Paul would surely be more explicit. Evans is as unclear as Frame on whether he equates the holders of authority with the workers.

¹¹ E. Schweizer, Church order in the New Testament, SCM, London, 1961.

does not however explain how all can be *προϊσταμένους ὑμῶν*, and it makes more sense to say with Milligan¹² that the leaders have more of the mutual responsibility between all Christians. J.D.G. Dunn sees the leaders as activists of the community who took on service: "but to assume that this group was a small one, that these were all fairly well-defined functions, and that they had to be appointed to the 'offices' in question, ...goes far beyond the text"¹³. But however undefined, it is only realistic to allow that even in a 'primitive' community some degree of organisation and administration is essential for it to constitute a community: a group can only be organised by a smaller number than all its members.

Whether the group referred to in 5.12 are a defined group of appointed elders in an institutional sense or an informal leadership variously described as charismatic (eg. Küng, Schweizer, Dunn), natural (Best), or voluntary (Frame) is a vexed question. Dunn asserts that the leaders were the "ones who were most active in the life of the Christian community, who undertook their service at the instigation of the Spirit and whose only authority was that of some particular charisma(ta) manifest in a regular ministry"¹⁴. It is uncertain whether Paul did appoint leaders in every church he founded: Acts does give this impression in 14.23, although this refers to his journey of consolidation after the initial mission. It may be that

¹² Milligan, comm.ad loc.

¹³ J.D.G. Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit, (SCM, London, 1975), p.286.

¹⁴ Dunn, op.cit., p.287.

Paul left Thessalonica in too much of a hurry to attend to this matter - Rigaux¹⁵ points out that in such a case, Timothy on his return would make good the omission as part of his inspection and encouragement of the young church. Most scholars agree however that 'eldership' (Acts 14.23) was undefined at that stage, and that to call the Thessalonian leaders presbyters in the sense found in the Pastorals would be anachronistic. The charismatic/institutional issue is therefore partly a wrong question: "institutional" carries overtones of fixed, formal, external organisation as against the primitive emphasis on Spirit-led spontaneity, but even if this is a valid criticism of institutions, the issue arises only later. As R.Schnackenburg¹⁶ observes, the later hierarchy of offices need not be a relapse unless rule by God and obligation of service to the church are forgotten. In the Thessalonian context, there need be no contradiction between Paul's appointing elders on the one hand and a set of leaders arising naturally in the community because of their gifts, charisms, or leadership potential on the other hand. Paul would scarcely choose as leaders men with no aptitude or charism. "No form of appointing them is apparent"¹⁷, but appointment need be neither formal nor apparent, to take place. It will be on the basis of their prior suitability - which is not an alternative qualification to vocation by God - which

¹⁵ Rigaux comm. ad loc.

¹⁶ R.Schnackenburg, The Church in the New Testament (Burns and Oates, London, 1965), p.128.

¹⁷ H.Küng, The Church (Search Press, London, 1968), p.399, [my italics].

Paul could perceive simply by observing who among the community automatically assumed a leading, supporting role. "Authority in the community is derived not from the holding of a certain rank, not from a special tradition, not from old age or long membership in the community, but from the performance of a ministry in the Spirit. The consequence of obedience of all to God, Christ and the Spirit, is voluntary and mutual submission, the voluntary ministry of all to all, voluntary obedience to the different charisms of others ... order and peace are to reign in [the church] yet without quenching the Spirit at all: this is the ecclesiastical order envisaged by Paul"¹⁸. Appointing leaders in his churches was part of Paul's responsibility as founding father: since he was unable to be present himself, he needed "local ecclesiastical assistants" who were endorsed with his authority¹⁹.

b) ἀδελφοί

E.E. Ellis, in his article "Paul and his co-workers"²⁰, argues that in 2 Thessalonians Paul addresses the Christian workers in the community rather than the Christian brotherhood as a whole. He traces a use of ἀδελφοί for "co-worker" through Acts and the epistles²¹. As Harnack

¹⁸ Küng, op.cit., p.401f.

¹⁹ Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.30.

²⁰ E.E.Ellis, "Paul and his co-workers", NTS, 17 (1970-1), p.437-52.

²¹ Cf. Acts 9.26f,30, 18.27, 16.1f, 12.17, 1 Cor 16.19f, Eph 6.23f, Phil 4.21f, Col 4.15.

argued that 2 Thessalonians was addressed to the Jewish Christian section of the community²², so Ellis sees it as addressed to the leaders of the community alone, while 1 Thessalonians is for the whole community. The mention of firstfruits (2.13), and the issue of idlers supports the case: the leaders are those first converted who formed the nucleus of the church and the beginning of the Christian harvest in Thessalonica; and the idlers are in fact leaders who are taking advantage of their privileges as ministers to shirk manual work. Hence Paul's example and admonition that Christian ministers should earn their own bread as well as doing the work of ministry.

There is however no sufficiently strong evidence that ἀδελφοί could indicate a specific narrow group as opposed to being a general Christian address. Ἀδελφοί are mentioned alongside "all", or specific names or churches in greetings (1 Cor 16.19f, Col 4.15, Eph 6.23f, Phil 4.21f); in Acts 9.26f,30 brethren (v.30) may be synonymous for disciples (v.26) and/or apostles (v.27), of which disciples is an all-embracing term; in Acts 18.27 brethren could indicate Aquila and Priscilla, or the elders of Ephesus, or the Ephesian church in general; in Acts 16.1f, the brethren at Lystra and Iconium could be leaders as their opinion of Timothy would then be respected, but the context does not make this clear; in Acts 12.17, James and the brethren could mean James and those in responsibility with

²² A.Harnack, "Das Problem des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs", Sitzungsberichte der Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin, 1910), p.560-78.

him, but it could equally well mean James (as a leader) and all believers. These references prove nothing: at the most, some leave open the possibility that Ellis could be right, but the burden of proof lies on Ellis to demonstrate that brethren is used as delimiting or as over against disciples, rather than simply as alternative vocabulary. Ellis admits that Acts can be ambiguous in its usage, and the greetings alone are very inadequate as evidence. His point about firstfruits in Thessalonica depends on a doubtful text and there is no reason why his interpretation should commend itself more than any of several others²³; in any case, it is not necessarily those first converted who lead the community later. The analogy which Paul draws between his own example and work combined with ministry and the idlers in Thessalonica actually loses some of its force if the idlers are Christian workers. The argument is that if Paul, who as an apostle may legitimately be said to earn his own living by preaching and therefore be owed support by the churches, nevertheless foregoes his right and earns his keep, how much more should those without such a right continue to work instead of exploiting Christian love and generosity. This command to work is a reinforcement of 1 Thess 4.11, which according to Ellis was written to the whole community. 2 Thess 3.11 implies that the idlers were not only failing to do a regular job but that what they were doing was a waste of time and blameworthy. If this was the way the leaders behaved, we would expect Paul to treat the problem far more strictly,

²³ Cf. under A.I on election and call, 2.13f.

and to give strong exhortations to fulfil their ministry, not just an eye-for-an-eye penalty of forfeiting meals. The exhortation of v.13 comes as an afterthought and is expressed very weakly: it does not support Ellis' case. Harnack's points about 2 Thessalonians are that the tone is much less friendly than 1 Thessalonians, and there is little new material: these cannot be used in favour of Ellis, since a letter to Paul's co-workers would surely be more friendly than a general letter, and new material might well be expected in a letter to the leaders who must have some teaching and guiding responsibility. It would also say little for Paul's choice of leader, if it was they rather than the less stable elements in the community who had misunderstood Paul's teaching on the parousia and were flustered and panicky about it.

The main objection to Ellis' case is the ambiguity involved. If $\alphaδελφοί$ can mean co-workers or believers in general, this must be clear from the context: but no clarity emerges from Ellis' argument. Thus Dunn concludes that "the case for recognising a class of 'brothers' is almost wholly unconvincing. In every instance cited by Ellis, 'brother' almost certainly means 'fellow Christian'"²⁴. Paul does not repeat $\alphaδελφοί$ at certain points to specify whom he is addressing - if it was an ambiguous term this would scarcely help - but to get attention, to add a personal touch, to reinforce the importance of what he is saying, much as we use a personal name in conversation or correspondence.

²⁴ Dunn, op.cit., p.288.

c) Apostolic authority

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul commands as well as exhorts: he exerts disciplinary authority. What right has he to do that? A previous command has been reinforced by his example (3:6-9) and he assumes his example ought (δεῖ) to be followed: what is the source and nature of Paul's authority?

Authority does not reside in Paul's person: it derives from the purpose of apostleship, which is, broadly, to be a mouthpiece for the gospel. An apostle is a member of a local community²⁵ and not more 'spiritual' or more favoured than others²⁶. That which constitutes an apostle is the call to preach the gospel, a commissioning from Christ himself²⁷ and all authority is an extension of this original commission²⁸. Paul only defends his apostleship when his message is treated as invalid (Galatians), and he defends his message when his person or office is denigrated (2 Corinthians): office and message are so closely bound up that criticism of one affects the other. An apostle embodies the gospel²⁹: his behaviour must accord with the gospel he interprets and makes available - hence Paul's life of suffering (2 Cor 4.7-12, Col 1.24). In J.H. Schutz' view³⁰, the authority of the apostle

²⁵ W.Schmithals, The Office of Apostle in the Early Church (SPCK, London, 1971), p.22.

²⁶ In 1 Cor 12.28, "first apostles, second prophets..." may mean first in time, cf. A.T.Hanson, The Pioneer Ministry, (SCM, London, 1961), p.63, "in his view the apostles are the ministry because they are the first church".

²⁷ Cf. Schmithals, op.cit., p.24f.; J.H.Schutz, Paul and the anatomy of apostolic authority, (CUP, 1975), p.281.

²⁸ Schutz, ibid.

²⁹ Schutz, op.cit., p.281f.

³⁰ Schutz, op.cit., p.282.

only comes into play when a church is untrue to the gospel - thus Paul accuses, corrects and disciplines his churches - but if the churches stand in the gospel, they have the same power and authority as Paul. Schutz here overlooks the fact that even where Paul praises and commends, he still exhorts. He may not oppose them, because they are doing well, but his authority is still exerted in confirming their action or faith, and encouraging them to continue (2 Thess 3.4f, 2.15, 1 Thess 4.9f, 5.11, 3.9f). Schutz understands apostolic authority in terms of power and weakness. The gospel is the power of God, which is manifest in weakness and suffering; the apostle reflects that gospel³¹. Paul is authoritative only insofar as he is transparent to the gospel³², ie. as he is weak so that God can show power through him³³. Paul makes the power of the gospel available by interpreting it in his words and deeds: he has no special personal authority or power.

Dunn emphasises not the authority of Paul as apostle but his abdication of it. He rarely uses authoritative words, and urges obedience to Christ or the gospel rather than to himself (2 Cor 7.15, 10.6(?), Phil 2.12, 2 Thess 3.14). He never uses the strongest word for command, ἐπιταγή (cf. 2 Cor 8.8 - not as a command, ἐπιταγή). He emphasises his authority only when absolutely necessary, as with the false apostles at Corinth (2 Cor 10.8, 13.10);

31 Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.226.

32 Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.239.

33 Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.230.

otherwise he mentions it only as something which he refuses to use (1 Cor 9.4ff, 12, 18, 2 Thess 3.9). His favourite word is *καταγγέλλω* (23 times): "The great bulk of Paul's ethical instructions in his letters are more the exhortations of a fellow believer than the commands of an apostle". He emphasises the freedom of his converts³⁴ (Gal 5.1, 1 Cor 7.23, 2 Cor 1.24, Philem 14). Only in certain areas can Paul exercise authority: outside those bounds he must submit himself to the judgment of the community like any other Christian - "as apostolic authority stems directly from certain decisive events and words of the past, so the exercise of that authority is limited by the same events and words; only where these events and words speak immediately to the issue at hand can the apostle speak as apostle"³⁵.

H. von Campenhausen also stresses Paul's abdication of authority, which is more surprising than the fact of apostolic authority. Authority should not threaten the believer's freedom in the Spirit (1 Cor 3.5, 1.13); apostles are under Christ's authority. The communities should follow Paul in freedom, as he reminds them of the standard of teaching to which they are committed (Rom 6.17)³⁶. "Der Hortativ und nicht der Imperativ ist der wahre Modus der paulinischen Paränese"³⁷. Paul's authority over his communities is based on his unique relation to them as founder, father, teacher and leader³⁸. As they grow and mature,

³⁴ Dunn, op.cit., p.278.

³⁵ Dunn, op.cit., p.279.

³⁶ H.von Campenhausen, Kirchliches Amt und geistliche Vollmacht in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten, (J.C.B.Mohr, Tübingen, 1953), p.50.

³⁷ von Campenhausen, op.cit., p.56.

³⁸ von Campenhausen, op.cit., p.48.

he stands back and trusts them, but that also strengthens the bond between them. It is a changing but lasting relationship, which will be completed at the Day (2 Cor 1.14, 4.14, Phil 2.16, 1 Thess 3.13).

A.T. Hanson sees the apostles as pioneers, not qualitatively different from other believers but leaders insofar as they go ahead before their communities, leading them into deeper faith and maturity. Hanson can even state that "the aim of Paul's apostleship is that all his converts should be apostles"³⁹. The Christian ministry carries on Christ's work, showing in little what the church as a whole should be; the ministry lives out the suffering, redeeming life in the world so that the church can do the same. This is to a great extent correct and helpful, but Hanson and others go too far in disclaiming apostolic authority, showing that they are really fighting shy of authoritarianism. Hanson underrates leadership and hierarchy of roles in a community: a certain amount of structure is necessary and is basic to human society. Not all Christians can be apostles: Paul emphasises the diversity of ministries (1 Cor 12, Rom 12).

R. Schnackenburg⁴⁰, influenced by very different presuppositions, is at pains to point out that Paul did exert authority, and refers to 2 Cor 10.8, 13.10, Paul's ἐξουσία for building up; 1 Cor 5.3-5 the ruling over the case of incest; the use of διατάσσω in 1 Cor 7.17, 16.1,

³⁹ Hanson, op.cit., p.63.

⁴⁰ Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.28f.

which is also used for a command of the Lord in 1 Cor 9.14; definite instructions for moral conduct, 1 Thess 4.2,11, 2 Thess 3.4,6,10,12. Even where Paul distinguishes between his own opinions and words of the Lord, he expresses the former "with a definiteness that brooks no contradiction"⁴¹ (cf. 1 Cor 7.40).

The solution to the opposing attitudes represented by Dunn and von Campenhausen on one hand and Schnackenburg on the other, is that Paul does not presume on his authority. He only bases his appeals, commands or instructions on it when necessary, ie. when the congregations were disregarding him. Normally, he expected brotherly love and the uniqueness of his relationship with them to direct their respect. Paul was conscious that his authority was derived and therefore did not insist on it for its own sake, only when the gospel or the good of a community was at stake. To work for his living (2 Thess 3) was an abdication of his authoritative rights, in order to exert a different kind of authority, that of a Christ-like life. Paul's humility is part of his authority. The command to work would not have been nearly so effective without his personal example of self-sacrifice in 'unnecessary' labour. However, when the Thessalonians still failed to respond (or lapsed again after his departure), Paul exerts more blatant authority in his letter, again telling them to work, repeating the penalty (3.12) and adding an instruction to ostracize the disobedient (3.14f).

⁴¹ Schnackenburg, op.cit., p.29.

Even here, he uses nothing stronger than *ἀπαρρέλλω*.

d) Imitation

Paul's right to set himself up as an example, to say "imitate me" rather than "imitate Christ" is bound up in his authority as an apostle. He represents and embodies the gospel and the Christian life to his churches: he is, at least at first, all they know about Christianity. It does not involve personal pride, and must be seen alongside Paul's disclaimers about himself (eg. Phil 3.12-17) and his assertion that if he has anything about which to boast, it is his churches (1 Thess 2.19,20, cf. 2 Thess 1.4), not himself. Paul does not think of himself as the embodiment of an ideal, but as representing conduct shaped by a particular goal, and of the experience of persecution and suffering for Christ, which all amounts to a life of fellowship with Christ. "To be an imitator of the apostle means laying hold of Christ in the consciousness of one's own imperfection and letting one's life be constantly remoulded by Christ in obedience to him"⁴². Paul does not limit imitation to himself: ultimately it is imitation of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 11.1), "imitatio Pauli is fundamentally always imitatio Christi"⁴³. The principle implies deep respect for Paul, but it cannot be reduced to the obedience of the converts to Paul, as W. Michaelis understands it. For Michaelis, Paul is not a pattern to follow but an example to copy: "recognise my authority, follow what I say, be

⁴² W. Bauder, "*ἀπαρρέλλω*", DNTTH, I. p.490-2.

⁴³ R. Schippers, "Pre-Synoptic tradition in 1 Thess 2.13-16", NovT, 8 (1966), p.223-34; p.22.

obedient". "Imitation here is not repetition of a model, it is an expression of obedience"⁴⁴; cf. 1 Cor 4.16, where imitation is explained as following his "ways" (ταῖς ὁδοῖς μου v.17). Michaelis is trying to avoid the impression of Paul's setting himself up as someone to be copied and putting himself in Christ's place. But the notion of obedience to Paul can also be seen as detracting from obedience to Christ, or at least as a mediated obedience: and the distinction between obedience and imitation is very slim, if the teaching to be obeyed includes ethical instruction as well as doctrinal. Obedience is definitely not the meaning in 1 Thess 1.6, 2.14; it is usually part of the meaning but is not exhaustive. It can be a presupposition of the imitation command, or part of what imitation implies, or a broader concept within which imitation is one form of obedience, depending on the context. In 2 Thess 3, it is presupposed that the Thessalonians should be obedient, and because the issue turns around a command coupled with an example, it is very hard to distinguish between the ideas of obedience and imitation. Insofar as all Paul's teaching, both doctrinal and ethical, was practically applied and mirrored in his own life, this will often be the case. Sometimes the emphasis falls more upon "live as I live" than upon "do as I say"; it may be an arbitrary emphasis, or it may, as in 2 Thess 3, be deliberately designed to increase respect, drive home a point and forestall personal criticism. "Get on with your work" from a church-supported minister will carry less weight than "Get on with

⁴⁴ W. Michaelis, "μυμησιν" TDNT, IV, p.659-71; p.668.

your work, as you see I am doing, although strictly speaking I do not need to work".

D.M. Stanley⁴⁵ emphasises the special relationship created between Paul and his churches by Paul's act of founding them. The convert who had not known Jesus needed a concrete, tangible norm to guide him through Christian life and against which to test the work of the Spirit. In Stanley's view⁴⁶, Paul's churches adopted even his particular insight into the gospel, and emphases in Christian practice: Paul saw himself as continuing Christ's role of Suffering Servant, and Acts hints at this aspect of Christ's work being preached at Thessalonica (17.3f). Hence the Thessalonians accepted this form of the gospel, and proved its force by their own perseverance and faith in suffering (1 Thess 1.3-8, 2 Thess 1.4f). The acceptance of Paul's kerygma involved a way of life in conformity with the gospel. Paul preached and exemplified. Paul preached himself as a concrete example of Christian tradition (2 Thess 3.6f). However, without going into the question of the Suffering Servant, it seems unlikely that Paul's gospel differed radically from the other apostles on this point: judging from his attitude to partisanship at Corinth, he would be horrified at the suggestion that his churches followed an idiosyncratic Pauline version of the gospel as if they constituted a Pauline 'school'⁴⁷.

⁴⁵ D.M. Stanley, "Become imitators of me: the Pauline conception of apostolic tradition" Biblica, 40 (1959), p.359-77.

⁴⁶ Stanley, op.cit., p.866.

⁴⁷ Cf. W.P. De Boer, The imitation of Paul (J.H.Kok N.V. Kampen 1962), p.209.

A.T. Hanson's model of a pioneer ministry is helpful in understanding the imitation idea: all that the apostle is as regard his character and way of life, the church should be after him, because he exists to lead the church into his own experience of fellowship with Christ and Christ's life in the world. W.P. De Boer observes the psychological effect of an example: "he recognised the strange power of attraction which inheres in personal relationships. He pressed this power into the service of God"⁴⁸. Paul ranked his example alongside his teaching and instruction: all three were parts of the whole Christian tradition⁴⁹. The essence of imitation is not obedience (as Michaelis claims) but the bringing to expression personally of things that are observed and learned from others⁵⁰. It is a stage on the way to maturity: Paul is nurturing his spiritual children to grow into a direct relationship with Christ⁵¹.

⁴⁸ De Boer, op.cit., p.137.

⁴⁹ De Boer, op.cit., p.138.

⁵⁰ De Boer, op.cit., p.211.

⁵¹ De Boer, op.cit., p.215.

B.I. APOCALYPTIC LITERATURE AND 2 THESSALONIANS

1. What is apocalyptic?

a) Identification

Apocalyptic is notoriously difficult to define. F.C. Grant describes it as a "Santa Claus mailbag"¹, and indeed it does sometimes seem a mere conglomeration of heterogeneous elements. Introductions to apocalyptic literature tend rather to list its characteristics than to attempt more precise definition; the reason is perhaps that with a checklist of characteristics one can at least identify a piece of apocalyptic on reading it. The table below shows a selection of ten scholars' lists, which illustrate the variety in this field². They are followed by a summary list, showing the characteristics which recur most frequently in checklists; this summary list will be used later to discuss 2 Thessalonians as apocalyptic.

It will be observed that the lists generally mix features of form and content, literary and theological features, without discrimination. Frost, Koch and Dunn do subdivide their lists; but Frost's "formal" and Dunn's

¹ F.C. Grant, Ancient Judaism and the New Testament (Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh, 1960²), p.81.

² H.H. Rowley, The Relevance of Apocalyptic (Lutterworth, London, 1963), p.166-89; M-J Frey, "Apocalyptique", Pirot Supplement I, p.326-54:p.328-337; M. Rist, "Apocalypticism", NBD, p.157-61:p.157; D.S. Russell, The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic, (SCM, London, 1964), p.105 (Lindblom's list, with Russell's additions); S.B. Frost, Old Testament Apocalyptic (Epworth, London, 1952), p.4-30; L. Morris, Apocalyptic, (IVP, London, 1972), p.34-63; Grant, op.cit., p.88-93; K. Koch, The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic, (SCM, London, 1972), p.24-33; J.D.G. Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: an enquiry into the character of earliest Christianity, (SCM, London, 1977), p.310-315).

Table showing ten lists of apocalyptic characteristics, with summary list²

<u>Rowley</u>	<u>Lindblom</u>	<u>Koch</u>
history divided into ages	transcendentalism	<u>Literary</u>
period of suffering before	mythology	discourse cycles
End	cosmological surveys	spiritual turmoils
goal is kingdom	pessimistic historical	paranaetic discourse
judgment	surveys	pseudonymity
	dualism	mythical, symbolic image
<u>Frey</u>	division of time into	composite
revelation	periods	<u>Concepts</u>
compilation	two ages	urgent expectation of
pseudonymity	numerology	End
esoteric	pseudo-ecstasy	End is cosmic
determinism	artificial claims to	catastrophe
symbolism	inspiration	history in fixed
indeterminate language	pseudonymity	segments: determinism
	esoterism	angelology & demonology
<u>Rist</u>		salvation beyond
(secondary features)	<u>Morris</u>	catastrophe -
vision	revelations	universalism
pseudonymity	symbolism	act from throne of God
messiah	pessimism	mediator (Messiah, Son
angelology & demonology	shaken foundations	of Man)
animal symbolism	triumph of God	"glory"
numerology	determinism	
wars	dualism	<u>Dunn</u>
astral influence	pseudonymity	<u>Literary</u>
	rewritten history	pseudonymity
<u>Russell</u>	prediction	visions & symbolism
(adds to Lindblom's list)	history as outworking	historical surveys from
unity of history	of God's purpose	past perspective
cosmic history	<u>Grant</u>	esoteric
primordiality	tension due to persecution	underground literature
source of evil	abandonment of human	response to situation
conflict between light/dark	means	of crisis
Son of Man	cosmic redemption	ethical exhortations
life after death	dramatis personae - Messiah,	<u>Theological</u>
	Son of Man, angels, Satan	two ages
<u>Frost</u>	transcendant God	pessimism and hope
<u>Formal</u>	visions recorded verbally	eschatological climax
historical situation	asceticism as means to	imminent End
(oppression)	insight	supernatural & cosmic
appeal to history	explicit & unconditional	dimensions
(theodicy)	prediction	divine sovereignty &
nationalism	predestination	control
anonymity and pseudonymity	day of judgment	
mythology	uses of unfulfilled prophesy	
symbolism	symbols	
<u>Content</u>	philosophy of history: will	
origin of evil	of God in all cosmos	
golden age		
angelology & demonology		
future life		

Summary list

The characteristics which occur most often are:

symbolism, pessimism, determinism, periodized history,

pseudonymity, cosmic/universal outlook, angelology

and demonology, dualism, two ages, and tribulation.

"literary" characteristics include items of environment and motivation as well as literary features, and Koch's list of concepts has the air of being an arbitrary selection of the apocalyptist's interests - it gives us no firm grasp on what apocalyptic is all about. This confusion is symptomatic of uncertainty about what the definition of apocalyptic is. S. Laws is more optimistic - "it is probably correct to see emerging in recent work on apocalyptic a broad consensus of opinion about its characteristics"³. The key words here are "broad" and "main": if a consensus were achieved, judging from the table below it would be too broad to form a clear definition. Laws' further remarks are however apposite: "In particular it is necessary to decide whether a definition of 'apocalyptic' is a definition of ideas, or of literary features, or of a coincidence of the two, and if it should also contain an analysis of the social phenomena which gave rise to the ideas and the literature"⁴. These questions are touched on below.

b) Context and environment

We noticed that one of Frost's formal characteristics was an environmental feature ("historical situation") and this becomes for some the key to apocalyptic. It has often been observed that apocalyptic occurs in periods of history where acute dissatisfaction with the present state of affairs arises through oppression, persecution or lack of identity. Hopes which are impossible to reconcile with the present

³ S.Laws, "Can apocalyptic be relevant?", What about the New Testament? Essays in honour of C.F.Evans, ed. M.Hooker and C.Hickling, (SCM, London, 1975), p.89-102:p.93.

⁴ Ibid.

suffering are relegated to the visionary future or to a different life altogether. So Wilder urges that we should not disparage apocalyptic, which is appropriate to its own situation, giving meaning to the disastrous present. It is impossible for us fully to understand unless we are in an analogous situation and with equal visionary capacity. Calkins describes apocalyptic as a "flaming message in days of defeat and disaster"⁵. In it, men with no earthly resources attempt to portray the resources of God. "It is description, so to speak, of celestial munition factories and of the mobilisation of ethereal troops"⁶. Calkins' article might almost be taken as an instance of contemporary apocalyptic: it makes extensive use of imagery, is eloquent, emotive and impassioned - but is unlikely to touch anyone without a similar affinity to apocalyptic thinking, which supports Wilder's point above. Ladd sees three circumstances as conditioning the rise of apocalyptic: i) the righteous remnant; a minority group who needed to develop their own perspective on life and the world; ii) the problem of evil - when injustice and oppression flourished, God's righteousness and sovereignty had to be defended; iii) the cessation of prophecy: the righteous remnant needed an authoritative word for their day, and this was supplied, in the absence of genuine prophecy, in the pseudonymous apocalypses⁷.

⁵ R.Calkins, "Militant message", Interpretation 2, (1948), p.430ff: p.433.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Morris, op.cit., p.26.

P. Hanson⁸ lists periods when apocalyptic flourished - 6th, 5th and 2nd centuries BC, primitive church, Reformation and the last 100 years - which are all characterized by inner-community struggle between hierocratic leaders and disenfranchised visionaries, resulting in a polarization between realism and vision. When the element of vision is overemphasised, it leads to a retreat from social responsibility into a world of dreams and ecstasy which the seer fails to translate into everyday historical terms. Hanson's emphasis on the sociological dimension is a valuable contribution to our understanding of why apocalyptic arises at certain times, but his differentiation between prophecy and apocalyptic as realism versus vision (though the latter developed only gradually out of the former) is stated rather too strongly as a black and white distinction. Prophecy gone bad could become a sterile preserver of the status quo, and apocalyptic run to seed could be totally divorced from real life, but neither fairly represent their genre. R. Bauckham criticizes Hanson for viewing apocalyptic as a corruption of prophecy: in fact it was a legitimate and important development that the apocalyptists looked beyond earthly events for salvation: "apocalyptic eschatology [is] essentially a theological advance in which God's promises through his prophets were stirring his people to hope for a greater salvation than their forefathers had guessed"⁹.

⁸ P.D.Hanson, The Dawn of Apocalyptic (Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1975), p.30.

⁹ R.J.Bauckham, "The rise of apocalyptic", Themelios (Jan. 1978), p.10-23: p.19.

Realism and vision can be evenly balanced in both genres, and the apocalypticist's realism about the present world would include a degree of pessimism about the nature of man and his part in God's saving activity because of the writer's environment of conflict. The stronger the community discord, the deeper the pessimism - but this itself is a realistic attitude. For the prophets, realism included making Yahweh's blessings or judgments dependent on the people's response and repentance or lack of it, because there remained a possibility of repentance. 2 Thessalonians falls into one of Hanson's polarization periods - the early church - and the sociological factor of community conflict is plain to see (2 Thess 1.5-8, 3.2).

c) Characteristics and context

Most of the prominent characteristics (see table) may be accounted for by the context of apocalyptic, as arising naturally from the needs and outlook of the people at the time. Goguel describes apocalyptic as a synthesis of "radical pessimism about the present situation and absolute optimism about the final outcome"¹⁰, and similarly Schmithals writes that "the absolute 'no' of the apocalypticist to this world-age ... still does not lead the apocalypticist into absolute resignation, but rather to a great hope for a new creation"¹¹. The present situation is so appalling that there must be supernatural powers of evil controlling it, so that human efforts are hopelessly inadequate to combat them and an intervention from God is the only solution.

¹⁰ M.Goguel "Eschatologie et apocalyptique dans le christianisme primitif" RHR, 109 (1932), p.381-434, 490-524:p.524

¹¹ W.Schmithals, The Apocalyptic Movement, (Abingdon, Nashville, 1975. Translated from Die Apokalyptik (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht 1973), p.45.

Accordingly, all hope is concentrated on the final outcome when God would be victorious¹². Thus the context of apocalyptic accounts straightaway for the characteristics of pessimism, determinism (helplessness to alter the situation soon becomes conviction that the situation cannot but unroll itself in a certain way; and the more the situation is seen as supernaturally controlled the more inevitable its degeneration becomes); angelology and demonology (curiosity seeks a more intimate acquaintance with the particular supernatural powers at work); dualism (essentially, the present situation is controlled by Satan and the final outcome by God); two ages (the present will give way to a totally different future); and endtime tribulation (the present situation).

Hengel has a similar explanation for the rise of apocalyptic, with emphasis on its new historical view (as universal and predetermined). i) The Jews were fighting for identity and survival, so needed a new interpretation of history to maintain perseverance. The hard present meant that history was developing in a predominantly negative way, to a final crisis before the End¹³; ii) calculation of an imminent End results from a situation of extreme crisis;

¹² Schmithals goes so far as to find the key to apocalyptic in its pessimism: "pessimism towards the whole of historically experienced reality is the basic experience of apocalyptic and the heart of the apocalyptic understanding of existence" (op.cit., p.88). The apocalypticist stands at the end of history, is sure that history is coming to an end and despairs of history itself, expecting salvation from beyond history, from God.

¹³ M.Hengel, Judaism and Hellenism: studies in their encounter in Palestine during the early Hellenistic period (SCM, London, 1974. Trans. J.Bowden), p.194.

iii) men had failed to create the presuppositions of salvation and so hope had to be directed towards the imminent realization of God's saving plan; iv) the decision of the individual came to the foreground because he now had to decide between the faith of his fathers and apostasy to a syncretistic cult (Hengel is thinking of the pressure of Hellenization); v) the vision of history as a unity was a defence against Hellenistic cosmopolitanism. Hengel's analysis is not altogether satisfactory: one might ask why, if apocalyptic was a nationalistic defence against Hellenism, was it adopted by Christianity (especially by Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles) which removed the Jewish/Hellenistic barrier? But Hengel does demonstrate the causative connection between context and characteristics. It is clear that context is an important consideration in the search for an understanding of apocalyptic.

2. The Essence of Apocalyptic

a) Characteristics are not the essence

We have already seen that attempts to define apocalyptic by listing its characteristics are unsatisfactory. Hanson calls this a "static" definition¹⁴. Frost coins a phrase to define apocalyptic as the "mythologizing of eschatology"¹⁵, eschatology expressed in mythical forms. Myth is the earliest form of speculative thought and is a medium of truth as much as history is. In apocalyptic, myth is the "dress" and eschatology the truth; apocalyptic can be demythologised, for "the truth lies not in the picture of narrative representation but in the eschatology it conveys"¹⁶. The

¹⁴ P.D.Hanson, op.cit., p.408.

¹⁵ Frost, op.cit., p.33.

¹⁶ Frost, op.cit., p.248.

"dress" however is necessary for expression. So for Frost, the literary characteristics are secondary to the message, and are the means to this end.

b) The message is the essence

Here we have reached what may be called the essence of apocalyptic. Its characteristics are explicable by reference to its context, and that context is not so much its essence as its external prerequisite. Within apocalyptic literature itself the essence is the message (or intention of the writer), required by the context and expressed in certain idiosyncratic ways which are called forth by the context.

This point is recognised by a number of scholars. Rowley writes on the misunderstanding of the purpose of Daniel, "they read it primarily as a prediction of the end"¹⁷, whereas it was primarily a word of power for men in dire need. As a prediction of the end it was a failure, but as a powerful spiritual force it was a great success"¹⁸. In Russell's words, "it is essentially a literature of the oppressed who saw no hope for the nation simply in terms of politics or on the plane of human history. The battle they were fighting was on a spiritual level; it was to be understood not in terms of politics and economics, but rather in terms of 'spiritual powers in high places'. And so they were compelled to look beyond history to the dramatic and miraculous intervention of God who would set to right the injustices done to his people Israel ... The expression of this belief is at times fanciful and exaggerated; but book after book

¹⁷ It cannot be denied that it is prediction of the End:
Rowley's "primarily" must be stressed.

¹⁸ Rowley, op.cit., p.53.

throbs with the passionate conviction that all that God had promised would surely come to pass"¹⁹. Thus apocalyptic is a vision of political events and circumstances in spiritual terms, and faith in God's triumph despite the apparent reign of evil now. Similarly Charles writes on Revelation, "the object of the seer is to proclaim the coming of God's kingdom on earth, and to assure the Christian church of the final triumph of goodness"²⁰. Rist explains the beneficial psychological effects of apocalyptic, its appeal and popularity: "an uncomplicated explanation for the existence of evil ... the reader or listener may come to think of himself as being involved in a great cosmic process ... a personal participant in the triumph of the forces of good over the forces of evil"²¹. "Mistaken though apocalyptic has been in its world view ... it strengthened both Jew and Gentile in time of persecution ... it may serve as a corrective to human pride"²². Frey is disparaging about the literary value of apocalyptic, with its lack of spontaneity and originality, but praises its motivation and message: "leurs intentions valaient mieux que leurs oeuvres; si ces dernières sont des compositions littéraires médiocres, celles-là ne manquent ni de noblesse ni de générosité. L'apocalyptique est donc avant tout le fruit d'une foi inébranlable en la véracité des Livres Saints, et en la parole de Jahvé. Elles sont en même temps un message d'indéfectible

¹⁹ Russell, op.cit., p.17f.

²⁰ R.H.Charles, The Revelation of St.John, (T.&T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1920), p.ciii.

²¹ Rist, op.cit., p.161.

²² Ibid.

espérance et témoignent, pour la plupart, d'un optimisme indéradicable: plus le présent est attrisant, plus l'avenir sera rempli de splendeurs"²³. Beardslee agrees that the root issue of apocalyptic is not its external visionary form but the directness and totality of its grasp on the coming transformation of reality; it is an expression of faith in God²⁴.

These quotations illustrate the three main lines of thought in defining apocalyptic according to its message: i) a vision of the present and primarily of the political and social situation in spiritual terms, a characteristic perspective on world events; ii) a vision of the future as a glorious and certain consummation, as victory of God; iii) and these views of present and future serve to maintain hope, endurance and faith in the present time. These are not disparate emphases: they are essentially interwoven. If the present is seen in spiritual terms then it cannot be understood as absolute and final; if the imminent future holds an assured final and total victory of God's sovereignty, then the inference is that the present is dominated by God's final enemies, who can only be spiritual forces of evil. Once the future is seen as God's, and God's sovereignty as not compromised, then hope may fly in the face of present disaster.

c) Relevance beyond context

If apocalyptic is so bound up with its context, does

²³ Frey, op.cit., p.339f.

²⁴ W.A.Beardslee, "New Testament apocalyptic in recent interpretation", Interpretation 25 (1971), p.419-35: p.424.

it have any relevance outside that context, especially if its expectations have turned out wrong? Do its characteristics obscure its message so much that it ceases to be meaningful to men in a non-apocalyptic situation?²⁵

Rowley readily admits the particularity of apocalyptic literature and its limitations - apocalyptists do make mistakes in prediction and expectation - but these factors do not invalidate apocalyptic. Inspiration, he believes, does not imply/fallibility. There is universal significance ⁱⁿ behind the particular form and setting of apocalyptic, if it is the Word of God²⁶. E.F.Scott goes further than this and labels apocalyptic "the natural language of religion" because it reflects man's earliest religious thought, the instinctive sense of another world. He lists three other merits of apocalyptic: it keeps us aware of ultimate issues, gives body to abstract ideas, and provides a necessary supplement to abstract thought²⁷. These are valid points but are too general to justify the existence of apocalyptic in particular: they apply to any religious language. Snyder's²⁸ justification for apocalyptic in the NT is as a form to express a "radically disjunctive eschatology". Jesus preached newness, radical change (the last shall be first ; let the dead bury their dead; except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of God) and therefore used apocalyptic for

²⁵ All history is a continuing situation of injustice, death and oppression, so every age has the same dilemmas; but there are crises at certain points, which throw up apocalyptic literature. Men are not always in extremis: at least, they are not always aware of being so.

²⁶ H.H.Rowley, "The voice of God in apocalyptic", Interpretation 2, (1948), p.403-18: p.406f.

²⁷ E.F.Scott, "The natural language of religion", Interpretation 2, (1948), p.419-29: p.419, 426-8.

²⁸ G.F.Snyder, "The literalization of the apocalyptic form in the New Testament church", Bib.Res. 14 (1969), p.5-18: p.6.

its sense of break with the past into a new future. Problems arose when he was misunderstood and his words literalized to give information about cosmology and history. The delayed parousia problem in Thessalonica was such a problem, according to Snyder: either a Hellenistic Utopian idea or a literal understanding of Paul's eschatological teaching had occurred, and neglect of daily work resulted. Paul had to maintain the sense of radical disjuncture whilst correcting their error; hence he repeats their teaching as well as rebuking them. Snyder's theory is an attempt to demythologise apocalyptic, and as often happens with demythologisation he loses something in the process. Radical disjuncture takes place at two points: at the point of entering the kingdom, conversion, to which the message of newness is often referring, and secondly at a future point, which is where apocalyptic eschatology comes into play. Here the cosmic End, break in history and onset of a new age form a disjuncture towards which the first is pointing. Jesus spoke about both of these: his apocalyptic language was not always directed towards the present (or past) disjuncture. Paul in 2 ~~Thess~~ 2 is speaking of the second disjuncture to make the point that it had not happened yet, not that his apocalyptic teaching referred to a disjuncture which had already happened and had constituted the church in Thessalonica. If such had been his teaching, it would have resulted in a loss of hope or a self-deceiving Utopian attitude. The reason he both corrects and repeats himself is to maintain hope and expectance but to keep a right perspective on the present. Snyder is right in asserting

that apocalyptic expresses a radical disjuncture, but wrong in failing to appreciate the future aspect of the disjuncture.

For Pannenberg, the advantage of apocalyptic is its openness beyond the world, which makes it valid in every culture. Without this insight into the nature and destiny of man, Jesus' ministry would be meaningless. The imagery of apocalyptic is not the central factor - rather it is concerned mainly with the full realization of man's humanity in its individual and social aspects. This involves righting present injustice between men, and all men realizing the righteousness of God; and these necessitate the resurrection and judgment of the dead. The belief that man will live after death - openness beyond the world - allows for a vindication of God and the suffering righteous. Apocalyptic does not however tell us about the material course of events to bring this about²⁹. Pannenberg may have laid undue emphasis on the fulfilment of humanity, and he admits that the Bible's eschatology is not formulated anthropologically, whilst arguing that it does not exclude such a perspective. His emphasis on the ultimate vision of the apocalyptists rather than their portrayal of the route towards the consummation is a salutary one, and corresponds to Paul's emphasis in 2 Thess 2. There, the apocalyptic section opens and closes with the parousia of the Lord and the intervening verses describe preliminaries to the climax of the Lord's

²⁹ W. Pannenberg, "Eschatology and the experience of meaning", Basic Questions in Theology, III (SCM, London, 1973), p.192-210.

coming and the Christians' uniting with him. Once mentioned, these preliminaries are referred to no longer, whereas the Lord's coming is repeatedly alluded to (1.7,10, 2.1,8; and since the references to glory also imply the parousia, 1.10,12, 2.14).

J.D.G. Dunn recognises the context-bound nature of apocalyptic: "its visions and its hope are too relative, too bound up with the period of history which called them forth, to allow any standardized interpretation or expression of the apocalyptic hope. This has meant inevitably that apocalyptic as such has never fitted very comfortably into the orthodoxy of the great Church"³⁰. It is nevertheless a valid and important expression of Christianity, which is demonstrated by its repeated appearance. Dunn lists three points of continuing significance: i) reality is seen on a wide canvas; God has a part in the spiritual forces operating behind the scenes - "the decisive part" - and man has responsibility before him; ii) history has a purpose; hope lies in God's control of events; iii) the present is properly evaluated: there is a positive attitude towards suffering as a necessary preparation and antecedent of the End (Dunn quotes F.C. Burkitt: "the gospel is the great protest against the modern view that the really important thing is to be comfortable"); iv) man is not dependent on this world but responsible for it: he is responsible to tell the world the state of reality and course of history.

³⁰ Dunn, op.cit., p.338f.

He can persevere despite persecution because he is not dependent on the world for recognition and value. Dunn concludes that the central role of apocalyptic is to understand the present in the light of the future and the future in relation to the present. We must not abandon apocalyptic on the grounds that its expression was too bound up in past events and cultures: any form of expression is relative. Apocalyptic must be both retained and restrained: the hope of God's imminent intervention must be retained, and a restraint put on any too detailed and historically conditioned hope of fulfilment.

It can be seen from these scholars that imagery is taking a back seat when the function of apocalyptic is under discussion. This is a healthy trend: previously too much attention has been focused on the peripheral and sometimes bizarre elements. This is language about the theological future (the future of the relations between God and man, and future events viewed from a theological point of view) which we do not know in the way that we know the historical past. Even granted the element of prophecy in apocalyptic, the point of speaking about the future is not merely to satisfy curiosity by description, which would be irrelevant to the present: the point is rather how the future, especially the End, impinges on the present, and its implications for the present. Hence apocalyptic at its best includes ethical exhortation: G.E. Ladd has suggested a category "prophetic-apocalyptic" to designate that part of apocalyptic literature which has not run to seed in total despair about the present and the world,

resulting in ethical passivity. Such apocalyptic had retained the prophetic optimism about present history, with God's present activity towards salvation, and a genuine ethic of preparation for the kingdom. Ladd finds these two features strongly represented in Jesus' teaching³¹.

E. Käsemann looks on apocalyptic as a stage in the development of the primitive church, preceded by the preaching of Jesus and followed by the "Frühkatholizismus" period. In fact, Käsemann uses "apocalyptic" as a synonym for futuristic eschatology: he says of 1 Cor 15.20-28, "no perspective could be more apocalyptic" because this passage looks to the future for the End; then a few lines later he states that "for Paul, [present eschatology] is not an alternative to, but a component of, future eschatology"³², using "future eschatology" where previously he used "apocalyptic". Käsemann's famous statement "apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology"³² means that apocalyptic appeared in the first theology written by the early church and was essential to form a corrective against the enthusiasts' emphasis on present completed salvation. Paul, encountering this emphasis, "sets over against it eschatological reserve and apocalyptic"³⁴. Käsemann has a positive attitude towards Paul's use of apocalyptic. He rejects the view that mere "relics" of apocalyptic are found in Paul, asserting that his apostolic self-consciousness,

³¹ G.E.Ladd, "Why not prophetic-apocalyptic?", JBL, 76 (1957), p.192-200: p.198f.

³² E.Käsemann, New Testament Questions of Today, (SCM, London, 1969), p.133.

³³ Käsemann, op.cit., p.102.

³⁴ Käsemann, op.cit., p.136.

and the method and goal of his mission are only understandable on the basis of his apocalyptic³⁵. Taking 1 Cor 15.20-28, Käsemann shows how Paul uses apocalyptic: "the anti-enthusiast battle waged by the apostle is fought under the sign of apocalyptic ... the present eschatology of the enthusiasts is therefore picked up but apocalyptically anchored and delimited as it is not with them. For Paul, it is not an alternative to, but a component of, a future eschatology"³⁶. "Present eschatology by itself, and not comprehended within a future eschatology - that would be for the Christian pure glorying in the flesh ... it is precisely the apocalyptic of the apostle which renders to reality its due and resists pious illusion"³⁷.

If we could revise Käsemann's well-known phrase, it would be better to say that "the balance of present and future eschatology is essential to (or, was essential in the birth of) Christian theology": apocalyptic alone would not have achieved Christian theology, and since by apocalyptic Käsemann means not so much the language and forms peculiar to apocalyptic but its futuristic perspective, it is better to avoid confusion and use a clearer term. This balance between present and future perspective is one of the fundamental things that Christianity adds to the Jewish prophetic eschatology and apocalyptic; hence we find the overlapping aeons, the tension between the 'now' and 'not yet' of salvation, the firstfruits of salvation presaging the consummation, the kingdom as present but still to come,

³⁶ Käsemann, op.cit., p.132f.

³⁷ Käsemann, op.cit., p.136f.

and so forth. Apocalyptic did indeed prove valuable at times to maintain the balance and 2 Thess 2 is an example of its use by Paul to correct a wrong emphasis.

When Käsemann affirms that this balance is not found until the early church, and Jesus' eschatology was entirely present-oriented, we would however disagree³⁸. There is no difficulty in seeing both aspects of eschatology in Jesus' teaching (e.g. in the Synoptic Apocalypse), not read back from a later perspective but retained, reported and developed. Dunn observes that "a complete discontinuity between an apocalyptic John the Baptist, a non-apocalyptic Jesus and an apocalyptic primitive community is scarcely credible"³⁹ ... Christianity began as an apocalyptic sect within Judaism, a sect which in its apocalypticism was in substantial continuity with the message both of John the Baptist and of Jesus. And ... to that extent Käsemann is correct: apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology"⁴⁰. Dunn may be overstating the case in describing the church as an apocalyptic sect within Judaism, but his point about continuity is a sound one. W.G. Rollins perceives the complexity of origins and expressions of Christianity,

³⁸ Describing the contrast between Jesus and John the Baptist, Käsemann says "Jesus is obviously thinking of the coming of the βασιλεία in a sense different from that of the Baptist or contemporary Judaism; his reference is not only or primarily to the end of the world which can in principle be dated within chronological time" (op.cit., p.112). This is fair enough: but Käsemann proceeds as if he had said that Jesus made no reference to that kind of End, as if he denied it. Käsemann is right that the alternative, present or future eschatology, is useless for Jesus' preaching; but he himself seems to underestimate the future eschatology in it. Both occur in a unique and paradoxical relation, which is taken up and continued by the early church.

³⁹ Dunn, op.cit., p.322.

⁴⁰ Dunn, op.cit., p.325.

pointing out that apocalyptic was only one of the many modes of expression which the primitive community could and did draw upon: "although Jewish apocalypticism may have supplied the church with a mode of conceptualizing or even of perceiving the Christ-event, the primary experience of the event itself constituted the focal point ... It invited description by whatever terms and images lay at hand, but none of the language systems called upon to 'give voice' to the original event can properly be called the 'mother of all Christian theology'. At best, they may have been midwives, but the event itself remains the matrix from which the theologies proceed"⁴¹.

J.J. Scott asks of 1 and 2 Thessalonians "whether Paul's eschatological thought here is distinctively Christian, or merely a traditional Jewish scheme to which a Christian veneer has been added"⁴², with the implication that the latter would be an inferior kind of eschatology. This is part of a widespread assumption that Jesus and the early church should have repudiated anything Jewish, or at least changed it beyond recognition, and any traditional Jewish material is immediately suspect. But since Christianity originated within Judaism, and at first could only be expressed in Jewish concepts, we should expect a certain degree of overlap. Scott does later concede that "indeed it was probably difficult for early Jewish Christians to discuss eschatology without using some apocalyptic forms"⁴³.

⁴¹ W.G.Rollins, "The New Testament and apocalyptic", NTS 17 (1970-71), p.454-76: p.427.

⁴² J.J.Scott, "Paul and late Jewish eschatology. A case study", JEvThSoc, 15, (1972), p.133-143: p.134.

⁴³ Scott, op.cit., p.142.

Christianity was a radical departure from Judaism, so there will be both continuity and discontinuity. Our task is not to eliminate every Jewish element, but to define where the continuity and discontinuity lie; to find the extent and limits of each. Rather than asking Scott's question, we should ask, "how different is Paul's eschatological thought here from that which he would have maintained as a Jew before becoming a Christian?". Scott goes on, "(Paul's) is far from a thoroughgoing apocalypticism. In fact, were it not for such concepts as the rapture, sound of the divine trumpet (sic!), man of lawlessness and conflict with Satan, it might be questioned whether these passages actually partake of the apocalyptic spirit"; but these elements, and the atmosphere of mystery in 2 Thess 2 "strongly suggest at least a subconscious influence from the apocalyptic movement"⁴⁴. This goes a little too far in 'playing down' the apocalyptic: the very elements which Scott mentions are those which mark the passage as apocalyptic for the modern reader. Scott concludes that apocalyptic was of quite minor importance for Paul: "the apocalyptic form ... is not used in such a way as to suggest that Paul was deeply committed to or profoundly influenced by the distinctive worldview of the apocalyptic movement. Actually there is nothing in his writings to indicate that Paul had more than a casual

⁴⁴ Scott, op.cit., p.135f.

acquaintance with the apocalyptic"⁴⁵. This approaches our conclusion; but Scott is implying that the appearance of apocalyptic elements was almost accidental, whereas we shall see that Paul in 2 Thess 2 is using apocalyptic deliberately for a particular purpose. It is his carefully chosen means of expression on this occasion.

There are two ways of explaining apocalyptic by its context. One writes it off as a 'phase'; the other accepts it as a valid contribution to our theological understanding. The first will comment "this is a temporary delusion which is understandable but mistaken and distorted"; the other will comment, "this heightened expectation is due to the situation and environment, which has stimulated a more perceptive and intuitive insight into ultimate values". Both attitudes attribute the phenomenon to the writer's current state, but one does so in order to write it off, whereas the other does so to show what new insight or emphasis this situation gives rise to. The first attitude

45 Scott, op.cit., p.141f. W.D.Davies ("Apocalyptic and Pharisaism", Christian Origins and Judaism (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1962), p.19-32) would disagree with Scott's estimation of Paul's acquaintance with apocalyptic. On the basis of a number of rabbinical references to apocalyptic concepts (eg. travail of messianic times, days of the Messiah, new Jerusalem, judgment) he argues that "Judaism came to accept in general the main elements in the eschatological schema or schemas of the apocaptytists ... there can be little question that at the time of Jesus and after AD 70 many of the greatest leaders of Judaism to a considerable extent shared the eschatological hopes of the apocaptytists" (p.23f). Davies has perhaps gone too far in the opposite direction from Scott: the truth lies somewhere in between, but the limits and overlapping of different groups within Judaism are notoriously difficult to define.

displays an arrogance in historical judgments; the second is fairer and more perceptive.

3. Is 2 Thess 2.1-12 apocalyptic?

"Paul does not meet the Thessalonian abuse of apocalyptic by abandoning apocalyptic but by simply spelling out the apocalyptic hope more fully. At this stage anyway (nearly 20 years after his conversion) apocalyptic remained an integral part of his message and hope"⁴⁶. We will examine the passage in the light of the various ways of defining apocalyptic already mentioned, in order to see how correct this common assumption is.

a) Characteristics

i) Symbolism: there are no animals, lamps, statues etc. The Man of Sin and the *κατελκον* probably come into this category, but they are not objects standing for persons or truths.

ii) Pessimism: lawlessness is at work, the apostasy will come: but these are not dwelt on at all. Alongside these is the radical optimism of Christianity, so that the pessimism loses its bitterness and hopelessness⁴⁷.

iii) Determinism: certain things must happen before the parousia; and God sends delusion upon unbelievers (2.11). There is no hint that everything in history is laid down, and no mention of past history. Moreover it is not certain

⁴⁶ Dunn, op.cit., p.328.

⁴⁷ By "pessimism" or "optimism" is meant an attitude to the present, not the future. Apocalyptists are pessimistic about the present but optimistic about the future when God will act. Paul, however, is optimistic about the present as well: the gospel is being preached and the church is growing.

that 2.1-12 alludes to political events. The delusion sent by God follows the independent refusal to love the truth (2.10).

iv) Periodized history: there is a sequence of future events (already, now, until, then) but no blocks of time, and the sequence bears little resemblance to periodized history. It is also set out in a confusing way, so that the order is not immediately apparent.

v) Pseudonymity: this question cannot be discussed at length here, and it must suffice to say that we consider there are insufficient grounds to doubt that 2 Thessalonians is Pauline⁴⁸.

vi) Cosmic outlook: the concern here is the salvation or damnation of men, not the renewal of the earth. On the human level, the application is universal - but this is because the gospel is universally significant. This is not a characteristic of Christian apocalyptic as opposed to other forms of Christian theology.

vii) Angelology and demonology: Satan is mentioned; the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\upsilon\nu$ may owe something to Jewish traditions about angelic confining of demons. The Man of Sin may be a supernatural figure. There is however no peopling of heaven and hell in detail, and in general no interest in extraneous matters.

viii) Dualism: This is most clear in the opposition between the Man of Sin and Christ, but the struggle between the two

⁴⁸ Cf. Excursus II on the hypothesis of W.Wrede, and for a summary of views on the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, cf. W.G.Kümmel, Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Quelle und Meyer, Heidelberg, 1973), p.226-232.

is subordinated to the easy victory of Christ by his very appearance. There is a polarization of good and evil, believer and unbeliever, before the End.

ix) Two ages: this is assumed, not mentioned here: but again, it is found in Christianity generally, and is no longer a distinguishing mark of apocalyptic.

x) Tribulation: there is apostasy, and deception of unbelievers, but no hint of Christians suffering because of the increasing evil. This omission is especially striking in view of the allusions to Antiochus Epiphanes and Caligula, figures of terror to Jews and Christians alike: we would expect the Man of Sin to enforce worship of himself and punish those who refused. It may be that this is simply not mentioned, or that he is not conceived of as a persecutor of the saints. 2 Thessalonians 2 is unique among NT apocalypses in this sense: both the Synoptic apocalypse and Revelation dwell on the End-time tribulations.

xi) Day of the Lord: this is mentioned (2.2) and is a prominent concept. In the NT, however, the parousia of Christ, which is now the major significance of the 'Day', is frequently mentioned outside apocalyptic contexts. Its occurrence does not necessarily imply that its context is apocalyptic.

About half of the main characteristics are present in some degree in 2 Thess 2, but in modified form, and without the emphasis placed on them by other apocalyptic literature. This is partly due to the inherent change involved when apocalyptic is Christian apocalyptic; but not entirely, as some characteristics are to be found more clearly in other NT apocalyptic passages.

b) Context

Here we are on firmer ground. 2 Thess 2 is clearly written to a community who are a minority group with a distinctive identity. With the young churches struggling for survival and growth amidst varied vehemence of opposition from both Jew and Gentile, the converts were set over against their environment as a new community in themselves, excluded and excluding. The Thessalonians were undergoing some kind of affliction (1.5-7), as was Paul, although he only hints at it in this letter (3.2) and their need for vindication, both of their faith and of their God (1.6-10), is natural. It is no wonder that Paul's short stay among them was not too short to pass on apocalyptic teaching (2.5), which we might not think essential in a brief course of Christian basics. It is also understandable that this was the area in which they erred, perhaps for very earnestness of expectation.

The attitude arising from this context is not however a typically apocalyptic one of pessimism, determinism and so on; hence the failure of the characteristics checklist to apply fully to 2 Thess 2. Pessimism is combined with great optimism (which is admittedly not explicit in 2.1-12 but follows immediately, as counter-balancing facts, 2.13ff, and influences the attitude of 2.1-12) about the advancing gospel, church growth, and God's activity spanning all history from beginning to end. Despite the presence of Hanson's sociological factors in the Thessalonian context, his analysis of apocalyptic does not apply to 2 Thess 2: since Paul's pessimism is not all-pervading, it does not

result in escapist vision and abandonment of world responsibility. 2 Thess 2 is not told as vision but as sober fact. No ecstasy is connected with it: rather it is used to appeal to the Thessalonians' right mind ($\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma$), their sober sense, because they were in danger of foolish ideas. We cannot be sure whether Paul did explain the terms that we do not understand; the balance of probability is that he did, since he seems to be alluding to previous detailed teaching just enough to remind them of it. If they did not understand at all, Paul could hardly expect them to have seen through the error - which he does expect, since he chides them for forgetting what he told them before (2.5). The apocalyptic teaching given here is not irrelevant to daily life: a right understanding of present and future is essential for calm and stability (2.2).

Despite the correspondence between the Thessalonians' situation of persecution and the typical apocalyptic context, this point is almost irrelevant to an understanding of 2 Thess 2. For this apocalyptic section has a more particularized context or *raison d'être*, which is mentioned in 2.1f: the mistaken idea that the Day is present. This is the situation Paul writes to: not just a persecuted community as such but a community in danger of misunderstanding, and

suffering confusion and agitation⁴⁹. The section is not written to reconcile the Thessalonians to their situation of persecution, but to correct an error about the Day. Hence the otherwise remarkable absence of the 'tribulation' element in 2 Thess 2: it is irrelevant to Paul's purpose.

c) Message

It is indisputable, therefore, that the essence of 2 Thess 2 is its message. But just as neither the characteristics nor the context of apocalyptic tally entirely with 2 Thess 2, nor does its message. It is certainly a message of hope and a vision of God's future victory - how far it is also a vision of the present political situation in spiritual terms depends on one's interpretation of the ~~KX~~ ^{Tz} ~~X~~ ⁰ and Man of Sin - but because of its particularized

⁴⁹ In this connection it is interesting to observe that there is an important difference between the Jewish and Christian near-expectation of the End: Jewish apocalyptic arises when the situation is so bad that it could scarcely get worse, and the only solution is the inbreaking of the new age; but for Christians, there are positive reasons for the near-expectation. It will be the consummation of what has happened in Christ's life, death and resurrection, and is the next major event in salvation-history - nothing prevents its speedy arrival. Later on, when persecution becomes severe, we find this combined with the Jewish attitude eg. in Revelation. 2 Thessalonians comes in the early period. In this letter, Paul is in effect suggesting a synthesis of the two attitudes; the Thessalonians have grasped the Christian reasons for a near-expectation, so Paul reminds them of the Jewish approach. The course of the world has to run to its end, and that involves a worsening of evil and the ultimate human embodiment of evil, before salvation through Christ can be consummated by the parousia and judgment.

context the overall message of the section is directed to that context. The message is, "the Day cannot have come yet, because as you know, certain things will precede it which have not yet happened". Rather than encouraging his readers by raising their expectation of an imminent End, Paul corrects them by mentioning interim events. This is not to say that he argues against imminence and justifies a delayed parousia: he argues against presence of the Day.

Moltmann⁵⁰ observes that there are two kinds of hopelessness: presumption and despair. Presumption is a premature and self-willed anticipation of what is hoped from God; despair is premature and arbitrary anticipation of the non-fulfilment of what is hoped from God. Both attitudes rebel against trusting the God of promise, rejecting hope altogether if immediate fulfilment is not seen. The presumptive kind of hopelessness was represented in Thessalonica among those who caused and spread the rumour that the Day was present, and we may postulate that despair was also in evidence among those who were at least partly deceived and were shaken. While we cannot be sure about the exact nature of the error, there was certainly confusion. It would not be surprising if some reacted to the news that the Day was here with despair, either because they were disillusioned about the Day and had hoped for more, or because they felt they had somehow missed it. If the idlers

⁵⁰ J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (SCM, London, 1967), p. 23.

were using the erroneous teaching as their excuse for neglecting daily work, they could have been victims of either kind of hopelessness: presumption in considering that work was no longer necessary, one could now renounce responsibility to the everyday world; or despair in thinking there was no time left to strive in zeal towards maturity and preparation for the Day, and they might as well give up if it was already upon them.

d) 2 Thess 1

Turning again to the summary list of characteristics, we may note that by this criterion, 2 Thess 1 has at least as much claim to be called 'apocalyptic' as 2 Thess 2."

Symbolism: the accompanying angels and fire at the parousia are typical of apocalyptic (1.7).

Pessimism: the Thessalonians' present situation of affliction (1.4,6) will not be alleviated until the Lord comes to judge (1.7f), ie. it can only be changed by external 'interference'. This is however combined with optimism about God, and the afflicted are given a sense of purpose in the present which is a preparation for the kingdom (1.5).

Determinism and periodized history: neither feature occurs - the passage does not deal with political history.

Pseudonymity: as with 2 Thess 2, we do not consider that this applies.

Cosmic and universal outlook: the outlook is universal: all who believe and those who do not know God (1.8,10) are involved. Cosmic questions are not found.

Angelology and demonology: angels appear in the chapter (1.7).

Two ages: there is a strict division between the 'now'

of unjust affliction and the 'then' of just retribution.

Dualism: vengeance (1.6,8) perhaps indicates a battle, though the source of evil is not mentioned, only its operation through evil men.

Tribulation: the Thessalonians are suffering affliction (1.4-6).

Day of the Lord: this appears in 1.10 as "that Day".

The feature most significantly lacking in 2 Thess 2, tribulation, is found here. Determinism, which is slightly evident in 2.1-12, is absent here. The features of symbolism, pessimism, universal outlook, angelology and dualism and the Day of the Lord are found about as strongly in 2 Thess 1 as 2 Thess 2.

If both chapters are combined, they exhibit most of the main apocalyptic characteristics (to a varying extent) except periodized history and pseudonymity. In the case of 2 Thess 1, the context and message bear much closer relation to other apocalyptic than we find in 2 Thess 2: Paul is explicitly addressing a persecuted community and encouraging them by emphasising a correct perspective on the situation and its final outcome, the reversal of role between afflicted and afflictors.

e) Disarmed apocalyptic

What may we conclude from our comparison of 2 Thess 1 and 2 with other apocalyptic literature? These chapters seem on the one hand to belong to the apocalyptic genre, but on the other hand they seem quite different. The solution may be expressed in H. Thieliicke's language of 'disarmed

myth'⁵¹. The Bible takes two attitudes to myth: it remains aloof, polemicizing against it; or it disarms myth, reducing its purpose to a functional (not credal or magical) level. The use of disarmed myth does not imply the acceptance of its Sitz im Leben or its worldview or philosophy of life on the part of the writer. It has been tamed, harnessed to a purpose different from its original raison d'être. In the same way, 2 Thessalonians (especially 2.1-12) is disarmed apocalyptic⁵². The context and message bear some similarity to that which gives rise to apocalyptic, so Paul uses the genre as an appropriate medium. He has complete freedom to pick and choose amongst the features of apocalyptic. Pseudonymity is a defunct feature - Paul has his own authority as an apostle, so there is no need to speak in the name of an ancient sage or prophet. Periodized history easily falls into the mistake of speculation about dates, which Paul would be anxious to avoid (1 Thess 5.1ff). Determinism is found in vestigial traces because it contains an element of truth - that God has a plan which is unfolding.

51 H.Thielicke, The Evangelical Faith (trans. G.W.Bromiley, T.& T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1978) I, p.84-107.

52 Cf. J.Schreiner, Alttestamentlich-jüdische Apokalyptik (Kosel Verlag, München, 1969), p.128. Contrast G.Bornkamm: "the language and concepts of apocalyptic deeply influenced the Pauline theology as well as that of the primitive church, but were radically changed there. Apocalyptic's speculations, panoramas and concepts fall away or are even expressly rejected (1 Thess 5.1ff)" (Paul, (trans. D.G.M.Stalker, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1975), p.199). It is not surprising that Bornkamm holds 2 Thessalonians to be non-Pauline: there is indeed a radically changed use of apocalyptic, but not a rejection, for Paul reaffirms previous apocalyptic teaching here.

Determinism does not necessarily deny the sovereignty of God, and for Paul, it supports that, meaning not the withdrawal of God and the relentless unfolding of fate but God's active willing to bring matters to the eschatological climax (cf. 2.11). Symbolism is drastically reduced, with the result that we need less acquaintance with apocalyptic literature to understand it: there is no allegory. The ideas of angels of power and flaming fire immediately evoke awe, whether one is familiar with apocalyptic literature or not; the Man of Sin and the $\kappa\rho\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\chi\omicron\varsigma$ had apparently been explained (as far as Paul could, and as was necessary): they are cryptic figures because they are mentioned only in passing. The pessimism is more like realism: the church was vulnerable to persecution. But this is combined with optimism not only in the God of the future but in the God who is active in the present (2 Thess 1.10f, 2.14, 16f, 3.1-5, 16) as evidenced in the birth and growth of the Christian community. A cosmic outlook can be traced in Paul's thought (Rom 8.19-23) but it is subordinated to his main concern, the salvation of men. The gospel has universal significance and power (2 Thess 1.8, 10). There are traces of angelology and demonology: Satan is very real to Paul; angels are merely mentioned, without any details or description because Paul avoids the excesses of apocalyptic with its irrelevant speculation about hierarchies of spiritual beings. There is a hint of a battle between God and Satan in the destruction of the Anomos by Christ, but only a hint: in both chapters, the mere appearance of Christ destroys the evil (1.7f, 2.8). They are not seen as equivalent powers, since according to the gospel Satan has

already been defeated. Because of the confusion between present and future Paul has to emphasise the difference between this age and the next. This feature has been taken over in Christian thought generally, with modifications but retaining a future age of consummation. Paul does not dwell on the experience of tribulation and does not warn of future tribulation. He emphasises encouragement (1.4,6) and purpose (1.5,11), and omits the idea of tribulation altogether from 2 Thess 2. Presumably he knew that the Thessalonians, despite their steadfastness, needed encouragement more than warning. 1 Thess 3.5 indicates that Paul had previously feared their affliction might have been too much for them.

Thus Paul adapts the apocalyptic genre to the situation in Thessalonica and his intentions in writing.

B.II. 2 Thess 2.1-12: The Political Interpretation

1. Introduction

This is the oldest attested interpretation of 2 Thess 2.1-12 and embraces many variations¹. The main lines are however quite similar and it will be convenient to deal with the overall interpretation in two sections. The first will examine the general political-historical interpretations, which do not necessarily identify any of the elements in the text with particular persons or places, but speak of political power, or law and order in a generalized, abstract sense. The second section will look at the more specific political interpretation which understands the passage as referring to the Roman Empire of Paul's day, and names the ~~KXTXWV~~ and sometimes the Man of Sin.

2. Forms of the general political-historical interpretation and criticism

a) Forms of this interpretation

i) The OT sources for Paul's picture of the Man of Sin support his conceiving it as a political figure. The chief sources are generally recognised to be Dan 11.36, Ezek 28.2 and Is 14.13f²; Dan 11.36 speaks of a king, Ezek 28.2 of the Prince of Tyre and Is 14.13f of the king of Babylon. Paul uses these OT traditions and his own recollections of Caligula's recent outrages to compile a

¹ In the interests of simplification, this chapter does not provide an exhaustive survey of variations on the political interpretation. A few idiosyncratic variations are listed and commented upon in the first section of the chapter on miscellaneous interpretations (B IV 1).

² Cf. Rigaux, Neil, Frame, Best, comms. ad loc.

portrait of the final manifestation of godlessness in political power. Caligula's attempt to erect a pagan statue in the temple at Jerusalem was averted and Caligula was disposed of by assassination; but Paul could see that very soon these tendencies towards blasphemous self-exaltation and defiance of God would come to a head. Thus Vielhauer³ sees the Antichrist figure in Revelation and the Synoptic Apocalypse as a political tyrant, and deduces that 2 Thessalonians follows the same lines.

This point can be used either to support a general political interpretation - the Man of Sin is an unspecified but political figure or power - or a specific interpretation of the Man of Sin as a particular Roman emperor whom Paul expected to consummate the blasphemy of previous rulers and emperors.

ii) G.B. Caird has argued in favour of a political interpretation on the ground that behind temporal political powers Paul saw supernatural principalities and powers, themselves under the ultimate authority of God⁴. Whilst they

³ P.Vielhauer, "Apocalyptic in Early Christianity", New Testament Apocrypha II ed. Hennecke (Lutterworth, London, 1965), p.608-642: p.614.

⁴ Caird traces the subordination of the powers back to the creation order: "their authority belongs not to the order of redemption but to the order of creation - Paul achieves the universal centrality of Christ not by making the authority of the powers dependent on the cross but by declaring that Christ is God's agent in creation" (Principalities and Powers (Clarendon, Oxford, 1956), p.25). Caird is here arguing against Cullmann, according to whom the powers were only subjected to God at the death of Christ: "that which the Apocalypse of John says of the binding of Satan in the end-time (Rev 20.2) holds true somehow for the Pauline conception of the present situation of the angelic powers. In the time between the resurrection and the parousia of Christ they are, so to speak, bound as to a rope, which can be more or less lengthened so that those among them who show tendencies to emancipation can have the illusion that they are releasing themselves from their bond with Christ" (Christ and Time (SCM, London, 1951), p.198).

fulfil their God-given function, they are beneficial; if they go beyond this, however, they usurp God's authority and become evil. The principle of the Christian's attitude to the state as given in Rom 13 is interpreted thus: the function of government is order, to punish wickedness and reward righteousness. Thus far the Christian must submit and cooperate. But since the authority of the state is not final, any further exercise is illegitimate, and should be resisted: extension of the state's authority is tantamount to treating it as an absolute, and therefore makes it demonic. The state is morally ambivalent⁵. Thus Paul can speak in one context of the state as restraining evil and as producing the ultimate embodiment of evil, the Man of Sin.

U. Simon has a similar but slightly different angle when he sees the *κατέχον* as the authority of the state, providing order and opportunity for the state to expand; but if the state openly sides with the Man of Sin, "then it would appear, the restraining hand has been withdrawn"⁶.

These scholars enable us to interpret either the *κατέχον* alone (Simon) as the state, or the state as both the *κατέχον* and Man of Sin (Caird), ie. having potential for both good and evil.

⁵ H.M.Gale draws a parallel between the functions of the state and the Jewish Law in Paul. Both are divinely instituted, both serve the primary function of restraining wrong, neither is absolute. A wrong understanding of either leads to opposing God's purpose (Gal 3.10-14, Rom 13.1-7. Cf. "Paul's view of the state" Interpretation 6 (1952), p.409-419.

⁶ U.Simon, The End is not yet (Nisbet, Digswell Place, Herts, 1964), p.32.

iii) A general political-historical interpretation usually takes the form of interpreting the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ as the forces of law and order, political structure, social structure, ordered civilization and so on, with the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$ as whoever is currently the political leader, or as a personification of law and order. Paul might be thinking of the Roman Empire, as the only political structure he lived under, but the reference is not limited to that⁷. When structure and order break down completely, the Man of Sin will be able to come. Meanwhile society and the state prevent the development of the ultimate political (or religious) atrocity. "Paul sees a day when the rule of law will collapse, when political order will be swept away and be unable any longer to restrain the principle of lawlessness. Then the last defences that the Creator has erected against the powers of chaos will break down completely"⁸. Likewise, L. Morris sees "in the restraining power a reference to the principle of law and government which was illustrated in the Roman Empire but which will continue in other states"; the masculine participle is not a personage but the personification of this principle⁹. For E. Stauffer, the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ includes political power but embraces more than this: "under the assault of the Antichrist the last defences that the Creator has erected against the powers of chaos break down completely. Even political order

⁷ Cf. Milligan comm. p.163: the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ is "probably to be identified with the power of law and government, especially as these were embodied at the time in the Roman state".

⁸ G.E. Ladd, Theology of the New Testament (Lutterworth, London, 1975), p.560.

⁹ Morris comm. ad loc.

collapses"¹⁰.

b) Criticism

i) According to A.J.Malherbe, "the relationship between church and state ... is not the prime concern of the NT writers". Christianity was then a social rather than a political problem, and only "in the second century, as Christianity assumed a specific identity in the Roman mind and became more politically significant was political action directed against it"¹¹. This counts against the Man of Sin as a political-historical figure and by implication also against the *κατεχου* as the Roman Empire of Paul's time: whilst Rome was simply ignorant of the significance and threat of Christianity, she could hardly be said to be positively protecting it from the assaults of the Antichrist. In general though, Malherbe's point is that the focus of attention in the NT is not on the political relations of church and state.

ii) Rigaux protests that "jamais Paul ne donne à l'état un rôle de protecteur du peuple nouveau, une fonction religieuse. Tout au plus lui reconnaît-il un service d'ordre (Rom 13)"¹². J. Schmidt writes similarly: "eine religiöse Funktion, etwa als Beschützer des Gottesvölkes der Christen, schreibt dem Staat Paulus nirgends zu"¹³. Paul does not think historically and politically but theologically and

¹⁰ E.Stauffer, New Testament Theology (SCM, London, 1955), p.213f. (The source critic might make interesting deductions by comparing this quote with the Ladd one above! Ladd does refer to Stauffer but uses exactly the same phraseology without realizing, apparently, that he is quoting directly).

¹¹ A.J.Malherbe, Social Aspects of Early Christianity (Louisiana State Univ.Press, Baton Rouge and London, 1977), p.20.

¹² Rigaux comm. p.274.

¹³ J.Schmidt, "Der Antichrist und die hemmende Macht (2 Th 2.1-12)" Theologische Quartalschrift 129 (1949), p.323-42:p.338.

eschatologically¹⁴.

It is however not necessarily the case that the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ in restraining the Antichrist is specifically (or only) protecting the church. If the effects of the Antichrist are universal, embracing Jew, pagan and Christian alike, the restraining power need not be something which is of particular benefit to the church, but may be of benefit to society as a whole.

iii) The general political interpretation is not unanimously held to solve the riddle of the masculine and neuter participles used for the restraint. H. Hanse comments "the favourite reference to the pax romana hardly fits the personal $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ "¹⁵. Hanse is thinking of the Roman Empire in a social rather than political sense, and in this case it is harder to envisage one individual as representative or agent of the restraint. On the other hand, political order and social stability are closely linked, so that the political leader might represent the social stability. Political instability would bring about social disorder, and social disorder would increase the likelihood of political instability.

iv) The source of a concept or image is not necessarily identical with its meaning; the meaning cannot be derived simply from its source. As H. Ridderbos asserts, the Man of Sin of 2 Thess 2 should be understood in the context of the whole early Christian tradition of the Antichrist: the

¹⁴ Rigaux loc.cit.

¹⁵ H.Hanse, " $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ " TDNT II, p.829f: p.830.

expectation "had acquired an existence of its own and bears a specifically Christian signature"¹⁶. Having enumerated Paul's OT sources at length, Rigaux comments simply "telles apparaissent les réminiscences vétéro-testamentaires de Paul. Quelle est sa pensée?"¹⁷.

The most striking difference between the Man of Sin and the OT depictions is that the former "shows no 'royal' characteristics"¹⁸. If he is however an historical person, Best goes on, we can have no idea of his identity.

In fact, more traits of the Man of Sin are found in Dan 7, 8 and Is 14.13f than in Dan 11.36 and Ezek 28.2. In Dan 11.36-8, the king exalts himself against every god, but only speaks against the God of gods, and he actually worships a foreign god. The Man of Sin, however, claims to be God himself, and elicits worship by sitting in the temple. In Ezek 28.2, the Prince of Tyre claims merely to be a god, that is to be as wise as a god, and his crime is his pride and violence in trade (v.16). The king of Babylon in Is 14.13f aspires to be like the Most High, to rise to the utmost height of divinity: this is closer to the explicit claim to be God. But Dan 7 and 8 are richer source material. The little horn speaks great things (7.8,20); magnifies himself to the Prince of the Host (8.11f, cf. 2 Thess 2.4); casts truth down (8.12, cf. 2 Thess 2.10f); persecutes the saints (7.22,26f, cf. 2 Thess 2.8); until judgment is given

¹⁶ H. Ridderbos, Paul: an Outline of his Theology (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 513.

¹⁷ Rigaux comm. p. 659.

¹⁸ Best comm. p. 288.

for the saints (7.21,25) which is followed by the reign of the Son of Man (7.14,27, cf. 2 Thess 2.8,2f). The figure is still a king, but the emphasis is more on oppression of the saints¹⁹, temple sacrilege, and his defeat and destruction at judgment, and the ensuing reign of the saints and the Son of Man. The claims of the Man of Sin are yet more blatant, his defilement of the temple more blasphemous, and the role of the judgment and the Son of Man figure (whatever that may signify in Daniel) have been developed and interpreted as the parousia of Christ bringing judgment by his very presence. Such development as can be traced is definitely in the direction away from political connotations and towards 'religious' or spiritual ones.

v) Some scholars think that the whole tone of 2 Thess 2 is against any historical identification - not necessarily that Paul did not conceive of the *κxτῆxωv* and the Man of Sin as historical figures, but that he did not know their identity himself and the Man of Sin at least was a figure of the future, so unnameable as yet. "Pour Paul lui-même, comme pour ses fidèles, la révélation de l'impie semble nécessaire pour qu'il en sache plus qu'il n'en dit"²⁰. Bornemann also points out that since the Man of Sin is not yet revealed, it is senseless to look for an historical person or to speculate from 2 Thess 2 whether he would arise from within Judaism, Hellenism or Christianity²¹.

¹⁹ Oppression of the saints may be implicit in 2 Thess 2: the Christians could hardly remain impervious to the worst outbreak of evil, and Mk 13.22 is a dire warning that the elect must not think themselves invulnerable at that time.

²⁰ Rigaux comm. p.271.

²¹ W.Bornemann comm. p.358.

Ridderbos, in similar vein, writes, "the particulars in the portrayal of the Man of Sin do not have the purpose of foretelling definite historical particulars and giving indications concerning the concrete manifestation of the Man of the future"²². Ridderbos therefore opposes any identification with contemporaries or near-contemporaries of Paul. This still does not necessarily mean that the Man of Sin and the *ἐκτελέων* were to be a-historical, but that Paul was not describing particular persons who were to come. The description is too general and traditional for this. "That which is still hidden, which as future event is still incapable of description, is denoted with the help of available notions borrowed from the present"²³.

vi) Caird, like Cullmann, claims that belief in the principalities and powers was central to NT faith: "the concept of world-powers reached into every department of Paul's theology ... it cannot be dismissed as a survival of primitive superstition ... he is describing spiritual realities with which he and his fellow Christians have personal acquaintance"²⁴. Cullmann supports the claim by reference to the early formulae of Christian belief which he finds in the NT, on the grounds that this is where the kernel of the NT faith is to be found: "in these quite brief summaries of the primitive Christian revelation the

²² Ridderbos, op.cit., p.520.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ G.B.Caird, Principalities and Powers (Clarendon, Oxford, 1956), p.x.

invisible powers are almost invariably mentioned"²⁵; "in all the ancient confessions of faith, from the first century and the opening of the second century, it is said in a decisive place that Jesus through his deed had defeated and subjected these invisible powers"²⁶. However, if we examine the NT texts to which Cullmann, at least, is referring, they fail to bear out the boldness of his claim. In the final chapter of Cullmann's book on the early confessions of faith, he discusses the content of the credal formulae, and a glance through the list referred to shows that about half of them may refer to the invisible powers²⁷. The interpretation of many of these verses is controversial and they form at best only corroborative evidence for the theory of supernatural powers behind political bodies.

²⁵ O. Cullmann, Christ and Time (SCM, London, 1951), p. 192.

²⁶ Cullmann, op.cit., p. 103.

²⁷ Texts possibly mentioning invisible powers: Eph 1.20f, 1 Pet 3.18-22, Phil 2.6ff, 1 Tim 3.16, 1 Cor 15.25, Col 1.15-20, 2.15, Heb 10.13, 1 Cor 8.6, and verses quoting Ps 110: Acts 2.34ff, Mt 22.44, Mk 12.36, Lk 20.42. Other texts mentioned in the chapter: 2 Cor 13.14, Mt 28.19, Eph 4.5, Heb 1.2f, 1 Cor 15.3, 1 Tim 2.6, 1 Cor 12.3, Rom 8.37, Heb 4.14, 1 Jn 4.15, Rom 1.3, 2 Tim 2.8, 2 Tim 4.1. Cf. O. Cullmann, Die ersten christlichen Glaubensbekenntnisse (Theologische Studien 15, Zollikon, 1949), final chapter.

Rom 13 is insufficient basis for an interpretation of the κρατέχον as the state²⁸: Paul does not here consider the question of the appropriate reaction if the governing authority should usurp extra authority, nor does he make explicit any eschatological significance in the discipline imposed by the state. A. Strobel argues that the terms ἐξουσία and ἄρχαι in Rom 13 are used concretely as in Lk 12.11 (cf. Mt 10.18, Mk 13.10) and as in contemporary secular usage²⁹. He concludes that "Die Sprache der Staatsbürokratie ist frei von bewusster Doppelsinnigkeit"³⁰. This is not a very strong argument since Cullmann is arguing for a double meaning in the light of other Biblical and intertestamental evidence rather than secular usage.

28 It should be noted that Cullmann emphatically denies the interpretation of the κρατέχον as the Roman Empire (The State in the New Testament (SCM, London, 1957), p.64ⁿ). Although Cullmann and Caird agree on the vital importance of the concept of invisible powers behind the state, they differ in their application of this concept. For Caird, the ambivalence of the state consists in the possibility of its becoming demonic by stepping beyond the bounds of its divinely ordained authority: for Cullmann, the ambivalence is due to the tension of inaugurated eschatology: since the death and resurrection of Christ the powers of the state have been in subjection but not finally vanquished, so that they may still rebel. Cullmann does not go on to give the state a specifically eschatological role.

29 A. Strobel, ("Zum Verständnis von Rom 13" ZNTW 47 (1956) p. 67-93) compares contemporary Latin usage of the parallel "imperia et potestas" or "imperia et magistratus" in: Suet. Ner.36; Cic. Orat. Phil. II 52f; De leg. 1.23; Lael 17.63; Leg 3.3.9; Suet. Caes. 54; Cic. Rep. 1.31. Singular usages: Cic. I Phil 7; 6 Verr 11; Rep. 1.33; 2.9; Flacc. 8.18; Qu. Fr. 1.1.10.31; Lael 15.54; Suet. Tib. 12. These terms never have a double meaning.

30 Strobel, op.cit., p.79.

Rom 13 expresses a common Jewish concept of political power, not a special Christian concept of the eschatological role of political power. The idea that all authority comes from God and all actual powers are therefore ordained by him is found in Jewish sources³¹. The texts go further than Rom 13, by acknowledging the failure of rulers to use their divinely-granted power rightly - but there is no hint of an eschatological role either of restraint, or metamorphosing into an ultimate anti-God figure.

Caird argues that Paul's attitude mellowed gradually until by the Captivity Epistles he had come around to viewing even the secular powers and their supernatural counterparts as within the scope of Christ's final redemption (Phil 2.10f, Col 1.16-20). This implies not only that Paul

³¹ Cf. W.Sanday and A.C.Headlam, A critical and exegetical commentary on the epistle to the Romans (Edinburgh, 1895), who mention Wisdom of Solomon 6.1,3; 1 Enoch 46.5; and Josephus War II 140:

Wisdom 6.3: ὅτι ἐδόθη λαοῖς τοῦ κυρίου ἡ ἐξουσία ὑμῶν, καὶ ἡ δυναστεία λαοῖς ὑψίστου.

1 Enoch 46.5: "and he shall put down the kings from their thrones and kingdoms because they do not extol and praise him, nor humbly acknowledge whence the kingdom was bestowed upon them" (R.H.Charles, The Book of Enoch (Clarendon, Oxford, 1912²)).

Josephus War II 140: οὐ γὰρ δέχεται θεοῦ περιγενέσθαι τινὲς τὸ ἄρχεῖν. The Essenes keep faith with the powers that be, since no ruler attains office except by God's will.

changed his outlook on the state, but also that he rejected a whole important strand of apocalyptic thought about the climax and outbreak of human and demonic evil before the parousia and final destruction of evil powers. This strand is not only to the forefront of Jewish apocalyptic but also appears prominently in the Synoptics, and cannot be passed over as an early and imperfect example of Paul's idiosyncratic thought.

In criticizing Caird, we are not denying that invisible principalities and powers do feature in the NT, nor that Rom 13 shows that Paul saw the role of the state as upholding law and order. The contested point is whether Paul is speaking of the same entity in Rom 13 as in 2 Thess 2.6f: whether the *κατέχου* is the state with its underlying ambivalent supernatural power. Insufficient evidence has been found to support this theory.

3. Arguments for and against the interpretation of the

κατέχου / *κατέχων* as the Roman empire/emperor

a) For

i) Paul's experiences with the Roman authorities suggest that he found the stability of the empire and reliability of the judiciary system advantageous to his mission (Acts 16.38f, 17.6ff, 18.12-7, 19.35-41, 22.29, 25.10-12, 26.32). Without the protection afforded by his Roman citizenship³² and such practical aids as roads and

³² If Paul was indeed a Roman citizen: the issue is disputable, since he mentions it nowhere in his letters, although Acts makes much of it (16.37, 22.28f).

communications, his task would have been far harder. "Paul was thinking of his own experience of Roman justice, which encouraged him to think of the empire as being - temporally at any rate - a safeguard against the unruly forces which endeavoured to frustrate the progress of the gospel"³³.

It might therefore be the empire's positive role in forwarding the spread of the gospel which Paul refers to as the *κἀτέχον*. More generally, he might mean the law and order maintained by Roman authority which prevented evil from breaking bounds (Rom 13.1-7). "The context suggests that it is the power of imperial law and order that at present imposes a check on the turbulent forces that are always threatening to break loose"³⁴. When this order disintegrated, there would be opportunity for the Man of Sin to arise. According to E.A. Judge, amongst the subject peoples of the Empire, appreciation for the benefits of Rome was more prominent than distrust - "a realistic approval of the contribution the Romans made seems normally to have outweighed any feelings of humiliation at being subjected to them"³⁵. The privilege of Roman citizenship was a valuable one, so that "lack of citizenship was a humiliating barrier to social acceptance in many cases"³⁶.

³³ F.F.Bruce, "Christianity under Claudius", BJRL 44 (1961-2), p.309-326: p.325.

³⁴ Bruce, op.cit., p.322.

³⁵ E.A.Judge, The Social Pattern of Christian Groups in the First Century (Tyndale, London, 1960), p.24.

³⁶ Judge, op.cit., p.28.

Judge has reservations, however, about the effectiveness of Rome's social order in Paul's case: "the experiences of Paul in some places suggest no great degree of control"³⁷, eg. Acts 14.5,19.

ii) This interpretation helps explain the enigmatic change of gender between the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ and the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$: the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ can be understood as the empire as a whole or the principle of law and order, while the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ is a particular emperor after whose death or removal the Man of Sin will come to the throne, either by legitimate inheritance or by taking advantage of the political confusion and breakdown of political stability when the right to the purple is disputed. The $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ is usually taken to refer to Claudius, the emperor contemporary with the writing of 2 Thessalonians. H.H. Scullard describes Claudius thus: "the main trend of the surviving literary tradition about his rule is contemptuous when it is not hostile, and depicts him as the victim of unscrupulous exploitation by his ambitious freedmen and scheming wives ... but luckily sufficient imperial enactments survive in inscriptions or upon papyri and these, though sometimes tortuous in manner, show that he possessed great administrative common sense. He not only showed skill in his choice of efficient freedman-servants and outstanding generals (as Corbulo, Galba, Vespasian, Hosidius Geta and Suetonius Paulinus), but he also impressed his own mind and policy upon public affairs. In the last few years of

³⁷ Judge, op.cit., p.24.

his reign, however, his powers began to fail, and the traditional view of him as a pawn in the hands of more determined men and women approximates to the truth"³⁸. There is thus a great deal to be said for Claudius as an efficient emperor. As for the question of emperor worship, Judge writes that "its usefulness depended very largely on its being spontaneous ... Compulsion would have destroyed its quality. Apart from certain megalomaniacs, the Caesars even indulged in mild depreciation of its extravagances"³⁹. Claudius returned to Tiberius' attitude to emperor worship, refusing temples and a high-priest, but nevertheless receiving as much honour as Tiberius had. He restored to the Jews their freedom of worship and exemption from the imperial cult, although he was more severe in Rome, where in AD 41, Jews were denied the right to hold meetings and in AD 49 were expelled from the city - according to Suetonius, the riots were "impulsore Chresto"⁴⁰, but it was effectively a Jewish affair.

If this is an accurate picture, one can better understand Paul seeing Claudius as a merciful interval in the succession of increasingly corrupt, violent and idolatrous emperors. He was a great improvement on Caligula, especially in returning to a moderate emperor-cult. He was also strict with rioting Jews in Rome and Alexandria. If the Jews formed the main opposition to Christianity at

³⁸ H.H. Scullard, From the Gracchi to Nero (Methuen, London, 1976⁴) p.299f.

³⁹ Judge, op.cit., p.25.

⁴⁰ Suetonius, Claudius, 25.

this stage - and they had caused trouble at Thessalonica (Acts 17.5) - and Claudius was keeping a firm hand on them, he could be said to be a restrainer in that sense. It is doubtful, however, whether Paul could foresee the disaster of Nero's reign, or even definitely that Nero would reign, writing as he does in AD 50, just before Nero received the title Princeps Iuventutis⁴¹. But Paul may have surmised the historical probability of Claudius' successor being more like Caligula than Claudius⁴².

iii) If the *κατέχων* is an emperor, the concept of his being removed *ἐκ μέσου* is acceptable: it simply means his death or impotence. Most other interpretations find this phrase a problem because it implies at least a limited importance and relevance of the *κατέχων*, but this is not inappropriate for a temporal ruler.

iv) A considerable weight of scholarship stands behind the political interpretation. The Fathers in particular present an all but unanimous body of support:

Tertullian⁴³: "what obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon its own ruins?"

Chrysostom⁴⁴: "Some indeed say the *κατέχων* means the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman Empire, to whom I most of all accede. Wherefore? ... because he said

⁴¹ Scullard, op.cit., p.314.

⁴² Cf. Best's summary of the view of Buck and Taylor that the Man of Sin was a Caligula Redivivus, adequately criticized by Best (comm. p.12f).

⁴³ Tertullian, De resurrectione, 24.

⁴⁴ Chrysostom, Homily IV on 2 Thess 2.6-9.

this of the Roman Empire, he naturally glanced at it and speaks covertly and darkly".

Augustine⁴⁵: "it is not absurd to believe that these words of the apostle (v.6) refer to the Roman Empire" - although his conclusion is, "I frankly confess that I do not know what he means".

Ambrosiaster⁴⁶: "the Lord will not come before the collapse of the Roman Empire takes place and the Antichrist appears who will offer freedom to the Romans".

Hippolytus⁴⁷: "what could 'he who restrains until now' be but the fourth beast" of Daniel, ie. Rome.

Cyril of Jerusalem⁴⁸: "this aforesaid Antichrist will come when the destined period of the Roman Empire has run its course".

For the interpretation of the κκτεχον in particular, Bornemann observes that with the exception of a very few, "fast alle andern halten es für wahrscheinlich oder gewiss, dass nur das römische Reich und der römische Kaiser darunter verstanden werden können"⁴⁹.

v) If Paul was predicting the disintegration of the Roman Empire and maybe also depicting a future emperor as the supreme manifestation of evil, it is hardly surprising that he conceals his meaning behind technical terms and allusive references rather than stating it clearly.

⁴⁵ Augustine, City of God Bk 20,19.

⁴⁶ Ambrosiaster comm. on 2 Thess 2.6f.

⁴⁷ Hippolytus comm. on Daniel XXI (on Dan 4.21).

⁴⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem Catechetical Lecture XV,12.

⁴⁹ Bornemann comm. p.404.

Such a prediction could put him in serious trouble, were it to fall into the wrong hands. This dangerous situation is further illuminated by F.H. Cramer's work on astrology in Roman law and politics. Astrology was considered a legitimate and reliable branch of knowledge, and emperors would regularly consult astrologers about possible future dangers to the empire, especially in cases of crisis or unrest. It was found, however, that astrological practices had an adverse influence on the population as a whole, leading to unnecessary and undesirable distress and agitation. As a result, there were permanent restrictions in force from AD 11, when speculations about the death of Augustus caused the authorities to forbid divination without the presence of a third person, or any predictions about a person's death⁵⁰. Additional imperial decrees banned astrological practice altogether in times of heightened unrest. "To pacify excited minds by withholding from them the stimulant of astrological promises, while on the other hand, retaining for himself the counsel of his court astrologers, could thus not seem inconsistent or hypocritical to any ruler of the principate"⁵¹. R. Macmullen quotes Ulpian as writing in the early third century, "very often and by almost all the emperors it has been forbidden to anyone at all to involve himself in this kind of folly ... those who consult about the

⁵⁰ Cf. R. Macmullen, Enemies of the Roman Order: treason, unrest and alienation in the empire (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1966), p.129.

⁵¹ F.H. Cramer, Astrology and Law in Roman Politics (American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1954), p.233.

health of the emperor are punishable by death"⁵². Macmullen adds that the reason for this was because "the public mind must not be 'disturbed'"⁵³.

If either Paul or the Thessalonians were suspected of flouting these laws, not only to make astrological calculations but to foresee future imperial fortunes by this method, they would have incurred serious penalties. Paul's concern about the excitement and disturbance in the Thessalonian community may be partly due to the fear of arousing suspicion along these lines, without his actual teaching having contained anything which could legitimately incur penalty.

b) Against

i) The masculine and neuter participles may not be adequately explained as referring to the empire and to Claudius in particular. Some reservations about the character of Claudius have already been expressed under point (a ii) above; according to Suetonius, "almost the whole conduct of his reign was dictated not so much by his own judgment as that of his wives and freedmen, since he nearly always acted in accordance with their interests and desires"⁵⁴. Scholarship is divided on the character of Claudius and his strength as a ruler; but unless Paul had friends in high places it is doubtful whether he would know who was actually responsible for imperial policies.

⁵² Cramer, op.cit., p.129.

⁵³ Cramer, op.cit., p.131.

⁵⁴ Suetonius, Claudius 25.

The question of emperor worship is also indecisive: Claudius avoided Caligula's extremes, but in accordance with custom he did accept divine honours. Even if this was done as a concession rather than a demand, it would surely have seemed reprehensible to Paul, and one might better understand Claudius being called the *κατέχων* if he had positively refused any such adulation. Although the acceptance of the divinity of the emperor's Genius may have been merely a matter of form to the Romans, the Christians took it more seriously (as is demonstrated by the martyrdoms later on) and refused to conform, according to the principle that only God may be worshipped⁵⁵. So the fact that Claudius did not forbid any degree of divinisation would have counted against him from the Christian's point of view, even if he was more restrained than his infamous predecessor.

A more definite point of criticism is that if both the *κατέχων* and the Man of Sin are emperors, there is, to say the least, room for confusion, as Cullmann comments: "Paul would thereby have introduced into the eschatological conceptions a remarkable confusion"⁵⁶. The figures are antithetical in 2 Thess 2, not merely successive personages.

⁵⁵ Cf. Judge, op.cit., p.35: "The oath may not have been taken seriously by individuals, but it was public knowledge that everyone was committed to it, and the accusation of disloyalty could be damaging. Whatever one's private feelings, public displays of conformity were expedient".

⁵⁶ Cullmann, Christ and Time, (SCM, 1951), p.164ⁿ.

Wrede argues cogently against the Man of Sin as a political figure influenced in its conception by Caligula, and expected as a future emperor: "im Übrigen weist in dem ganzen Passus auch nicht ein Wort auf dem Kaiser hin, was für ein 'Caligula-Apokalypse' denn doch sehr befremdlich wäre. Überhaupt hat aber das ganze Bild keinen politischen Charakter, ein irdischer Herrscher wird hier nicht geschildert. Im Besondern kommt hinzu, das der *ΚΑΤΕΧΩ* bei dieser Auffassung keine annehmbare Erklärung findet. Indessen selbst jene Beziehung auf Caligula ist keineswegs evident: seine Statue im Tempel aufstehen ist zunächst noch etwas Anderes als sich selbst im Tempel niederlassen"⁵⁷.

Against the Man of Sin as a Nero redivivus⁵⁸, Vos contests the use of Revelation to interpret 2 Thessalonians:

⁵⁷ W.Wrede, "Die Echtheit des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs" T.U. 24 (1903).

⁵⁸ This legend is found in Suetonius (Nero 57) and Tacitus (Historiae 2.8f) and in the Sibylline Books. It began with rumours that Nero was not dead but hidden with the Parthians and would return; later when he could no longer be alive, the legend of a demonic enemy merged with that of Nero's return, so that Nero became a superhuman figure with Satanic characteristics: "Satan oder Beliar wird in der Gestalt des verstorbenen Neros als Antichrist wiederkommen (cf. Asc. Is. 4.2-4), oder Nero wird durch ein Satan gewirktes Wunder ins Leben zurückkehren (cf. Sib 5.28-34, 214-217)", J.Ernst Die eschatologische Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments (Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 1967), p.147f. The legend can only be connected with 2 Thess 2 on the assumption of non-Pauline authorship, since it only arose gradually after Nero's death.

Revelation is a separate prophecy, and we should not read back the Nero redivivus legend from Revelation to 2 Thessalonians. The legend could not in any case have been in circulation yet, as Nero was only about 13 years old when 2 Thessalonians was written, unless it is non-Pauline and written in retrospect.

ii) The verb *κατέχων* implies activity, and the mere fact of one emperor reigning and thereby preventing another from coming to the throne is too passive to be a satisfactory interpretation⁵⁹. The maintenance of law and order (as Claudius seems to have done by sensible legislation and government) does not influence the character of the next emperor, nor retard his succession. Restraining is prevention of activity, but the restrainer himself is active aggressively in doing so.

iii) The formidable number of scholars who subscribe to the political interpretation tends to overshadow the fact that the first known attestation of a political interpretation is found in Tertullian, writing in the early third century, and that his was not the only current interpretation; other Fathers explained the *κατέχων* as the Holy Spirit or divine decree⁶⁰. J.Ernst comments that "die Funktion des römischen Reichs als ^{ke} bestimmende Macht ist erst seit dem dritten Jahrhundert nachweisbar. Tertullian, der diese Deutung zuerst klar formuliert, ist nicht durch sorgsame Exegese zu diesem Ergebnis erkommen, sondern durch apologetischer Interessen". The

⁵⁹ Cf. A.L.Moore, The Parousia in the New Testament (Leiden Brill, 1966), p.112.

⁶⁰ Rigaux comm. p.274.

idea that Christians should pray for the empire in order to hold up the endtime is entirely unpauline: Paul waited with burning ardour for the End and the return of Christ⁶¹; Dibelius also asserts that "Paulus und seine Gemeinden beten gar nicht um Aufschub der Katastrophe"⁶². Schmidt also criticizes Tertullian on the grounds that his motive was to make Christians pray for the continuation of the restraining empire, and this was an unpauline use of the text: Paul would not want to put off the endtime - on the contrary, he longed for it eagerly⁶³.

Tertullian seems to have taken an ambivalent attitude towards the state. In his apologetics, he continually emphasises that the Christians are the really faithful citizens, fully entering into every side of social and civic life except emperor-worship; they are far more virtuous and law-abiding than the Romans, and do the emperor a compliment by taking him seriously and not joining in the mockery of an emperor cult but instead praying sincerely to the true God on his behalf. Tertullian waxes lyrical in ridiculing the emperor cult and all pagan gods, and states with great seriousness and patriotism that the Christians pray for the emperor. "Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged, for security to the empire, for protection to the imperial house, for brave armies, a faithful senate,

⁶¹ Rigaux comm. p.50.

⁶² M.Dibelius, Rom und die Christen im ersten Jahrhundert (Heidelberg C.Winter, 1942), p.13.

⁶³ Schmidt, op.cit., p.338.

a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish"⁶⁴. "The very end of all things threatening dreadful woes is only retarded by the continued existence of the empire"⁶⁵. "We pray ... for the delay of the final consummation"⁶⁶. The Apology thus gives the impression that Tertullian firmly believed that the Roman Empire was the *κατέχον*, upholding order and delaying the dreadful time of the Antichrist⁶⁷; and that he could not possibly conceive of the Man of Sin as an emperor claiming divine honours, since he pours such scorn on the emperor-cult, dismissing it as an ignorant and trivial folly. In his writings to Christians, by contrast,

64 Tertullian, Apology, ch.30.

65 Tertullian, op.cit., ch.32.

66 Tertullian, op.cit., ch.39.

67 It is inconsistent to desire the prolonging of the *κατέχον* if as a Christian one looks to the final consummation, because that can only come via the final outbreak of evil. If any preference is to be expressed, there might well be conflicting desires, as in Paul facing the possibility of life or death (Phil 1.21-24); on the one hand, the 'dreadful woes' are not attractive, and the present is a time of opportunity for repentance; on the other hand, the Lord would only come and consummate the kingdom after evil has been unleashed, so it could be appropriate in some moods and situations to pray for the removal of the *κατέχον* especially in a persecution context where endurance might be wearing thin. 2 Thess 2 does not hint at petition for a speedy or delayed End: the praying is all for the Thessalonians' endurance and continued sanctification (1.11f, 2.16f) or the spread of the gospel and protection of missionary work (3.1f). Paul strikes a note of coping with the present situation realistically, without trying to 'twist the arm' of God.

Tertullian warns them strenuously not to brook the slightest compromise with the pagan world. They are not to serve in the army or the civil service, nor to give any collaboration with the cult, even in the most indirect manner. Only education may be acquired through the state, as a regrettable but necessary concession. This reads as if Tertullian saw the Roman Empire as the embodiment of evil, and the potential area for the Man of Sin to appear at any moment. When expounding Rom 13, Tertullian explains that Christians should be subject to the powers as "assistants bestowed upon righteousness, as it were handmaids of the divine court of justice"⁶⁸, and on 1 Pet 2.13, he produces an argument similar to that of G.B. Caird: "the king indeed must be honoured, yet so that the king be honoured only when he keeps to his own sphere"⁶⁹. But it is not clear how Tertullian has arrived at this understanding of 1 Pet 2.13. Peter's presupposition is that it is right to keep civic law - so that in that sense, government is on God's side; his motive in urging submission is witness: Christians should be faultless in the eyes of pagans. Peter takes this same principle into the area of slavery and general injustice, to advocate silent submission to injustice (2.19f, 3.13f,16) - so he might say the same about Christians' attitude to the state even if it were opposing God. He is not arguing submission to the state even implicitly because it is a check on evil: from the rest of the letter, the implicit

⁶⁸ Tertullian, Scorpiace ch.14.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

reason seems to be that Christians should never give the slightest grounds for criticism by pagans. If the *κατέχον* in 2 Thessalonians is the state, Peter does not agree with Paul, and Tertullian's interpretation of Peter is faulty.

The situation is further complicated by Tertullian's ironically triumphant attitude about the persecution of the Christians by the state, which at the end of the Apology he asserts actually works in favour of the church by encouraging growth: "semen est sanguis Christianorum"⁷⁰. We might even deduce from this that the state as Antichrist, oppressing the saints, works to the advantage of the church. This might almost stand, as an illustration of how the endtime shows every man in his true colours, so that the wicked are seduced by the Antichrist and the righteous endure and become greater in number and more righteous through affliction - except that Tertullian does not draw this conclusion, and elsewhere in the Apology the state is represented as the *κατέχον* and not as Antichrist.

It is in fact extremely hard to discover exactly what Tertullian really thought about the Roman Empire and why. We might combine his varying attitudes by suggesting that the empire as an ideal was the *κατέχον* : the empire prayed for by Christians, without the incidental frippery of emperor-worship and without the corruption of intrigue and immorality. But this is an interpretation

⁷⁰ Tertullian, Apology ch.50.

of Tertullian, an attempt to harmonize where there possibly was no harmony; and it would be an unlikely concept for Tertullian to hold, flying in the face of the plain facts of daily reality, where the most prominent features of Roman life seemed to be tinged at the least with corruption and idolatry. The couple of references in Tertullian to the Roman Empire delaying the End are therefore no secure basis for the multitude of later expositors to rely upon.

iv) In Best's opinion, "there does not seem to be any real connection between the empire or emperor and the date of the parousia of the Rebel or that of Christ"⁷¹. Best does not explain what he means by a "real connection". It is typical of apocalyptic to see the current world power as the last one, the present as the worst time ever, the climax of evil; and if Paul had absorbed this apocalyptic attitude, to expect Rome to be the last empire would be natural. But this trait of apocalyptic does not provide a precedent for seeing the authority of the state as a restraint on the End: rather, the increase of evil hastens the End; and apocalyptists were not concerned with the principle of authority but simply with the current world power - who were invariably abusing their authority, which fact forms a fundamental environmental condition for the production of apocalyptic literature.

v) In the face of the problem of non-fulfilment,

⁷¹ Best comm. p.296.

some adherents to the political interpretation assert that in a sense, the Roman Empire still stands: not in its original form of Paul's day, but in some other form, changing periodically through history but basically representing the same as did the Roman Empire. "Der Untergang des weströmischen und des byzantinischen Reiches hat darauf (viz. on the political interpretation) keinen dauernden Einfluss gehabt, konnte man bis ins 15. Jahrhundert auf das oströmische Reich und bis zum Anfang unsers Jahrhunderts auf das 'römische Reich deutscher Nation' verweisen"⁷². This re-interpretation looks suspiciously like a rather desperate attempt to hold onto a specific political interpretation, avoiding the issue of error, whether on the part of Paul or the exegete. If Paul meant the Roman Empire by the *καταχρον* and/or the Man of Sin, he did not mean the Byzantine empire or any other historical power. It may be that an exegete, concluding that Paul did mean the Roman empire and that he was mistaken in his expectation, might want to say similar things about a contemporary world-power; but this is not exegesis. Alternatively, the exegete might conclude that although Paul had the Roman Empire particularly in mind his real concern was political power in the abstract: in this case, we have a general political interpretation, which should not be limited in application to one world-power at a time (eg. the Byzantine empire was not the only form of law and order in its day; and the problem of identifying the political power becomes much more difficult as we approach modern times).

⁷² Bornemann comm. p.404, cf. Schmidt, op.cit., p.339, Ridderbos, op.cit., p.523.

4. Summary and conclusions

General interpretation

Of the three points listed in favour of this interpretation, the first two were negated by arguments against. The OT sources were found to support a religious rather than a political figure as background to the Man of Sin, and Caird's on principalities and powers as an interpretation of 2 Thess 2.6f was severely criticized. Point (a iii) was however found to be a strong argument: the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu\nu$ as political and/or social structure in the abstract with the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu\nu$ as a personification, and the reference not limited to the Roman Empire.

There were four further points against the general political interpretation. It was questioned whether at this stage there was any political issue for Christianity (b i); this is a general point against a preoccupation in Christian apocalyptic of this stage with opposition from a political quarter. If it is pointed out that it was not opposition but support from a political quarter which is relevant to the interpretation of the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu\nu$, the counter-objection is that if the restraint acts on the Man of Sin then the former should also be of a political nature. Point (b ii) argued that Paul never gave the state a religious role, ie. of protecting the church from the Antichrist. This was qualified by observing that the restraint does not necessarily need to be specifically protecting the church; its effectiveness may be more widespread. This point was therefore not found strong enough to negate point (a iii). Point (b iii) was also qualified: although it is not so obvious and natural to

conceive of a personification or an individual representative of the *κατέχων* as social order, it is not impossible, especially as political and social order are in practice closely bound up, and a political leader might be seen as the embodiment also of social order. Point (b v) argued that there may be no appropriate historical identification for the figures of the *κατέχων* and Man of Sin, because they were part of Paul's future expectation about which he knows no more than he says. This is a valid point for the Man of Sin, but not so much for the *κατέχων*, which Paul says is active in the present. However, it may be that the *κατέχων* cannot be historically identified: it may be a-historical. This possibility will be taken up later.

The general political interpretation presented in (a iii) has been found worth consideration, although there are several points which count against any political interpretation.

Specific interpretation

Five points were listed in favour of this interpretation: the masculine and neuter participles, the removal of the restrainer *ἐκ μέσου*, and the cryptic language were all seen to be appropriate if the *κατέχων* meant Claudius. Further, there was weighty scholarly support, especially from the Fathers, and evidence that the Roman Empire may have been beneficial to the Christian mission. There were qualifications to some of these, however, There is no definite evidence that the cryptic language is due to fear of arousing suspicion about astrological practices,

and even if this were the case, it does not prove that Paul was speaking of the rise and fall of emperors. It may merely be a further interesting illumination of Paul's concern about the disturbed Thessalonians. The beneficial effects of the Empire are not altogether certain, either: even in Acts, where the Gentile world is favourably regarded and Paul's citizenship is mentioned, Roman protection fails to prevent repeated harrassment from Jews, and Roman opposition to Paul's mission is specifically recorded.

The support of the Fathers is called into question by the examination of Tertullian's vacillating attitude towards the Empire and his lack of careful exegesis: his attestation of the interpretation was found to be a shaky foundation. The version of this interpretation which replaces the Roman Empire of the first century with successive empires was rejected, on the grounds that this made nonsense of a specific political interpretation. It was doubted whether the mere fact of reigning and thereby preventing the next emperor from coming to the throne was sufficiently active a role for the restrainer; the restraint exercised by Claudius, in terms of moderate and efficient rule, was not so much on the future emperor as on the present state of affairs - but the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$ restrains the Man of Sin rather than the mystery of lawlessness (ie. 'the present stste of affairs'). The latter is the result of the Man of Sin being restrained, not the object itself of restraint. The idea of an empire as a restraint on the final outbreak of evil was seen to be contradictory to the traditional apocalyptic attitude to world-powers,

which generally become steadily more evil and thereby hasten the End. The principle of authority, and the idea of a pagan empire rightly exercising authority is also novel in an apocalyptic context. The question of Claudius himself - his character, and the nature of his reign - was discussed inconclusively. There are varying opinions; a probability that Paul would not know the details of court affairs; doubt as to Paul's attitude towards an emperor who without forbidding emperor-worship altogether, did avoid its worst extravagances; and a problem of confusion if both the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$ and the Man of Sin were emperors, when the text presents them as antithetical rather than merely successive personages. Claudius' repudiation of Caligula's outrages might count as restraint, and he might be antithetical in character to his successor.

We could possibly combine the strongest points of the general and specific interpretations to give the view that by the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$ Paul meant the lawfulness maintained by state and society, and that since he wrote in Claudius' reign we can understand both his taking that view (if Claudius was a good emperor) and maybe his seeing it embodied in the current ruler. This comes down to a general political-historical interpretation, with Claudius as an example of it in action. There are, however, problems still remaining besides those already mentioned: 1) is this too sophisticated an historical perspective to attribute to Paul? Would he think in abstract terms of political and social structure? Whilst he was obviously aware of the rise and fall of empires in the past, would he foresee this continuing into the future? 2) The removal of the restraint $\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\sigma\sigma\upsilon$

is not altogether explained. The forces of law and order have repeatedly broken down, and world-powers supplanted each other, with apocalyptists continually expecting the End at every crisis - but it does not happen. Has society not yet collapsed as totally as Paul envisaged? 3) The weightiest argument, in our view, is that the Man of Sin is depicted as a religious figure in 2 Thess 2 (which is supported by the OT sources, cf. 2 b iv), not a political one; the whole description is of a figure making religious claims with no political characteristics at all. The breakdown of political and social structures seem irrelevant to the emergence of the ultimate religious anti-power.

On the whole, then, a political interpretation, whether general or specific, is to be rejected, although some of the points which have been made in favour of the general interpretation in particular may be taken up again later.

B.III. The Mythological Interpretation of 2 Thess 2.1-12

1. The Mythological Interpretation

Many cultures of the Ancient Near East have similar creation myths which are related to Hebrew traditions. In its simplest form, the common denominator between the myths is a battle between a primeval monster and a god; the monster is frequently a dragon or serpent and associated with the sea. In the Ugaritic poem of Baal from the 14th century BC, Baal encounters the dragon monster Yamma/Naham/Tannin, and subdues him as a necessary preliminary to dominion over the gods, men and earth. The Babylonian epic Enuma Elish tells of a conflict between Marduk and Tiamat, a female sea monster. Tiamat and Apsu are mother and father of the gods: when the younger gods disturb them, Tiamat and Apsu decide to discipline them, but the younger gods prevail. By slaying Tiamat, Marduk becomes supreme god and proceeds with creation. He uses Tiamat as material for this: she is either divided in two to form land and sea, or in the Assyrian text, imprisoned or confined.

"May he imprison the sea, may he remove and store
up its treasure,
for the men to come, in days advanced"

"I will confine Tiamat - I will save you"¹

"Tiamat, the waste of waters, cannot be slain; but it

¹ W.Bousset, The Antichrist Legend (trans. A.H.Keane, Hutchinson, London, 1926³), p.xvi,xxii.

may be confined (to its proper channel), and the people seated on its margin can thus be 'saved': the Euphrates plain, being in continual danger of flooding, gave rise to myths of an aquatic monster who was only controlled when the gods were created, that is, when man became strong enough to handle his environment². Wakeman's excellent study of this body of Near-Eastern myth contains two points particularly relevant to 2 Thess 2. After the primeval battle, the monster (if it is conceived of as a sea monster) is confined by the god or hero: "Marduk must take precautions against her overflowing uncontrollably, he heaps up a mountain over her ... he must continually maintain his guard"³. This corresponds to the *κατέχον* of 2 Thess 2: a restraining influence on the forces of evil. Secondly, during this time of confinement, the evil of the serpent is turned to good: its characteristic action becomes legitimate. It is regulated by the god, and turns out to be essential to the ordering of life and the world. This may be compared to the Biblical concept of the period prior to the final revelation of evil, when the *κατέχον* is active, for this is a time when God is at work, saving men. The delicate tension of power between God and Satan itself places man in a position of having to align himself with one or other, and of having a definite choice before him: cf. Rom 2.4f - God's kindness, his prolonging of the present era before judgment, is meant to lead men to

² Bousset, op.cit., p.xxi.

³ M.K.Wakeman, God's Battle with the Monster (Brill, Leiden, 1973), p.21.

repentance; but an impenitent heart stores up wrath for the day of judgment. This does not imply that the Man of Sin is Satan: he is Satan's instrument (2 Thess 2.9), which is sufficient for the deduction that by restraining the Man of Sin, the *κατεχόμενος* is indirectly restraining Satan.

Other myths may be briefly mentioned: a Hittite myth tells of a battle between the hero Hupasiyas on behalf of the gods and the serpent Illuyankas, which assures rainfall; Sumerian myth has the god Ninurta subjugating the demonic Asag and keeping him confined between the banks of the Euphrates. In an Iranian myth of the End, Azi Dahak, a primordial serpent confined beneath the mountains, will burst forth in the last days to be defeated by the hero Keresaspa. This body of mythological thought was not without influence on Hebrew culture: indeed Gaster comments that "the myth evidently enjoyed considerable popularity in Israelite folklore"⁴. A summary of OT texts on the mythical opponent is given by J. Ernst, and is worth reproducing in full, to demonstrate how widespread and how rich a source of imagery the myth was in Israel.

Rahab: Is 51.9; Ps 89.11; Job 26.12; 9.13; Ps 87.4; Is 30.7

Rehahim: Ps 40.5

Leviathan: Ps 74.14; Is 27.1; Job 3.8; 40-41; Ps 104.26

Behemoth: Job 40; Is 30.6

Tannin: Is 51.9; Job 7.12; Ps 44.20; Jer 51.30

⁴ T.H.Gaster, Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament (Gerald Duckworth, London, 1969), p.376.

Dragon: Ps Sol 2.29

Pairs: Leviathan and Behemoth, Job 40-41; Enoch 60.7-9;
4 Esdras 6.49-52

Connected with the sea in particular: Is 51.9f;

Ps 89.10f; 74.13f; Job 26.12; 3.8; Ps 68.31;

Job 7.12; Ps 148.7; Neh 2.13

Connected with the Nile: Ezek 29.3; Job 40-41

Characteristic features of the dragon; pride, self-exaltation, haughtiness: Ps 89.10f, Ezek 29.3; Ps Sol 2.29; Ps 74.18

The dragon is the enemy of Yahweh: Ps 74.3; 10.18; and of Yahweh's helpers: Ps 89.11; Ps Sol 2.1 calls him 'transgressor'; Ps Sol 2.25 calls him 'presumptuous one'.

Yahweh defeats the dragon: with the sword, Is 27.1; with rod and net, Job 40.25; with a fishhook Ezek 29.4; with a net, Ezek 32.3. Yahweh smashes Rahab, Is 51.9; he breaks Leviathan's heads, Job 26.12; he slays the dragon on dry ground, Ps 74.14; Ezek 29.5; 32.4

The corpses of the beasts are shamed after the conquest: Is 51.5; Job 26.12; Ps Sol 2.30; Ps 89.11; 44.20; they are not buried: Ezek 29.5; 32.4; they are eaten by animals: Ps 74.14; Ezek 29.5; 32.4

Binding of the sea: Yahweh dries the sea, Is 51.10; splits the sea, Ps 74.13; dries the streams, Ezek 30.12f; Jer 51.36

The dragon is defeated and bound: it is quieted, Is 30.7; Yahweh holds Leviathan on a ring, Job 40.26; Leviathan lies in the bottom of the sea and must obey Yahweh,

Am 9.3; God puts a watch on him, Job 7.12⁵.

A major interpretation of 2 Thess 2 is based on relating this kind of primeval myth to Christian eschatological traditions. Three names in particular are associated with this approach to the text: H. Gunkel, W. Bousset and M. Dibelius. In order to explain the broad lines of the interpretation, the relevant work of each on the subject will be summarized before criticism is attempted.

H. Gunkel's Schöpfung und Chaos⁶ explores in detail the relationship between the creation account of Gen 1 and the Babylonian myth; the other OT texts which Gunkel believes contain influences from Babylonian mythology; and the mythological origins of Rev 12. His principle for interpreting Rev 12 is the Endzeit=Urzeit motif: the traces of the creation myth found throughout the OT show its development in an eschatological direction as it is gradually applied to the present and then to the immediate

⁵ J.Ernst, Die eschatologischen Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments (Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 1967), p.260f.

⁶ H.Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1921²).

future and ultimate future⁷. The psalms and prophets depict Yahweh's victory over Israel's enemies in terms of his victory over primeval forces of evil⁸. Thus Is 27.1 speaks in mythological terms of the downfall of three kingdoms, Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent and the dragon in the sea, in that day when Yahweh shall slay them; Ps 68.31 applies the myth to the fall of Egypt and Ethiopia⁹; Ps 74 to Antiochus Epiphanes; Ps Sol 12 to Pompey. "Rahab" becomes a code-name for Egypt (Ps 87.4). These references show the myth becoming part of the eschatological dogma. Individual elements of the

⁷ This progression has recently been explored by F.M. Cross in his work, Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic. Essays in the History of Religion of Israel (Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1973). In the middle period of development, before the exile, "the old Exodus is described in terms of the creation myth and in turn becomes the archetype of a new Exodus" (p.144), eg. Is 51. Later, in and after the exile, "the myths of creation ... were given an eschatological function ... I think it is accurate to say that it is in this late Exilic and early post-Exilic literature that we detect rudimentary traits and motifs of apocalypticism" (p.345f). Cross concludes that the primary source of mythical material behind apocalyptic is the old Canaanite mythical lore (though without excluding later influences from Persia and Greece) which, startlingly, gives apocalyptic a strong continuity with ancient Israel. The concept Endzeit = Urzeit is never quite true of Israel though, because her use of mythical material does not negate the reality and importance of history as a pagan cyclic mythical system does. "The primordial events of creation and the eschatological events of the new creation are typologically related but are held apart by the events of human history, so that, unlike the movement of myth, the primordial event and the eschatological event never emerge in a cultic 'now'" (p.90).

⁸ Gunkel, op.cit., p.89.

⁹ Each nation has a God-appointed angel, and judgment on the nations includes judgment on their 'gods' who misused their responsibility and oppressed the innocent (Ps 82, Is 24.21ff, cf. Job 21.22). Gunkel, op.cit., p.67.

myth are interpreted, and the chaos monsters become the gods of ruling peoples. Information about the future was sought in the myth, and details changed to make historical identification easier (Is 27.1¹⁰). A similar process took place with the motif of the primeval waters, governed and limited by Yahweh¹¹. The sea is calmed by Yahweh, Ps 46; the nations like a roaring sea flee before him, Is 17.12-14¹²; Yahweh comes from Zion in a thunderstorm, crushing and trampling the sea, Hab 3; Nahum 1 and Ps 18 have similar theophanies¹³. The motif has long lost its connection with the myth and is used in a poetic form. "Man redet davon, dass das Meer in der letzten Zeit gegen Yahves Schöpfung übermütig heranbrausen, dass dann aber Jahves Scheltwort es in die Flucht treiben werde; und erklärt diese Weissagung als ein Bild des letzten Ansturmes der Heiden und des grossen Völkergerichtes der Zukunft"¹⁴. By the time we reach Revelation the myth has been thoroughly apocalypticized and allegorized¹⁵.

W. Bousset's work builds on Gunkel's, with whom he agrees for the most part. He explores the NT and later Christian occurrences of the Antichrist concept, concluding that there was a fully developed Antichrist concept in Judaism before NT times, which was non-political and originated

¹⁰ Three monsters are mentioned here instead of two, Tiamat and Apsu, because of the three world kingdoms in the mind of the apocalypticist.

¹¹ Gunkel, op.cit., p.100.

¹² Gunkel, op.cit., p.101.

¹³ Gunkel, op.cit., p.103ff.

¹⁴ Gunkel, op.cit., p.111.

¹⁵ Gunkel, op.cit., p.89.

in the Babylonian dragon myth. Bousset does not hold that Paul and the writer of Revelation were aware of the myth and deliberately using it: the more immediate origin of their ideas was the Jewish tradition of a pseudo-Messiah. This tradition - of a religious figure as pseudo-Messiah - prevailed in later Christian thought despite the different political concept of Antichrist in Revelation. Bousset sees the Man of Sin in 2 Thess 2 as an exclusively religious figure, and points out the unlikelihood of 2 Thessalonians having greater influence on Christian thought than Revelation¹⁶. After Revelation was known, one would expect the general expectation to be of a political Antichrist, and the reason why this is not so can only be because the prevalent and longstanding tradition before Revelation was of a religious figure as in 2 Thessalonians. "In the collective Christian tradition the Antichrist rule is not the Roman empire, which on the contrary is conceived as the 'letter' (sic), the obstacle that stands in the way, and this despite Revelation and the early history of Christianity. The Antichrist is the false Messiah, appearing in the midst of the Jews in Jerusalem, working signs and wonders through the power of Satan, and seating himself in the temple of God. As ruler of the Jews he is joyfully greeted by them. He is no peaceful monarch, no political personality, but a purely eschatological figure in every sense of the word"¹⁷. In 2 Thess 2 we find an incarnation

¹⁶ Bousset, op.cit., p.127.

¹⁷ Bousset, op.cit., p.182.

of the old dragon myth, which has nothing to do "in the first instance"¹⁸ with political powers. Instead of a dragon is a man with miraculous powers, making himself God's equal. For the Jews, this could be none other than a false Messiah, but the origin of the legend can be detected at times: "there continually arises behind the Antichrist the still wilder figure of the God-hating demon, of Satan, ever seeking to thrust him aside"¹⁹. The pre-Christian development of the pseudo-Messiah expectation is found in the Pseudepigrapha. In Sib 3.46-91, which in Bousset's opinion is the earliest Sibylline oracle, datable to the times of Antony and Cleopatra, the Antichrist is called Beliar and springs from the Sebastenoi. "It therefore appears that the Sibyl expects the Antichrist to spring from the dynasty of the Roman Caesars. Hence we have here already a political application of the Antichrist legend, for Beliar ... had originally nothing to do with a Roman empire"²⁰. "Here we have a Sibylline prophecy that Nero is to be the Antichrist and that he will consequently ... be regarded as king of the Jews. In this Sibyl, 3.45ff, there are no Christian elements"²¹. The earlier non-political source of the Beliar Apocalypse is Sib 2.167ff, which despite Christian additions has a Jewish background. Sib 5.18 mentions "an unvanquished woman

¹⁸ Bousset, op.cit., p.144.

¹⁹ Bousset, op.cit., p.145.

²⁰ Bousset, op.cit., p.96.

²¹ Bousset, op.cit., p.97.

falling on the waves", meaning Cleopatra in superhuman demonic form. If Antichrist is the human form of the old dragon figure, this could be a survival of the female marine monster idea. In 4 Ezra 5.1ff, "he shall reign whom they expect not" is Antichrist. Ascen Is 4.2 and T.Dan 5 are also cited as evidence.

To the question of how a Messiah claiming to be God and sitting in the temple could be a Jewish expectation and not a Christian one, Bousset replies by pointing back again to the dragon storming the abode of God (cf. Rev 13.6), as the Antichrist ejects God from his earthly sanctuary and seats himself there. In such a form, the expectation could arise and spread among Jews, and would be seized upon and developed by Christianity. Later Jews brought the Antichrist into relation with the Caesars and the Empire, but the legend is older than the Jews' hatred for the Romans who destroyed Jerusalem²². "The idea of a demonic power hostile to God and ejecting him from his temple very soon became degraded to the simple expectation of a false Messiah"²³. The dragon myth is applied to Nero redivivus in Sib 5.214, 8.88, 154, 5.28, 32²⁴. Between the dragon and the human Antichrist the middle stage of development is the Beliar tradition: a ruler of the last times, an evil spirit, possibly even Satan (cf. Sib 3.63ff, T.Dan, Ascen.Is 7.9²⁵). The dragon becomes a wicked angel,

²² Bousset, op.cit., p.164f.

²³ Bousset, op.cit., p.166.

²⁴ Bousset, op.cit., p.151.

²⁵ Bousset, op.cit., p.154.

ruler of the ethereal regions and prince of this world.

The Antichrist picture of 2 Thess 2 is not formulated by influences from the contemporary world, in Bousset's theory, for apocalyptists do not invent new imagery, but apply old. "Such eschatological expectations are of slow growth"²⁶. So Caligula's attempt to place his statue in the temple was not a source, nor even an influence on Paul's picture of the Man of Sin.

Rather than the Christian sources containing usually a political Antichrist associated with the Roman Empire, Bousset finds that the fall of the empire appears almost everywhere as a premonitory sign of the End²⁷. The empire is the power warding off the last days (cf. 4 Ezra 5.1ff). Bousset thinks that the possible mythological origin of the *κατέχων* (see Gunkel²⁸) is irrelevant to the NT because Paul would understand by it the Roman Empire from the tradition handed down to him, especially 4 Ezra 5.1ff, 6.21ff.

Bousset's view on 2 Thess 2, in summary, is that the ultimate origin of the concepts of the *κατέχων* and the Man of Sin is mythological, but their significance in their context is the expectation of a pseudo-Messiah at the fall of the Roman Empire.

Dibelius is a commentator on 2 Thessalonians who follows Gunkel and Bousset in tracing the concepts of

²⁶ Bousset, op.cit., p.163f.

²⁷ Bousset, op.cit., p.123.

²⁸ Gunkel, op.cit., p.225.

2 Thess 2 back to mythological origins. He cites examples from many cultures which bear close similarity to the Babylonian myth: a battle in primitive times when the godhead defeats the enemy, a human or animal monster²⁹. This primeval enemy is also often projected into the future when a final battle will take place: in Jewish tradition, Ap Bar 29.4, 1 Enoch 60.24f and 4 Ezra 6.52 describe Leviathan and Behemoth appearing from the sea to be fought again at the End. The enemy is therefore not dead: it must exist somewhere but not in freedom or else it would destroy the world. OT reflections on this interim existence are found at Am 9.3, Is 30.7, Job 40.26ff, Ps 104.26, Job 3.8, 7.12: *κότερον θάλασσα εἰμι ἢ φράκων, ὅτι κατέπεξας ἐκ' ἐμῆ φυλακῆν*. The dragon is kept under guard (cf. Rev 20.2)³⁰. "Der gottfeindliche Unhold der Urzeit gilt nicht als getötet, sondern nur als gefesselt. In der Endzeit wird er frei werden und sich zum letzten Entscheidungskampf stehen"³¹. The principle of restriction is commonly found in the myths, but Dibelius does not find an equivalent of the *κατέχων*. The Antichrist expectation is the monster translated into human form. This came about partly because of strong eschatological expectations - looking for the enemy of God in the present world, and finding him in a tyrant. The Jewish Messianic expectation and Christian expectation of the Parousia added to this, building a

²⁹ F.von der Leyen, "Der gefesselte Unhold", Prager Deutsche Studien 8, p.7-35 (Prag 1909), gives many Germanic folk traditions of a bound monster.

³⁰ M.Dibelius, An die Philipper, an die Thessalonicher, (J.C.B.Mohr, Tübingen, 1923²), p.41.

³¹ Dibelius, op.cit., p.42.

picture of the enemy of the Messiah rather than of God. From 2 Thess 2, Dibelius deduces that there was probably already a concept of the antimessiah in Judaism. Features in the text borrowed from the dragon are: a) sitting in the temple - pride was the cause of Satan's fall: b) the present reality of the bound monster in the mystery of lawlessness - this could mean the blindness of the Jews, since the Man of Sin is a pseudo-Messiah; c) the binding concept. In mythology, the dragon is bound by chains or behind doors, as in Job 40.26 where God holds Leviathan on a ring to play with him. But there is no real equivalent in mythology to the *κατέχων*. The traditional interpretation of the *κατέχων* as the Roman Empire may be right - although there is otherwise no reference to historical events. The Thessalonians would only have understood the term as referring to the empire if they were already familiar with it. Dibelius concludes that we shall probably always be ignorant.

2. Criticism of this interpretation

a) It is difficult to see what the Roman Empire has to do with the coming of a pseudo-Messiah. There were Messianic pretenders during the empire, and the only reason the Romans would have for suppressing such a figure would be if he saw himself (or was seen by others, cf. Lk 23.2) as a political king, so inciting the Jews to rebellion. But Bousset is at pains to stress the lack of political features in the Man of Sin of 2 Thess 2. The empire as the *κατέχων* fits best with an Antichrist claiming some kind of political power; and so it was interpreted by some Fathers who depicted Antichrist as both ruler and

pseudo-Messiah³².

b) There is no direct evidence that Jews are meant in 2 Thess 2.8-12 as those whom the Man of Sin deceives³³. All who reject the gospel suffer the supreme irony of believing instead a false gospel. The Jews are not even mentioned in 2 Thessalonians, and in 1 Thessalonians where they are blamed for killing Jesus and the prophets and opposing the spread of the gospel, v.16b states that the wrath has already come upon them: their fate is sealed by what they have already done rather than by future apostasy. The measure of their sins is filled up by hindering the Gentile mission, not by believing in a false Messiah.

c) Bousset's sources for proving a pre-Christian pseudo-Messianic expectation are Sib 2 and 3, T.Dan and Ascen Is. He holds that Sib 3 is the earliest Sibyl, and that Sib 2 retains an earlier, non-political understanding of Beliar (Antichrist). But the dating of these writings

³² Eg. Ambrosiaster Commentarius in epistolas Paulinas ad Thesalonicenses secunda, 2.4; Cyril of Jerusalem Catechetical Lectures XV,11; Irenaeus Adversus Haereses V,25.

³³ E.H.Askwith (An Introduction to the Thessalonian Epistles (Macmillan, London, 1902)) criticizes Bousset for assuming v.9-12 refer to Jews, and he compares the similar Rom 1.18 which refers to the heathen. He holds that the conception of Antichrist as a pseudo-Messiah arose later by a misinterpretation of 2 Thess 2, and that, contra Bousset, it would have no difficulty in becoming prominent.

is disputed: Lanchester places Sib 3.62-92 (the destruction of Beliar) at the end of the first century AD³⁴, and Sib 2 at c.150 AD³⁵. Both at least have Christian elements, so are doubtful sources for pre-Christian thought. Sib 3.68-70 categorizes the men deceived by Beliar as "Hebrews faithful and elect and lawless too, and other men who have never yet listened to the word of God". This looks like a Christian description since there is specific mention of Hebrew apostasy, and emphasis is laid on that section of the deceived. The last phrase is more a Christian way of denoting those who reject the gospel than a Jewish way of describing Gentiles. According to Sib 2.167ff, Beliar likewise causes "confusion among holy men, elect and faithful, and there shall be a plundering of them and of the Hebrews". T.Dan 5 merely puts Beliar in contrast to God, and as the Beliar figure is not a constant one, we cannot be sure that the Antichrist rather than Satan himself is in mind. Ascen Is 4.2 is clearly a reference to Nero, and Flemming and Duensing date it in the second century AD³⁶. Even if these sources do contain pre-Christian tradition, it is not enough to find expectations of a political anti-God figure - indeed, this undermines Bousset's case, which depends on Revelation's

³⁴ R.H.Charles, Apocrypha and Pseudepigraphs (Clarendon, Oxford, 1913), p.371.

³⁵ Charles, op.cit., p.703.

³⁶ E.Hennecke, New Testament Apocrypha II, p.643 (ed. W.Schneemelcher, trans.ed. R.McL. Wilson, Lutterworth, London, 1963-5).

political Antichrist being a deviation from the regular tradition - there must be an exclusively religious figure. To expect a final successor to the series of political oppressors would be natural for the Jews, but to expect a pseudo-Messiah, before the true Messiah had come, makes less sense and needs stronger support. According to Strack and Billerbeck, "die altjüdische Literatur hat keinen Ausdruck, der dem ἀντιχριστος entspricht: auch in sachlicher Hinsicht bietet sie so gut wie keine Berührungspunkte mit der neutestamentlichen Vorstellung vom Antichrist"³⁷. Political enmity to the Messiah may be found in the last ruler of Rome (Ap Bar 39.7, 40.1f) or Gog and Magog, but there is no religious opponent (Sib 3.63ff and 2.165ff being of Christian origin)³⁸. Ernst agrees that it is "zweifelhaft, ob auf jüdischem Boden die Gestalt eines menschlich-dämonischen Gegenspielers bekannt gewesen ist"³⁹.

The Man of Sin is a religious figure (2 Thess 2.4) and does caricature Christ (2.9) but these characteristics need not be explained by a Jewish expectation of a pseudo-Messiah. In a Christian context, it is essentially Christ whom the Antichrist imitates - though this would probably involve deceiving Jews into believing him the true Messiah.

³⁷ H.L.Strack and P.Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, (C.H.Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, München, 1926), III, p.637.

³⁸ Strack-Billerbeck, op.cit., p.638.

³⁹ Ernst, op.cit., p.285.

d) To explain why the Jews believed in a messianic pretender who committed the blasphemy of claiming to be God and seating himself in the temple to be worshipped, Bousset refers to the myth of the dragon who storms the heavens to oust the gods and is thrown down, defeated. But it is not clear where he finds this myth: in the Babylonian Enuma Elish, which is the creation myth normally compared to Genesis and Revelation, the defeated dragon or sea monster, Tiamat, is actually the mother of the younger gods, including her conqueror, Marduk. It is the threat of Tiamat and Apsu to discipline the younger gods which gives rise to the battle between Tiamat and Marduk: Tiamat is in a sense defending her rightful position, and Marduk is only decreed supreme god by virtue of his victory over her. In the Hebrew form of the myth, so far as we can piece it together, Yahweh creates the dragon, or two monsters, Leviathan and Behemoth, on the fifth day of creation (4 Ezra 6.49-52) and assigns sea and land to them respectively (cf. 1 Enoch 60.7f). When the Messiah is revealed, these monsters will also be revealed - but only to provide food for the Messianic banquet (2 Baruch 29.4). There is no battle explicitly mentioned, either at the beginning or at the End. The theophanies also, where Yahweh exhibits his control over the elements, do not imply that the latter were attempting to usurp God's place. Ps 74.14f seems to refer to some battle between Leviathan and Yahweh, but more as polemic against foreign mythology than as part of Israel's own traditions about the primeval time.

e) Although the view of Bousset and Dibelius is called 'mythological', it is only semi-mythological at most⁴⁰. They relate the Man of Sin much more closely to the myth than the *κατέχων*. If the origin of the Man of Sin is the mythological dragon, it would be much more consistent to see the *κατέχων* as its guardian⁴¹.

The masculine and neuter *κατέχων* and *κατέχον* imply that not only the fact of the Man of Sin being restrained is in mind, but also the personage exercising restraint (the manner of restraint is not implied, any more

40 Cf. R.J.Peterson, "The Structure and Purpose of 2 Thessalonians" (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard, 1967), p.127: "We do not doubt that the apocalyptic background of this passage is set within this general mythical schema" - but we should not stop there: "it comes out of the more specific category of Jewish apocalyptic, and the apocalyptic development within the early church". Earlier, he objects, "If it is mythological, then what is it (ie. the *κατέχων*)? No-one has been able to define it precisely" (p.113). This implies a similar dissatisfaction to our own with the mythological interpretation as represented by Bousset and Dibelius, but having accepted the mythological background one cannot simply brush it aside and turn to more relevant and "precise" interpretation. Peterson seems to be looking for a historical identification of the *κατέχων* which overlooks the point that a myth is stated "precisely" in mythological terms, not historical ones.

41 See Gunkel, op.cit., p.224f, and F.Pratt, The Theology of St. Paul (Burns and Oates, London, 1964), I, p.82f.

than the manner of the restraint's cessation). From the text of 2 Thess 2 one would assume that this element is no more novel than the rest: there is no special introduction to the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\upsilon$, and not even a hint that there is any distinction between the teaching on the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\upsilon$ and that on other apocalyptic signs (apostasy, Man of Sin, mounting wickedness, judgment, etc.). Logically therefore, the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\upsilon$ should be traceable in Jewish tradition. The idea of a $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\upsilon$ has been found in, and often identified with the binding⁴² of Satan/the dragon in creation myths, which in the OT and especially in intertestamental literature, have been extended to become myths of the End. But a $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\upsilon$ is rarely seen in Jewish tradition⁴³. In the creation myths it is a god who binds

42 The translation "bind" is not often used for $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota\upsilon$ in 2 Thess 2.6f. The ideas of restraint and imprisonment, however, both possible translations of $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota\upsilon$ are very close. Arndt-Gingrich translates the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\upsilon$ as restraint, but for no apparent reason - possibly from a presupposition about its interpretation (as the Roman Empire). Hanse translates the usage of 2 Thess 2.6f as "to prevent an evil person or power from breaking out" and comments that the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\upsilon$ "does not have to be a historical magnitude and might be an angel" (" $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega$ " TDNT, II, p.829f). The restraining could be by means of imprisonment. It is hard to be precise about the manner of restraining evil, since it is a supernatural mystery, and we can only use crude pictorial language.

43 In T. Levi 18.12, the Messiah binds Beliar at the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom. This shows the binding concept used with an agent, although it is not identical to the 2 Thess 2 concept.

and imprisons the monster⁴⁴, and sometimes in the OT it seems to be God himself (eg. Job 40.26). But this will not do for 2 Thessalonians: firstly, the cursory reference to the removal of the restrainer ἐκ μέσου : neutral though this expression may be, it nevertheless implies a limited function⁴⁵; and secondly, if God were meant by the allusive

44 For the translation "to bind", cf. Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die Griechischen Zauberpapyri, K. Preisendanz (2nd. ed. A. Heinrichs, Stuttgart, B.G. Teubner, 1973-4), I, p. 106f, l. 995: ὁ δειλῶν νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν ἡνιοκῶν καὶ κυβερνῶν οὐρακα, κατέχων δράκοντα ...

This is a prayer addressed to Horus, with a long list of titles and attributes. Preisendanz translates: "der die Zügel hält and das Steuer führt, der die Schlange beherrscht ...". Cf. LXX Job 7.12: πότερον θάλασσα εἰμὶ ἢ δράκων, ὅτι κατέταξας ἐπ' ἐμὲ φυλακὴν.

45 It is often assumed that ἐκ μέσου γίνεσθαι implies an ignominious removal, by death or destruction, and the phrase is compared to ἐκ μέσου ἀφαιρεῖσθαι which is the only Biblical parallel (Is 57.2, death and burial ἦρται ἐκ τοῦ μέσου; 1 Cor 5.2 excommunication ἀφ' ἧ ἐκ μέσου θανάτου; Col 2.14 cancellation and annihilation ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου). But the change of verb is significant: γίνεσθαι has a different meaning from ἀφαιρεῖσθαι. The phrase is a rare one, but there are a few secular instances of ἐκ μέσου γίνεσθαι: H.W. Fulford ("ἔως ἐκ μέσου γίνεσθαι": 2 Thess 2.7" Exp.T.23 (1911) p.40f) quotes Plutarch in Timoleon V.3 where ἐκ μέσου γινόμενος describes the hero who killed his brother and therefore retired from public life; in Nic. c. Crass. ii 4, ἐκ μέσου γινόμενον καθῆσθαι means to sit removed from all activity (Loeb translation). Fulford compares also Cicero's usage of the Latin equivalents, de medio tolli (for ἐκ μέσου ἀφαιρεῖσθαι) by which he refers to murder, and recede de medio (for ἐκ μέσου γίνεσθαι) which he uses for a rhetorical request that someone should get out of his way (Pro Sex Roscio VII 20, XXVIII 112). From these examples, Fulford concludes that the phrase implies voluntary action, not compulsory removal by an outside force, and that there is no destruction or death involved. D.J. Stephens ("Eschatological Themes in 2 Thess 2.1-12" (Ph.D. thesis, St. Andrews, 1976), p.351, quotes four examples of ἐκ μέσου coupled with other verbs and all meaning voluntary removal from the scene: Herodotus History 4.118 οὐκ εἰς ὧν κηθεὶν τράω ἐκ τοῦ μέσου κατήμενος. The Scythian legation tell the barbarian neighbours to take part in the contest - "do not stand aloof". Op.cit., 8.22 καὶ νῦν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου ἡμῶν ἔξεσθαι "even now withdraw from the war". Plutarch Moralia 150d: after the flute girl had played, she withdrew: ἐκ μέσου κατέσθη. Xenophon Anabasis I.5.14: ἐκέλευσέ τε αὐτὸν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου ἐξίστασθαι "you ordered him to remove himself". Stephens reaches the same conclusion as Fulford: ἐκ μέσου γίνεσθαι in 2 Thess 2.7 means voluntary withdrawal.

term the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$, one would expect at least the clarifying addition of $\delta\ \Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma - \delta\ \kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ alone designates the personage merely according to his function in the context, which is not a normal way of referring to God, and is scarcely acceptable. There is, however, a figure in Jewish tradition which some scholars believe could fit this context: this is the archangel Michael. Michael is the special guardian of the people of Israel (Dan 12.1, 1 Enoch 20.1ff); he is the highest angel, a representative of God⁴⁶ and he is closely associated with judgment, both in the present era by limiting the scope of evil (1 Enoch 10.11, 54.6, Baruch 13.2) and in the judgment to come (1 Enoch 67.12f, 68.2-5, 71.3,8f, 89.61). It is thus that Gunkel interprets the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$: "Weiter dürfen wir vermuten, dass wie der $\acute{\alpha}\nu\theta\rho\omega\pi\omicron\varsigma$ kaum noch wie ein Mensch auftritt, so auch der $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ wohl ein himmlisches Wesen sein wird; wir könnten uns dann das $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\epsilon\iota\nu$ nach Art des Kampfes Michaels gegen den Engel von Persien denken, cf. Dan 10.13 ... Jedenfalls ist der $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ keine geschichtliche Person"⁴⁷. F. Prat argues that if the Man of Sin is a supernatural power or the tool of such power (2 Thess 2.9), control could only be exercised over him by an equivalent power, one "of the same order"⁴⁸. Bousset and Dibelius, in

⁴⁶ Strack-Billerbeck, op.cit., p.813.

⁴⁷ Gunkel, op.cit., p.224f, Cf. Ernst, op.cit., p.53: "Der grosse Wert der religionsgeschichtlichen Untersuchung liegt darin, dass damit die Zeitgeschichtlichen Deutungen endgültig abgetan wurden; denn es geht auf keinen Fall an, die 'hemmende Macht' mit einer bestimmten historischen Persönlichkeit zu identifizieren".

⁴⁸ Prat, op.cit., p.82.

understanding the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\acute{\omega}\nu$ as the Roman Empire (with some hesitation on Dibelius' part) fail to consider the possibility that Paul may not have interpreted or applied the myth: he may have taught the Thessalonians the mythical tradition as it was formulated at that stage. From the text, we could deduce this to be a supernatural restrainer of evil which would soon allow free rein to evil manifested as a human demonic counterpart to Christ (which does not necessarily imply a pre-Christian pseudo-messianic tradition). We could call this a thoroughgoing mythological interpretation.

One problem with such an interpretation would be that the sign-character of the text would be called into question. Can supernatural goings-on be signs of the End? However, in support of a Man of Sin as a human and therefore visible figure, whilst the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\acute{\omega}\nu$ is supernatural and therefore invisible, it may be observed that the text does not necessitate a visible $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\acute{\omega}\nu$. The Thessalonians cannot suppose that the Day has come yet because the apostasy and coming of the Man of Sin have not yet occurred. They know why these are still in the future: because the supernatural restrainer of evil is still active (Michael?). But once this function of Michael's is over, the evil will break out in the form of a human aping Christ, and by observing this the Thessalonians will know the Lord to be at hand to judge the Man of Sin. This angle on the text gives the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\acute{\omega}\nu$ slightly more of a mythical nature than the Man of Sin.

3. Conclusion

The criticisms presented here do not intend to dispute the mythological origins of the concepts behind 2 Thess 2: the work of Gunkel, Bousset and Dibelius is well-founded in that respect⁴⁹, and the myth does embody truth about the struggle between good and evil. We must still ask, however, how relevant this mythological origin is to an interpretation of the text. Did Paul know the mythical concepts behind his apocalyptic teaching, and did he apply and interpret them or did he leave the tradition in mythical form? Are the Man of Sin and the both related to or due to the myth, or only the Man of Sin? We have suggested that the mythological origin may be more significant than it appears to be for Bousset and Dibelius, having provided the concept of a *κατέχων* as well as a Man of Sin, and that Paul may not be using the term *κατέχων* as a cipher to allude to an earthly entity (as for example the Roman Empire) but for its intrinsic significance and to designate the activity of a supernatural agent. These suggestions will be taken up and examined more closely in section B.VIII below.

⁴⁹ Ernst, *op.cit.*, p.38, boldly states "dass mythische Elemente vorhanden sind, wird heute von niemand mehr bestritten".

B.IV. 2 Thess 2: Miscellaneous Interpretations

This chapter is in three sections: the first contains variations of the political interpretation not already treated¹; the second discusses representatives of a collective or general view; and the third is a collection of disparate and more individual approaches.

1. Political variations

E.E.Lofstrom's interpretation is a political one, but with an unusual translation of ἕως ἔκκευθου γένηται. μόνον ὁ κατέχων ἄστυ is a parenthesis, and ἕως ἔκκευθου γένηται applies to τὸ μυστήριον. He translates: "and for the present, you know the thing that withholds, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season, for the mystery of lawlessness is already working (only there is he who is restraining it just now) - until it shall arise out of the midst, and then shall the lawless one be revealed"². The restrainer is Claudius, whose policy was a temporal check on emperor worship. The mystery of lawlessness would soon arise out of the midst: ie. a successor (not necessarily the next emperor) would continue and complete the lawlessness of emperor worship.

¹ These more idiosyncratic approaches to the political interpretation were not included in B.II in order to enable us there to discuss the general lines of the political interpretation without additional complications.

² E.E.Lofstrom, "Lawlessness and its restrainer: a new translation of 2 Thess 2.6-8", Exp.T.28 (1916-17), p.379f.

Lofstrom's translation of v.7 is hard to accept: the mystery is already active, and does not need to "arise", and "the midst" is unexplained. It would make more sense to translate "until he (the Antichrist) should arise out of the midst (of the current lawlessness)" taking $\rho\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta\tau\alpha\iota$ to refer to the nearest third person singular, which is δ $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$.

D.W.V. Robinson translates the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ as "hold sway" and identifies it with the Roman empire and emperor. δ $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ explains the identity of the principal eschatological figure δ $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma$, or at least indicates where it should be sought. "The Thessalonians know well enough what is now in possession: let them know that from this ruling power will emerge the final satanic opponent of the worship of God". The mystery is at work in the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$: it is Gentile opposition to Yahweh which was always to be found in the ruling power - "ever and anon breaking out into some overt act of $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\sigma\tau\alpha\sigma\acute{\iota}\alpha$ against the Lord"³. The $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ and $\acute{\alpha}\nu\omicron\lambda\omicron\gamma$ are not identical but are on the same side and in the same series. V.7a means that the present ruling power will not have final ascendancy but will disappear and cease to hold sway.

It is unclear whether by "the present ruling power" Robinson means the present emperor or the Roman empire.

³ D.W.B. Robinson, "2 Thess 2.6f: that which restrains or that which holds sway?", Stud Ev 2 (1964), p.635-8: p.637.

If the former, the problems of identification arise; if the latter, v.7b would mean the downfall of the empire. But the oppression of the people of God is usually associated with the rise to power of the oppressor - it does not follow the fall of an empire.

L. Gaston has an interesting but totally conjectural comment relevant to the political interpretation: he dates Paul's vision of 2 Cor 12.2 in the year of Caligula's death and states that some of the revelation given then was not ἄρρητα because we find it in 2 Thess 2. Presumably he means the Man of Sin, with his blasphemy and desecration of the temple, and Claudius as the κατέχων⁴.

2. The collective or general interpretation

A number of scholars understand the Man of Sin and sometimes also the κατέχων in a collective or general sense. This approach dates back to Origen's interpretation of Mt 24.33ff: "Generaliter unus est Antichristus, species autem illius multae"⁵. E. Kauder denies that there is any distinction between a singular Man of Sin or abomination of desolation and plural antichrists. All apply to the Antichrist "in all his disguises and masks"⁶. The Beast of Revelation is similarly interpreted: "everyone is no doubt intended who deceives and persecutes the church and blasphemes

⁴ L.Gaston, No Stone upon Another (Brill, Leiden, 1970), p.479.

⁵ Origen, Patrologia Graeca, XIII, col.1668, ed. J.P.Migne.

⁶ E.Kauder, "Antichrist", DNNTh, I. 124-6: p.125.

the Christ"⁷. Berkouwer opposes the view that the antichrists of 1 and 2 John are in the present whilst the Man of Sin of 2 Thess 2 is a future figure: both signify the great Lie and ultimate heresy, the denial that Jesus is the Christ. "The anti [sic] assumes numerous shapes depending on time and circumstances. But it is always recognisable"⁸. We cannot systematize the data about the Antichrist: "when the light of the eschaton falls on time, it calls forth the anti - the one anti - in all its various forms ... there must be continuous reinterpretation of the idea of the Antichrist"⁹. No concrete identification is incorrect per se¹⁰. Apostasy also is multifarious and continuous¹¹. In J. Michl's view, "Paul ... depicts the evildoer to come in a way peculiar to his own day, so that we cannot expect his representation will be fulfilled in every detail"¹² - so the Man of Sin could be interpreted in a collective sense of all rulers and seducers who oppose Christ. P. Althaus urges that the church should always see the Antichrist as a reality in the present or a threatening possibility in the near future, because in the NT it is either present (1 and 2 John) or coming soon (Synoptic apocalypse ,2 Thess 2).

⁷ Kauder, op.cit., p.126.

⁸ G.Berkouwer, The Return of Christ, (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1972), p.271.

⁹ Berkouwer, op.cit., p.274.

¹⁰ Berkouwer, op.cit., p.282.

¹¹ Berkouwer, op.cit., p.283-8.

¹² J.Michl, "Antichrist", EBT, I. p.28-32: p.32.

"Es geht uns nicht an, wo der Antichrist einmal war, sondern wo er heute und morgen ist"¹³. For example, it can be the state as absolute, claiming divine authority; society bringing freedom through its order and culture, and therefore deifying itself; religion becoming a means of security and arrogance; or a church which usurps God's authority over man¹⁴. The variations between singular and plural antichrists in the NT show that the question of one or many antichrists is not theologically important.

A collective understanding of the *κατ'ἑξῆς* usually runs along the lines of the state or the principle of order throughout the ages preventing the breakdown of society and thus limiting evil. E. Stauffer comments, "the civil power is set up as a bulwark against the power of chaos, but it can only keep these powers in check, never really subdue them. The fight against them will never come to an end, and in the end it must succumb to their final onslaught (2 Thess 2.7f)"¹⁵. Similarly, in rejecting specific identification of the apocalyptic figures, L. Morris says "better than any of these speculations seems to be that which favours the principle of order which restrains the working of evil"¹⁶.

D. Buzy is a prominent advocate of the collective interpretation, He points out that an individual antichrist

¹³ P. Althaus, Die Letzten Dinge (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Mohn, 1970¹⁰), p.285.

¹⁴ Althaus, op.cit., p.283f.

¹⁵ E. Stauffer, New Testament Theology, (SCM, London, 1955), p.85.

¹⁶ L. Morris comm. p.226.

cannot be prevented from coming into existence - one cannot stop someone from being born. There must be a succession of antichrists who are prevented from doing the evil they would do; only an actual antichrist can be prevented. The ~~collectif~~ lasts until it is removed, and "la durée de l'obstacle (ie.its continued existence and operation) postule la collectivité des antéchrists"¹⁷. Paul's individualization in 2 Thess 2 aims at dramatizing, making the concept more vivid. Buzy adds that an individual interpretation is not excluded by this view: the final outbreak could be by the personal action of a future man incarnating all the forces of evil.

Buzy spells out his theory in an article refuting the criticisms of Rigaux in particular: a) The literal sense is not always appropriate for apocalyptic: in this case, the single figure of the Antichrist may stand for a collectivity. Buzy compares the "Prince of Tyre" in Ezek 28.2,18f - "il n'est autre que le symbole de sa capitale et de son royaume maritimes, donc une collectivité"¹⁸. b) A common criticism of the collective interpretation is that it detracts from the sign character of the Man of Sin: if there is a series or a continuous entity, when will the End come? Buzy argues that "le signe de la venue du Seigneur n'est pas l'existence ou la présence d'un ou de plusieurs Antéchrists, c'est leur révélation au sens défini, c'est leur parousie éclatante"¹⁹.

¹⁷ D.Buzy, "L'Antéchrist", Pirot Supplément, I, p.301-5: p.302.

¹⁸ D.Buzy, "L'adversaire et l'obstacle: 2 Thess 2.3-12", R.S.R. 24 (1934), p.402-431: p.409.

¹⁹ Buzy, "L'adversaire ...", p.413.

c) Buzy interprets the *κατέχον* by comparing the passage with Mt 24 and Rev 11. The two witnesses of Rev 11 are the preachers of the gospel, and they restrict the Beast's activity: "tous les bons prédicateurs de l'évangile, qui combattent l'influence de l'Antéchrist"²⁰. But the Beast finally defeats and destroys the witnesses (Rev 11.7): "elle finit par les vaincre, du moins en apparence; comparez le *ἔως ἐκ μέσου γένηται*"²¹. Of Mt 24.14 Buzy says, "tant que les ouvriers évangéliques sont là, le mal ne peut se déchaîner, il est retenu"²². Evil cannot break out until the gospel preachers are removed. Paul knew this in his own experience: "il savait la puissance divine, et qu'elle faisait reculer les forces du mal ... et les dominaient partiellement, subjuguées"²³. He had told the Thessalonians that when the work of evangelism was completed, the preachers (including himself) would be taken away, and the Man of Sin revealed. The difference between the present antichrists and those at the End is that the present ones are "agents du mal et les suppôts de Satan, mais ils sont livrés à eux-mêmes, à leur moyens et à leur malice", while the final antichrists are "assistés de toute la puissance de Satan, et par ses prodiges et signes mensongers, ils recevront un incroyable pouvoir de seduction ... les antéchrists actuels sont empêchés par l'obstacle de faire leur parousie"²⁴.

²⁰ Buzy, "L'adversaire ...", p.422, quoted from E.B.Allo L'Apocalypse, p.132 (J.Gabalda, Paris, 1933³).

²¹ Buzy, "L'adversaire ...", p.424.

²² Buzy, "L'adversaire ...", p.427.

²³ Buzy, "L'adversaire ...", p.428.

²⁴ Buzy, "L'adversaire ...", p.430.

There are a few critical comments to make about Buzy in particular before passing on to a general criticism of the collective interpretation; a) Although a person's birth cannot be prevented, one emperor can prevent the succession to the throne of another, by not dying. Buzy understands the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ as preventing the Antichrist's activity, not his coming into the world, because the latter would necessitate a pre-existent Antichrist. But this is not necessarily the case, if for instance the Antichrist is "thrown up" by world circumstances when the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ is withdrawn²⁵.

b) Buzy's collective antichrist seems to be what Paul meant by the mystery of lawlessness, especially as Buzy seems to allow for a final individual incarnation. Under the duration of the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ there is suppressed action of $\delta\upsilon\nu\omicron\mu\iota\alpha$; when the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ is removed, $\delta\upsilon\nu\omicron\mu\iota\alpha$ breaks out in a personal climactic incarnation, the $\delta\upsilon\nu\omicron\mu\omicron\varsigma$. If lawlessness is in the world (which it obviously is) then there will be people whom one could call antichrists or antichristian; but this does not necessitate a collective interpretation of the Man of Sin of 2 Thess 2.3. c) Despite Buzy's assertion, he has not maintained the sign character of the Man of Sin: the antichrists after the preaching era are more overt in their activity, but they still seem to be collective, and Buzy is not at all clear on the distinction between their presence and their future parousia. d) The interpretation

²⁵ We are not here advocating the political interpretation; merely disputing Buzy's reasons for arguing against it.

of the *κατέχου* as preaching of the gospel is criticized in chapter B.V; but it must be observed here that the 'schemes' of Matthew and Revelation are not identical to 2 Thessalonians and should not be read into 2 Thessalonians without more ado. In Revelation, the witnesses are removed by being conquered by the Beast; in 2 Thess 2, the Man of Sin does not remove the *κατέχου* : the latter is removed before the Man of Sin can appear, and the manner of removal is not dealt with. In the case of Mt 24, the preaching of the gospel is not said to restrain the development of evil, merely to take place before the End. The horrors of v.5-12 do not read as a description of restrained evil which is meant to contrast with the further description of conditions following the mention of gospel preaching in v.14: the false Christs and prophets, for example, appear in both descriptions (v.5,23). The restraining effect of preaching is highly questionable: various kinds of suffering and tribulation are found throughout Mt 24, and Paul's mission was heavily opposed. The preaching of the gospel might even be said to arouse the wickedness of men, to provoke them to evil action.

A collective or general view of the Man of Sin and the *κατέχου* is an attractive option and allows for much flexibility in interpretation. But there are serious problems:

a) Would this interpretation achieve the purpose of the passage? It detracts from the 'sign' character of the Man of Sin who marks the time before which the Day will not occur. J. Ernst mentions this objection to the theory: there has to be a definite parousia of an individual person, for

the Man of Sin to be a sign. Paul does not distinguish between a series of forerunners and a final Antichrist: only one is mentioned²⁶. If there are repeated fulfilments, who is to tell which heralds the parousia? Every generation always thinks their experience of evil is the worst: who can be sure that a worse evil will not come? "Nur etwas einmaliges kann als 'Vorzeichen' dienen, nicht Ideen, Kräfte, Bestrebungen, Einrichtungen, die zu allen Zeiten gegeben sind"²⁷. If the Antichrist is collective, the Thessalonians might understandably have thought that they had experienced the final Antichrist; and to repeat teaching on a collective antichrist would be a poor aid to understanding.

b) The Man of Sin is designated repeatedly in the singular with the definite article; this emphasis on definiteness and singularity is hard to explain away. "Die Zeichnung weist klar auf Einzelpersönlichkeit"²⁸.

3. Miscellaneous individual interpretations

J.B. Orchard connects 2 Thess 2 very closely with Mt 24. He posits a literary relation - that Paul was dependent on a written Matthean source. The grounds for this are largely linguistic: the use of *ἀποσπορέω* in particular is very striking. In the sense of "Christ's manifestation of his presence at the end of the world"²⁹ Matthew uses it four times (24.3,27,37,39); Mark and Luke not at all; and

²⁶ J.Ernst, Die Eschatologische Gegenspieler in den Schriften des Neuen Testaments (Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 1967), p.58f.

²⁷ Staab comm. p.57.

²⁸ Staab comm. p.58, cf. H.Cowles, "On the Man of Sin. 2 Thess 2.3-9", Bibliotheca Sacra 29 (1872), p.623-40: p.627.

²⁹ J.B.Orchard, "Thessalonians and the Synoptic Gospels" Biblica 19 (1938), p.19-42: p.35.

Paul uses it in 1 and 2 Thessalonians seven times, and once in 1 Cor 15.23, but elsewhere in the usual sense of coming or presence, not the technical sense. There are many other parallels and similarities³⁰ and Orchard comments, "it is highly significant to find them both using the same rare words and the same common words in the same contexts"³¹. Orchard therefore interprets 2 Thess 2 according to Mt 24. The chief precursor of the Parousia in Mt 24 is the destruction of Jerusalem, so Orchard connects this with the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ of 2 Thess 2.6f. "The present unfulfilment of the prophecy (of the destruction of Jerusalem) at the time when St. Paul wrote would therefore be the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$ which was preventing the advent of the Lawless One"³². The masculine participle refers to the defender of the city, Michael: "St. Michael, the Patron of Israel, the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$, defends his city until the moment preordained by God for the manifestation of the complete and final reprobation of the ancient temporal kingdom of Israel, signified by the total destruction of Jerusalem and its temple at the orders of Titus"³³. The fact that the parousia did not immediately follow this event is no problem to Orchard: in his view the text does not necessarily indicate a close temporal relation between the two events - " $\kappa\alpha\iota\ \tau\omicron\tau\epsilon$ (v.8) does not signify ... that the Lawless One will be revealed immediately

³⁰ These are not listed here, since our concern is not so much with Orchard's theory of literary dependence as with the conclusions for the interpretation of 2 Thess 2 which he draws from it, and which we criticize on other grounds. The literary parallels are easily available in Orchard's article.

³¹ Orchard, op.cit., p.37.

³² Orchard, op.cit., p.41.

³³ Ibid.

after, but simply some time after the withdrawal of the
κατέχων "34.

Orchard's interpretation of the κατέχων and κατέχον as the protector of Jerusalem and the necessity for Jerusalem's destruction do not correspond: since the terms differ only in gender, they should be more closely related than this. The κατέχον becomes almost the lack of protection, whilst the κατέχων is the protector. If Michael is the κατέχων, his removal (v.7) allows Jerusalem to be destroyed - which is very close to saying that the removal of the κατέχων allows the κατέχον to take place.

In Mt 24, the destruction of Jerusalem is one of the events before the parousia of Christ, not of the Antichrist: what relation does the punishment of Israel have to do with the coming of the Man of Sin, who follows the removal of the κατέχων? Mt 24 lists many precursors of the parousia, not only the destruction of Jerusalem; and they are precursors of the parousia of Christ, not of the Man of Sin as the κατέχον is in 2 Thess 2.

A long interval in the sequence of events of v.6-8 does not fit the text: if the κατέχον is a restraint on the coming of the Man of Sin, then the latter must appear immediately (καὶ τότε) on the removal of the κατέχον, otherwise the idea of restraint is nonsensical. The words καὶ τότε may not demand this interpretation, but the sense of the passage does.

34 Orchard, op.cit., p.40.

E. Cothenet also sees 2 Thess 2.1-12 as closely linked with Mt 24, both of which are concerned with the fall of Jerusalem. "On ne recherchera donc pas dans le II aux Thessaloniens des indications sur la fin des temps, mais beaucoup plus simplement un écho des prédications de Jésus sur le châtement de son peuple"³⁵. The judgment, according to Mt 24, will take place in two stages: first the judgment on Israel, followed by the times of the Gentiles, after which general judgment will take place. Paul also envisages an initial judgment on the Jews: 1 Thess 2.16 refers to this and does not therefore contradict Rom 11 which speaks of the final salvation. 2 Thess 2 therefore speaks of the revolt of Israel against their God, and their punishment by destruction at the hands of Rome as God's instrument of judgment. The Man of Sin is probably a false Jewish Messiah who profanes the temple and completes the unfaithfulness of the covenant people. "L'apôtre dramatise la révolte d'Israël en se représentant la brusque apparition de l'Homme de l'Iniquité, sans doute un faux Messie"³⁶. The *κατέχον* is derived from Mt 24.14 but does not mean world-wide evangelisation: the theme of that context is the Jewish nation and therefore v.14 means that all could witness that if the Jews did not believe, it was their own fault. The *κατέχον* therefore consists of the necessity for the whole nation to have invoked judgment, wherever Jews

³⁵ E.Cothenet, "Le IIe Épître aux Thessaloniens et l'apocalypse synoptique", RSR 42 (1954), p.5-39: p.38.

³⁶ Cothenet, op.cit., p.32.

were found, for though the catastrophe is localized, it has general effect. The apostasy is of Christians, which Cothenet deduces by comparison with Mt 24.10-12. The relevance of this in a context dealing with Jews is that it was always the Jews who caused trouble for Paul in his missionary work, and any threat to the churches comes from them. The mystery of lawlessness is the growing opposition of Jews to the gospel and the salvation of Gentiles.

There are several points of criticism to make.

a) In Mt 24 it is not self-evident which sections refer to the destruction of Jerusalem and which to the final parousia. There are many varied interpretations of the chapter, and it is at least possible that v.4-14,23-28 do not refer to the period before the destruction of Jerusalem but to the whole period before the final parousia, and v.15-22 is an interlude describing an example (relevant to the hearers or readers) of tribulation in the near future, ie. the Jewish War.

b) Cothenet argues that 2 Thess 2 is especially closely related to Mt 24 rather than to the other Synoptic Apocalypses chiefly because of the identical use of *παρουσία* in its aspect of punishment ("châtiment"). But of the three occurrences in Mt 24 (Cothenet excludes v.3 as of doubtful accuracy), one (v.27) is concerned with the unavoidably evident nature of Christ's parousia as against those who locate a false Christ's appearance, and the other two (v.37,39) are in a context dealing with the unexpectedness of Christ's parousia. The parallel between his parousia and the days of Noah is the aspect of suddenness, not a purpose of punishment.

c) Cothenet's interpretation of Mt 24.14 is rather strained. The ἀκουσίην would mean the whole known world, as he says, but this includes both Jews and Gentiles, as is shown by the following λαοῖν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν . These are no grounds for understanding the testimony given to the nations as a testimony against the Jews: the natural sense is of a testimony of the gospel conveyed by preaching it to the nations. In Mk 13.9f, the testimony is made before kings and governors, not Jews, and the gospel is preached to all nations (εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη). There is no support here for Cothenet's interpretation of Mt 24.14. It is not clear how Cothenet interprets the κατέχων of 2 Thess 2.7: he rejects an identification as Paul, preferring a heavenly being - "on pensera plutôt à un être céleste qui fait obstacle à Satan et l'empêche, avant l'heure fixée par Dieu, de susciter son homme-lige, l'Homme d'Iniquité; on ne peut cependant fournir plus précision sur son identité"³⁷. There is no apparent connection between this unidentified figure and the κατέχων as understood by Cothenet.

d) An element in Cothenet's scheme which ill-fits the rest is the apostasy. As a Christian apostasy, it would contrast with the prevalent concern with the Jews. Cothenet explains the apostasy as caused by Jewish opposition to the gospel, but the cause is not explicit in the text. In fact, the Jewish orientation of the whole passage is by no means obvious, which seems strange after such an explicit accusation and condemnation as 1 Thess 2.14-16.

³⁷ Ibid.

e) Cothenet defends his view of the Man of Sin as a pseudo-Messiah against the common objection that a Jew would not claim divinity, but his defence is unconvincing. The emphasis in the text on the overriding blasphemy of the Man of Sin, going far beyond any of his predecessors ('types') cannot be brushed aside as not literally intended. Also, 2 Thess 2 features an individual figure - designated repeatedly in the singular with the definite article - which contrasts with the many figures of the Synoptic Apocalypse, where the minimum of detail gives the impression of minor figures, of far less moment than the Man of Sin. But did such a definitively different Messianic pretender arise in Judaism just before the destruction of Jerusalem? We hear in Acts of Theudas³⁸ who had 400 followers but was killed (5.36f); of Judas the Galilean, also killed; of an Egyptian who incited 4000 Zealots to revolt and led them into the wilderness (21.38)³⁹, and F.F. Bruce comments on "the increase in militant messianism in the period following AD 44 ... number of insurgent movements"⁴⁰, but no one particular figure seems to stand out. In any case, these are militant,

³⁸ According to Josephus (Antiquities 20.5,97) Theudas rebelled about ten years later than Acts dates him, ie. 44-46 AD. Foakes-Jackson comments that "the attempts to save the historical accuracy of Acts in this matter are more interesting than convincing", (The Beginnings of Christianity. Part 1: Acts of the Apostles (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1931), p.47), Cf. D.Hill, "Jesus and Josephus' 'Messianic prophets'" in E.Best and R.McL Wilson (eds.), Text and Interpretation: studies in the New Testament presented to Matthew Black (Cambridge University Press, 1979), p.143-54: p.147f.

³⁹ Cf. Josephus, War II 254-6a, 258f.

⁴⁰ F.F.Bruce, New Testament History (Nelson, London, 1969), p.320.

political Messiahs, not religious figures, as we find in 2 Thess 2.

f) The argument of the passage according to Cothenet's interpretation is basically that the Day cannot have come, since the first stage of judgment must precede it, when Jerusalem is destroyed as a punishment on the Jewish nation. He holds that although the Jewish punishment must precede the parousia nothing in the text suggests that it must closely precede the parousia⁴¹: but the inference which follows naturally is that the final parousia and judgment would follow this immediately - Paul does not hint at further events. But this was not the case. Moreover, if the times of the Gentiles are to follow the fall of Jerusalem (ie. the destruction of the Man of Sin) a sizable interval is envisaged between the destruction of the Man of Sin and the Day, which is not indicated in 2 Thess 2. If Cothenet were right, then the Gentile mission could be a further sign of the approaching final parousia.

In any case, the missions to Jews and Gentiles were not so clearly distinguished as Cothenet's case requires: Paul himself was conducting mission to both Jews and Gentiles, being especially commissioned to preach to Gentiles but nevertheless making it his practice to preach in local synagogues.

According to J.M.G. Ruiz, the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\lambda\acute{\alpha}\nu$ is not the punishment of the Jewish nation but its conversion. He understands the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\lambda\acute{\alpha}\nu$ as Michael, the guardian angel of Israel, who will bring about the full conversion of Israel

⁴¹ Cothenet, op.cit., p.38n.

(cf. Rom 11) before the Man of Sin appears. Paul taught the Thessalonians about this because of Jewish opposition in Thessalonica; he alludes to it obliquely in order to prevent further incitement of the Jews⁴².

Ruiz does not justify his different understanding of the *κατέχων* ^{the} from *κατέχων*, which are generally, and surely correctly, taken to refer to the same entity under different aspects. The nature of this restraint on the Man of Sin is confused: is Michael's protection preventing the Jews from being converted yet? Is it his removal (v.7) which allows for their conversion? - for it is not the *κατέχων* (the necessity for Israel to repent) which is removed, but the *κατέχων*, Michael himself. Ruiz seems to be trying to harmonize Rom 11 and 2 Thess 2, but he does not succeed. Where, for example, does the "hardening" of Rom 11.25 fit into 2 Thess 2? Ruiz also fails to explain Paul's apparently contradictory attitude in 1 Thess 2.16, where he sees no hope for the Jews.

P. Richardson sees the Jewish opposition to the gospel as the *κατέχων* : "they are trying to hold back eschatological events by restraining Paul himself"⁴³, and he refers to 1 Thess 2.14,18 as evidence. The error in Thessalonica is that they deduced from 1 Thessalonians that the Jewish apostasy from the gospel and activity of Satan meant that

⁴² J.M.G.Ruiz, "La incredulidad de Israel y los impedimentos del Anticristo segun 2 Tes 2.6f", Estudios Biblicos, 10 (1951), p.189-203.

⁴³ P.Richardson, Israel in the Apostolic Church, (CUP 1969), p.105.

the End was about to come. Paul corrects this to explain that the parousia would be preceded by both the apostasy and the personal appearance of the Lawless One⁴⁴. Richardson propounds this theory of the *κατέλαον* as if the Jews knew that the gospel was true, understood all the consequences of belief and disbelief, and the nearness of the consummation, and were interfering with the progress of the gospel in order to delay the End. But we must assume that the Jews were acting in integrity, suppressing a movement they genuinely thought to be in error. Further, there seems no reason why Jewish opposition to the gospel should cease (the removal of the restraint) before the Man of Sin comes. The *κατέλαον* is not explained.

M. Brunec disputes the traditional identification of the Man of Sin with the Antichrist of 1 and 2 John and Revelation; the former is a different enemy of Christianity, existing and active in the time of Paul, not the eschatological Antichrist. He signifies Judaism which has rejected the gospel, and each title and description is appropriate to this meaning. Man of Sin alludes to the incredulity of the Jews, cf. Jn 8.34,44. Son of perdition (cf. Mt 21.34-46, Lk 13.1-3, 1 Thess 2.16, 2 Thess 1.6-9, 2.10-12) - the Jews are condemned by their disbelief. He sets himself up against any called god or *σεβασμα*, ie. Augustus: the Jews crucified the Son of God, persecute the

⁴⁴ Richardson, op.cit., p.109f.

church, and refuse worship to the Roman emperor. Anomos: Jews violate the law of Moses, cf. Mt 23.1-37, Jn 7.19, Acts 7.51-53. He sits in the temple: this refers to military occupation of the temple by Zealots during the War. The *κατεχων* is parallel to the elect of the Synoptic Apocalypse and therefore means the Christian church in Jerusalem, by whose sanctity and prayers God is placated and maintains the order of public life. The apostasy is not spiritual but material: it signifies the withdrawal of the church from Jerusalem at the beginning of the War from the midst ("de medio") of unbelieving Judaism. The crisis will follow immediately after they leave. The occasion of writing this passage is the danger of being deceived into believing false parousias - this danger springs from the Man of Sin, whose parousia is *ἐν ἀλώῃ ἀπάτη* (v.10). "Parousia 'Hominis p.' ergo intelligenda est falsus ille adventus gloriosi Messiae, cuius imminentiam omnibus artificiis propalabant seditiosi duces Judaeorum (cf. Act 21.38, 5.35-39) donec ea falsa spe Parusiae instantis freti Romanis bellum indixerunt et in eo perierunt"⁴⁵. By this Brunec means that from unbelieving Judaism spring the false Christs mentioned in the Synoptic Apocalypse; the Christians are not to be deceived by these false parousias.

There are three main points of criticism of Brunec.

⁴⁵ M. Brunec, "De 'homine peccati' in 2 Thess 2.1-12", Verbum Domini 35 (1957), p.3-33: p.22.

a) The Jerusalem church as the *κτελέων* is unconvincing. What actual effect could they have on the turbulent situation? Moreover, in the Synoptic Apocalypse Christians are told to flee from Jerusalem because the tribulation has begun and the abomination is in the temple: they are not told that the latter will not happen until they have fled. The translation of *ἀποστασία* as "secessio", withdrawal, is doubtful: departure, disappearance is one of the four meanings listed by Liddell and Scott, but the first meaning of defection, with its particular religious meaning as rebellion against God, is more likely in this context with its religious concern.

b) In the phrase *ἐπὶ πάντα λεγόμενον Θεὸν ἢ σέβασμα*, Brunec translates *σέβασμα* as Augustus, ie. as a reference to the Roman emperor. But the imperial title was *σέβαστος* and *σέβασμα* means any object of worship, "alles was Gegenstand göttlicher Scheu und Verehrung ist, wie Opfer, Altar, Tempel, Gott"⁴⁶. Even accepting Brunec's interpretation here, it is unlikely that Paul would include refusal of emperor-worship in his lists of crimes: it would be no crime in his eyes.

c) The irreligious activity of the Zealots is by no means as certain as Brunec's case requires. Josephus certainly blames them for defiling the temple and precipitating judgment on Jerusalem⁴⁷. Bruce comments, however, that

⁴⁶ Wohlenberg comm. ad loc.

⁴⁷ Cf. Josephus War 4.150: *ἐπὶ τὸ θεῖον μετήνεγκαν τὴν ὕβριν καὶ κενιασμένους τοῖς ἁσὶ ἀρῆσαν εἰς τὸ ἅγιον.*
4.387: *ζηλωταὶ καὶ τὴν κατὰ τῆς ἀκτροῦδος ἀσφηταῖαν τέλους ἤξιωσαν.*

Josephus' attitude is "repulsive": the Zealots were "men of piety, scrupulously observant of the finest details of their ancestral religion". Josephus represents a certain animosity towards the Zealots among some Jews which was evoked by Zealot hostility towards the Jewish establishment. Their piety was however evidenced by remains discovered at the fortress of Masada, defended to the last by Zealots⁴⁹.

J. Coppens and N.F. Freese have comparable views on the interpretation of the *κατέχον*.

According to Coppens, v.6b refers to Christ (*εἰς τὸ ἁλοκαυφθῆναι αὐτὸν*) and the *κατέχων* and the *κατέχον* refer to the two obstacles, personal and impersonal, which are opposed to his parousia. He translates from v.6 thus: "And now (after these explanations) you know what it is that holds him back (Christ - the *αὐτὸν* refers to Christ, for Paul is going back ... to the problem of the Day of the Lord mentioned in v.1f), in order that he may manifest himself in his own time. True, the mystery of iniquity has already done its work. Only at this moment (*ἀρτι*) (there remains) the *κατέχων* until he is put down. And then (here Paul passes brusquely to the description of this suppression, a stylistic mannerism of his) the man of sin will reveal himself, but the Lord Jesus will cut him off with the breath of his mouth"⁵⁰.

Coppens' explanation of the transition from v.7 to v.8

⁴⁹ Bruce, *op.cit.*, p.94f.

⁵⁰ J.Coppens, "Mystery in the theology of St.Paul and its parallels at Qumran" in J.Murphy-O'Connor (ed.), *Paul and Qumran* (Chapman, London, 1968), p.132-158: p.158.

is unconvincing: in 4.7 the Anomos exists and is then destroyed, then in v.8 he appears, prior to destruction by the Lord Jesus. A brusque stylistic trait does not explain the temporal reference of *καὶ τότε* in v.8. Moreover, *μόνον ὁ κατέχων ἄρτι* implies that the Man of Sin (the personal obstacle to Christ's coming) is now present, whereas v.8 has him appearing in the future (*ἀποκαλυφθήσεται*); and Paul's stating him to be present would serve to encourage the very mistake he was contradicting.

For Freese, the *κατέχων* consists of the fact that the apostasy and Man of Sin are not yet fulfilled: "eben die Nichterfüllung, oder die noch nicht volle Erfüllung jener beiden Vorzeichen dasjenige sei, durch das die Parusie Christi gehemmt werde"⁵¹. Again, he interprets v.6b as Christ's revelation. He differs from Coppens in understanding the mystery as the preliminary signs of apostasy and Man of Sin. Of these, the apostasy is already in progress (*ἤδη ἐκτελεῖται*) but the Man of Sin, the other half of the mystery, is still outstanding. This is based on separating *ἐκ μέρους* from *γένηται* and translating *ἐκ μέρους* "zur Hälfte": "nur muss der, der es (nämlich das *μισθίμιον*) bis jetzt zur Hälfte zurückhält, auftreten (*γένηται*), d.h. es fehlt nur noch, dass der auftritt, der es bis jetzt zur Hälfte zurückhält"⁵². Before the parousia of Christ the mystery must be completed with both its elements. The Man of Sin is delaying the completion

⁵¹ N.F.Freese, "*τὸ κατέχων* und *ὁ κατέχων* (2 Thess 2.6f)", Theologische Studien und Kritiken 93 (1920-21), p.73-77:p.74.

⁵² Freese, op.cit., p.76.

of the mystery and therefore the coming of Christ. The different genders of the κατέχων/ων are explained as the non-fulfilment of the mystery in v.6 (neuter) and the Man of Sin as the restrainer in v.7 (masculine)⁵³.

This interpretation really rests on the translation of ἐκ μέσου as "zur Hälfte", which is very rare: only one occurrence is mentioned by Liddell and Scott in Classical Greek: ἔτη δὲ ἣ χρυσίῳ τοῦ πολέμου τοῦδε ἔλαττα βέν ὀκτὼ καὶ ἑνάντων ἐκ μέσου, ὅτε ἐπόφυγεν⁵⁴. It is by no means a common usage and should therefore only be adopted if the context makes it absolutely plain. But this is not the case: Freese has to juggle with the words in v.7 to achieve his translation, even moving from one half of the verse to the other. To fit Freese's translation v.8 should express an assurance that the Man of Sin will nevertheless appear, but in fact it merely states "and then the Anomos will appear".

In Sirard's view, there are not two personages in the passage (Man of Sin and the κατέχων) but one; there is no series of events - ἐκ μέσου γένηται, ἀποκαλυφθήσεται, ἀνελεῖ, καταργήσει - but one event. Ἀποκαλύπτω is translated not "reveal" in the sense of appearance, but "scrutinize in judgment". Ἀνελεῖ and καταργήσει then repeat, reinforce and further describe this judgment of the Man of Sin, and all three verbs refer back to ἐκ μέσου γένηται v.7. The subject of the latter, the κατέχων, is translated not restrainer (which would be κωλύω)

⁵³ Freese, op.cit., p.77.

⁵⁴ Thucydides 4.133.

but possessor, one who holds fast, and is another way of designating the Man of Sin, on the analogy of the world being under Satan's dominion. The Man of Sin and the *κατέχων* represent the whole collection of evil forces which can be designated the *κατέχων*. Sirard's translation runs as follows: "Que personne ne vous abuse d'aucune façon avant que la rébellion ne soit d'abord venue et que ne soit mis en jugement l'Impie, le Damné, l'Insurge ... C'est ce que - vous vous en souvenez? - je vous ai dit quand j'étais chez vous. Ainsi donc, vous savait ce qui exerce l'emprise (the *κατέχων*) jusqu'au jour où il sera mis en jugement (*ἀποκαλυφθήναι*). Oui le mystère du mal est opérant dès à présent. Seulement, celui qui exerce l'emprise ne le fait que pour le moment, jusqu'à ce qu'il soit évincé (*ἐκ μέσου γένηται*). C'est alors que l'Impie sera mis en jugement ..." ⁵⁵. The Man of Sin is therefore already present and active: the text does not speak of his coming but of his presence and future unmasking by judgment and destruction.

There are four points to criticize in Sirard's interpretation.

a) The interpretation hinges on translating *ἀποκαλύπτω* of the Man of Sin as his judgment. The NT references which Sirard cites do not support his case sufficiently. A survey of the usage in the epistles show three main categories:

⁵⁵ L.Sirard, "La parousie de l'Antéchrist", Studiorum Congressus Paulinorum 2, p.89-100: p.98.

special revelation connected with charismata (1 Cor 13.30, 1 Pet 1.12 (verb), 1 Cor 14.6,16, 2 Cor 12.1,7, Gal 1.12? 2.2, Eph 1.17 (noun)); the present revelation of the gospel (Rom 1.17, 1 Cor 2.10, Gal 3.23, Eph 3.5 (verb), Rom 16.25, Gal 1.12?, Eph 3.3? (noun)); and the third category which is relevant to us, the revelation at the last day. Various things are to be revealed then: the glory of Christ or of Christians (Rom 8.18, 1 Pet 5.1 (verb), 1 Pet 4.13 (noun)), the sons of God (Rom 8.19 noun); Jesus Christ himself (1 Cor 1.7, 1 Pet 1.13, 1.7 (noun)); the works of Christians (1 Cor 3.13 verb); and the righteous judgment (Rom 2.5 noun). The only text which mentions judgment together with revelation is Rom 2.5. In 1 Cor 3.13, works are tried as by fire in a scrutinizing judgment, but these are the works of Christians. Where ἀποκλύω is used of the End, it is not used of evil, and rarely for any object of judgment. Christ, believers, glory and salvation are revealed. Even in 2 Thess 1.7-10 where Christ comes to avenge himself on the persecutors of the church, therefore judging them, it is Christ who is revealed, not his enemies (v.7). Ἀποκλύω is used in 2 Thess 2 to show that the Man of Sin is a devilish counterpart of Christ, with his own parousia and apocalypse. Fundamentally, what is revealed at the End is Christ: so the Antichrist has an imitation revelation. Christ's revelation shows him for what he really is - the Antichrist's revelation shows him as what he apes, not what he really is, which is revealed only by contrast at the parousia of Christ.

b) Under Sirard's interpretation, the passage loses its

function of giving signs of the End. The point of the text is that something has to happen which has not yet happened, before Christ's parousia. According to Sirard, Paul is simply describing the effects of Christ's parousia on Satan - to overthrow and scrutinize him by judgment, showing his true nature - who is already present and active. But the revelation of the Man of Sin is a sign that the parousia of Christ is about to come, and likewise the fact of his not yet being revealed serves to refute the apocalyptic error of thinking the Day was there.

c) Sirard translates *καὶ τότε* in v.8 as "c'est alors que ...", meaning "thus", to avoid a temporal clause because v.8 refers to the same event as v.7b. He cannot have Satan being deposed before the revelation of his supreme opponent. But the temporal sense of *καὶ τότε* cannot be avoided: the actions of v.8 follow chronologically after 4.7. This is reinforced by the future tense of the three verbs *ἀποκαλυφθήσεται, ἀνελεῖ, καταργήσεται* 56,57.

56 Cf. C.H.Giblin, The Threat to Faith (Rom 1967), p.100. Rigaux, Frame, Milligan, Lunemann, Findlay, Morris and Best all agree that *καὶ τότε* indicates a chronological sequence: that the revelation of the Man of Sin follows the removal of the *κατέχων* (comms ad loc.). "'And then' seems to indicate that these further events will follow more or less immediately upon the removal of the restraining power" (Morris comm ad loc); "Il passe du présent *καὶ νῦν* au futur" (Rigaux comm ad loc.). *καὶ τότε* does not introduce an expansion or repetition of events or an event just mentioned: it introduces a further development.

57 M. Barnouin ("Les problèmes de traduction concernant 2 Thess 2.6f" NTS 23 (1977), p.482-498) also loses the temporal sense of καὶ τότε in his interpretation. He holds that the subject remains constant from v.4 to v.8 - the Man of Sin - and interprets ἐκ μέσου γένηται as parallel to ἀποκκαλυφθήσεται, meaning that the Man of Sin comes into the midst, from hiding into the public eye, and is revealed: "Et maintenant vous connaissez ce qui le tient gardé, avec comme but qu'il soit révéélé, lui, au temps qui sera le sien. Car cette réalité mystérieuse de l'Impiété est déjà en action. Quelqu'un le tenant seulement gardé actuellement jusqu'à ce que, sortant de là, il vienne. Et alors il sera révéélé ..." (p.498). There are no adequate grounds, however, for understanding the subject of γένηται as the Man of Sin instead of the κατέλων. Barnouin's comparative references are either not parallel, or the meaning is too obvious to be misunderstood (cf. Rom 8.27, 2 Cor 12.7, Gal 4.4, Eph 5.26, Phil 2.22, 1 Thess 1.10, 2 Thess 1.10, 3.12, Philem 13). The translation of ἐκ μέσου as into the midst is also ill-supported and directly contradicts the natural sense; also it involves separating ἐκ μέσου from γένηται. The sense of v.7b is uncertain: Barnouin's translation amounts to saying that the Man of Sin is kept under guard until he comes out of guard. There would be more point in saying that he is under guard until the time for the guard to be removed: which brings us back to the usual translation.

d) The genders in v.8 are a problem to Sirard, with αὐτὸν¹ as a pronoun for the κατέχον, although masculine. He suggests that the "ν" might have been acquired by dittography from the following ἐν, or that the κατέχον was originally masculine accusative, τὸν κατέχοντα, or that there is just grammatical incoherence owing to the complexity of ideas. These seem unlikely possibilities, and Sirard cannot actually explain the masculine pronoun. As Giblyn points out⁵⁸, v.6 presumably implies that the αὐτὸν which is revealed is not the same as the κατέχον which they know.

The theory of Andriessen bears some comparison with that of Sirard. The κατέχων is the Antichrist when he is working in secret, and the Man of Sin is the revealed Antichrist. Ἐκ μέσου γίνηται means not "disappear" but "appear", "sortir du milieu"⁵⁹. καὶ τότε is translated "and at this moment"⁶⁰. According to Andriessen therefore, the Man of Sin is in existence but working in secret - "il doit subordonner son entreprise à des circonstances qui ne dépend que du gouvernement divin"⁶¹. But he will appear: "l'apostasie générale est le préambule immédiat de l'entrée personnel en scène de l'Antéchrist"⁶², and thereby will enable Christ's parousia to take place. The κατέχων is then not an obstacle to the coming of the Man of Sin,

⁵⁸ Giblyn, loc.cit.

⁵⁹ P.Andriessen, "Celui qui retient la revenue du Seigneur", Bijdragen 21 (1960), p.20-30: p.22. Cf. Barnouin, note 57.

⁶⁰ Cf. Sirard above.

⁶¹ Andriessen, op.cit., p.25.

⁶² Ibid.

but to the coming of Christ, for the κατέχων is the Man of Sin⁶³. The overall sense of v.1-9 is then that the Lord cannot come until the apostasy takes place, at which time the Man of Sin will appear and Christ will come to destroy him.

The translation of καὶ τότε as "and at this moment" has already been criticized⁶⁴. It is unclear whether Andriessen means that the κατέχων is the Man of Sin - in which case what is the κατέχον ? - or that the κατέχον is the apostasy and the Man of Sin which have to precede the parousia of Christ - in which case, what is the κατέχων ? "L'obstacle (est) ... la double condition dont St. Paul, ch 2,3, déclare l'accomplissement indispensables au retour du Christ, à savoir, la grande apostasie et l'apparition de l'Impie"⁶⁵. Ἐκ κείνου γένηται may not be translated "appear", because the dominant sense in secular usage is of removal from the public eye into obscurity: not into the midst but out of it. If these mistranslations are excluded, the κατέχων and Man of Sin cannot be interpreted as the same entity: they are distinct, opposed and successive forces.

H.E. Littleton is an example of an exegete who holds that 2 Thessalonians is post-Pauline. We are not specifically concerned with the issue of authorship, but since Littleton's

⁶³ Andriessen, op.cit., p.26.

⁶⁴ Cf. criticism of Coppens and Sirard above.

⁶⁵ Andriessen, op.cit., p.20.

case is argued principally on the grounds of the function of apocalyptic in 2 Thessalonians, it is appropriate to consider here. He holds that 2 Thessalonians was written by a Paulinist in the late first century who aimed to salvage Paul's reputation when his expectation of an imminent parousia proved wrong. The signs given in ch.2 therefore project the End further into the future.

The details of Littleton's thesis to be commented on will be enumerated in turn.

a) 2 Thess 2 is didactic rather than paranetic

2 Thess 1.3-2,17 is not paraenetic as 1 Thess 1-3 is: "the absence of any paraenetic thrust forces full attention on the content of the apocalyptic instructional section"⁶⁶. But 1 Thess 1-3 simply recites an account of what happened in Thessalonica and how Paul and the Thessalonians acted, then and after Paul's departure, and the only direct paraenesis is 3.11-13, a very brief and general prayer for more love and holiness. 2 Thess 1.3-2,17 has recounting of the past, 1.3f; encouragement for the present by reference to the future, with emphasis on the encouraging future, 1.5-10; a prayer for worthiness and completion, 1.11f; direct entreaty not to be disturbed, 2.2; reminder of teaching which should restore calm, 2.3-12; thanksgiving by recalling the past and its significance, 2.12f; a command to stand firm, 2.15; and a prayer for comfort and establishment, 2.16f.

⁶⁶ H.E.Littleton, "The Function of Apocalyptic in 2 Thessalonians as a Criterion for its authorship" (Ph.D. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1973), p.159.

So 1 Thess 1-3 has one prayer, and 2 Thess 1.3-2,17 has two prayers, one encouragement, one reminder of teaching, one entreaty and one command. One cannot possibly claim "an absence of any paraenetic thrust" in 2 Thess 1.3-2,17, especially not by comparison with 1 Thess 1-3.

b) Concern with traditions, propositional statements

In 2 Thessalonians, the most attention is given to not living according to traditions, 2.1, 3.14f⁶⁷.

Certainly Paul is concerned about the community's departure from proper Christian attitudes, but it is the living that concerns him, not just doctrinal belief as such. Apocalyptic instruction is called forth by their disturbed state, not just by a doctrinal misunderstanding. It is necessary to correct them in order to maintain peace and hope rather than confused excitement or trepidation. Idleness, whether or not connected with apocalyptic disturbance, is obviously not a Christian virtue, and Paul reminds them of his teaching and example because their behaviour showed that they had forgotten. His purpose in repeating traditions is therefore highly practical.

c) Faith in 2 Thessalonians is unpauline

Faith is intellectual acknowledgment of specific eschatological teaching⁶⁸.

However, believing eschatological teaching (even if this is all that is meant by faith in 2 Thessalonians) is not intellectual acknowledgment as a passing nod to

⁶⁷ Littleton, op.cit., p.160.

⁶⁸ Littleton, op.cit., p.172f.

doctrinal soundness: it is highly practical in content and outworking. "It is not faith made possible by God's eschatological act but a human act; it is not a constant self-relating to God's act of salvation (as in the undisputed Pauline epistles) but is the acceptance and retention of a teaching"⁶⁹. But Paul is not describing a human act in 2.14,16f or 3.3 ("he called you through our gospel ... may the Lord ... comfort your hearts and establish them ... the Lord is faithful, he will strengthen you ..."). Similarly, Littleton holds that the author "equates the truth of Christianity with the content of propositional statements"⁷⁰ as opposed to Paul, for whom the truth of Christianity has to do with the Lordship of Christ. But oddly enough, 2 Thessalonians is notorious for not containing any summary of the kerygma, which might be held to encapsulate Christianity within a statement. The Lordship of Christ is evident in 2 Thessalonians, undergirding all three chapters and thematic in ch.1 and 2, where it is variously stated that Christ will demonstrate his Lordship to those who deny it now, whether in contemporary persecution or in future apocalyptic circumstances.

Littleton assumes that anything which is not stated or mentioned in 2 Thessalonians is rejected or modified by the author. This argument from silence is unsatisfactory. By Pauline faith, he presumably means the faith which appropriates God's gift of salvation, as contrasted to

69 Littleton, op.cit., p.182.

70 Littleton, op.cit., p.179.

earning salvation by works. This issue is simply irrelevant to the letter. If the author had a nonpauline legalistic view of salvation, we might see it evidenced in ch.3, where the penalty for idleness would be threatened salvation, and working diligently would be commended as securing salvation.

d) Use of future and present

1 Thessalonians uses the present to clarify the expectation of an imminent future; 2 Thessalonians uses the future to emphasise the nature of the present and argue against enthusiastic eschatology⁷¹. This is a difficult point: Littleton becomes clearer when he states that there is an absence of emphasis on the future in 2 Thessalonians, where ἐλαίς occurs only once (2.16)⁷² and that 2 Thessalonians uses teaching about the future to distinguish between present and future⁷³.

But Littleton has failed to consider that the purpose of each letter is different and dictates the respective teaching on present and future. In 2 Thessalonians, the problem is misunderstanding the nature of the present - they think the future is now. Paul therefore states what is present (...ουστῆσιον, κατέχον/ων) and what is future (apostasy, Man of Sin, parousia). In 1 Thessalonians, the problem is doubting what the future holds; so Paul uses what is now and what has been to reassure them: Jesus has died

⁷¹ Littleton, op.cit., p.165.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Littleton, op.cit., p.180.

and risen, and therefore so will Christians; they are destined to salvation, not wrath, and are sons of light, not darkness, so they will live with him and not be surprised when he comes.

There is an emphasis on the future in 2 Thessalonians: the usage of ἐλπίς is no criterion for future emphasis or lack of it: the fact that it appears only once in 2 Thessalonians is without particular significance. 2 Thess 1 emphasises the future reversal of fortunes between persecutor and persecuted, ch.2 emphasises the future nature of the Day and preceding events, and each is followed by allusions to the goal of the Christian life, 1.12, 2.14.

"2 Thessalonians establishes a time-scale to emphasise the present and unintentionally provides a clue to nonpauline authorship. In none of the undisputed epistles does Paul make such a use of temporal references"⁷⁴. This is in marked contrast to the usual criticism of 2 Thessalonians, that its futuristic outlook proves it to be nonpauline! The time-scale is here in order to distinguish between what is future and what is present: this is necessary because of the particular error. Littleton accuses the author of using teaching about the future to distinguish between future and present, but this is precisely the point of 2 Thess 2. Littleton decides from the use of the future in 2 Thessalonians that the author is using apocalyptic but is not an apocalypticist; but if he were an apocalypticist, suspicion would be justified. Paul was no apocalypticist: he used apocalyptic when appropriate. There is much less apocalyptic

⁷⁴ Littleton, op.cit., p.175.

in 1 Thessalonians than in 2 Thessalonians.

e) 2 Thessalonians opposes enthusiasm⁷⁵

If by this Littleton means an imminent parousia expectation, 2 Thessalonians does not oppose such enthusiasm. It opposes the false idea that the Day is already here, now, (ἐν ἔσθηκεν) which is simply wrong, and had a bad effect on the community. Whenever this false idea was spread, however early or late, it was wrong. Since we do not know why the idea arose, we cannot establish when it arose.

In accordance with this alleged anti-enthusiastic thrust, the apocalyptic elements of 2 Thess 2 are understood by Littleton to be deliberately obscure. "There is no attempt by the author to refer to actual events in this veiled language". This is precisely what he is saying cannot be done and why the appearance of the apostasy and Man of Lawlessness prior to the Day of the Lord was so essential. To be concrete would feed the fire of enthusiasm he was combatting"⁷⁶. This may be accurate psychology; but it is also true that to be so enigmatic that no criteria are given for judging interpretations and applications, would provide grist to the enthusiast's mill, and leave the community at the mercy of erroneous interpretations. Deliberate obscurity would give the enthusiast something to work with; so would concrete identification - but only if identified

⁷⁵ Littleton, op.cit., p.165.

⁷⁶ Littleton, op.cit., p.176.

with current persons and events. The obscurity is due rather to the future nature of the matters dealt with. Again Littleton hits the nail on the head, but in his argument against Pauline authorship: "the very inability to identify the figure (of Antichrist) relegates his activity to the future"⁷⁷. Paul is being as concrete as he can, but he can only characterize the Man of Sin by comparison with past figures known to the Thessalonians (by repute or experience). The *κατ'ἔχων* is a slightly different case, since his activity seems to be present and the Thessalonians' knowledge about him may be of a very different nature from their knowledge about the Man of Sin and apostasy (personal knowledge - (not necessarily experience (Giblin) or acquaintance) - rather than conceptual knowledge derived from information alone). Unfortunately Littleton does not deal with the problem that the *κατ'ἔχων* does not belong to the category of future and therefore unidentifiable events.

f) Suffering is not in an apocalyptic context

Paul understands suffering in the context of Jesus' suffering, and the fellowship of his sufferings, but in 2 Thessalonians suffering is seen simply as part of the Christian life, without an apocalyptic context⁷⁸.

This point is rather puzzling, since i) Jesus' suffering and the fellowship of his suffering is not an apocalyptic context, and ii) in 2 Thessalonians the problem of suffering

⁷⁷ Littleton, op.cit., p.177.

⁷⁸ Littleton, op.cit., p.170.

is dealt with in an explicitly apocalyptic context and indeed gives rise to apocalyptic in ch.1. By contrast, in 1 Thessalonians affliction is mentioned in passing as "our lot" (εἰς τὸ ὅτι κέλευσα 1 Thess 3.3), with no explanation of why this should be so, and no hint of its purpose and goal. In 2 Thess 1, however, suffering is that which prepares Christians for the kingdom (1.5), it is evidence of God's righteous judgment - the afflicted and afflictors will receive rest and punishment respectively (1.6f) at the parousia of Christ (1.7) which is then enlarged upon (1.8-10). There might even be a hint of the imitation of Christ in his endurance of suffering in 3.5 where Paul prays for them to know the steadfastness of Christ.

Littleton's thesis aims to explain 2 Thessalonians on the basis of nonpauline authorship rather than considering that where the function of apocalyptic changes, it may be due not to a different hand but to a different situation and purpose of writing.

Rather than seeing the *κατέχον /ων* as an enigmatic and unique figure, even in apocalyptic literature, some scholars interpret it as God himself and his plan. Among these are A. Strobel and D.J. Stephens⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ J.Ernst considers this the best interpretation of 2 Thess 2. New circumstances had arisen in the community: the enthusiasts' teaching about the Day, and the deaths of some Christians (1 Thess 5), and therefore a new explanation was necessary, viz. "Gott will es so, es ist in seinem Heilsplan so vorgesehen". Ernst allows that Paul might have had in mind either the Gentile mission or angelic activity, as the more precise reason within God's plan, "das alles aber bleibt nur Vermutung, die grösste Wahrscheinlichkeit hat in der Tat der Gedanke an die in Gottes Heilsplan vorgesehene Parusieverzögerung für sich", (op.cit., p.57).

In 1961 Strobel defended this view, tracing the concept of God's delaying action back to Hab 2.3. "Die Frage nach dem göttlichen Aufhalten der messianischen Heilzeit klingt schon im Habkom der Sekte vom Toten Meer an. Von der Stimmung der Makkabäerkämpfe her scheint Jes 51.14 LXX geprägt: (κύριος) οὐ στήσεται οὐδέ χρονεῖ, nicht zuletzt aber Jes Sir 32/33. Die Vorstellung vom Aufhalten nimmt hier bereits konkrete Gestalt an. In der ältern rabbinischen Lehre vom Nichtkommen des Messias, wie sie R. Jehoschua vertritt, ist sie voll ausgebildet, vor allem auch bei 4 Ezra und bei Baruch. In dieser Form muss sie bereits vor dem Jahre 70 n. Chr. herrschend gewesen sein. Der für sie charakterische Begriff des אָוָּר beruht nach Targ. Jon. zu Hab 2.3 auf einem אָוָּר Pi. des NT"⁸⁰.

The piel of אָוָּר is a technical term for the "Nochausstehen der Vollendung". No human personage or institution is meant by the "in Gottes Zeitplan liegenden Parusieverzögerung an sich"⁸¹. The κατέχων is God who decrees the order and succession of the last times. The differing genders are explained as the principle and its operator, the power and its wielder. Strobel compares this to the relation between $\text{τὸ μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας}$ and ὁ ἄνομος as Antichrist and antichristian activity⁸². The common

⁸⁰ A. Strobel, Untersuchungen zum eschatologischen Verzögerungsproblem (Brill, Leiden, 1961), p. 101.

⁸¹ Strobel, op.cit., p. 106.

⁸² Strobel, op.cit., p. 107.

objection to this view is that v.7b is scarcely applicable to God: he cannot "get out of the way". Strobel overcomes this by reading *μόνον ἑκατέρωθεν ἕσται* as a parenthesis, so that τὸ μυστήριον is the subject of the whole verse and ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται applies to τὸ μυστήριον. Lawlessness is already working (except that God is restraining it) and will do so until it is dispensed with.⁸³ ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται therefore refers in fact to the destruction of Anomos (as the end of lawlessness?). If so, it is strangely expressed, because it is not the mystery which gets out of the way when Anomos is destroyed, but the full revelation of lawlessness. Its character as mystery ends with the arrival of Anomos. Alternatively, the intended sense might be that the mystery gets out of the way when Anomos is revealed; but in this case a more accurate and Pauline expression might be that the mystery is revealed in the revelation of Anomos.

Following von Dobschütz⁸⁴, Strobel compares 2 Thess 2.7ff with Rom 1.20ff. The latter gives concrete theological expansion of the mythological 2 Thess 2.7ff. Hence the *κατέχοντες* of Rom 1.18 could also allude to Hab 2.3: antichristian heathen hinder the truth by their wickedness. Since Strobel maintains that truth is synonymous with judgment here, according to the rabbinical view of truth as a critical division⁸⁵ then the wicked are a delaying factor in the process of salvation-history. This is however a rather strained parallel. Rom 1.18 is a case of hindering truth by doing evil, not hindering evil by truth (ie. a

⁸³ Strobel, op.cit., p.108-114.

⁸⁴ Von Dobschütz comm.(1909), p.271.

⁸⁵ "Das Gericht ist ein Gericht von Wahrheit", R.Akiba, Aboth 3.16.

κατέχων on God's side). Rom 1.18ff is not merely eschatology, and certainly not apocalyptic: it deals with the whole of human history, "ever since creation" (v.20). In v.18 we cannot read "who by their wickedness delay/suppress the judgment" after "the wrath of God is revealed". Wickedness brings about judgment, almost hastens it; certainly makes it more inevitable. Wickedness does not delay salvation-history: it is a continual denial of God's truth. We might say that it delayed the salvation of the wicked - prevents it, in fact - but this is not the cosmic role of the κατέχων .

Apart from these more detailed points, the general criticism to be made of Strobel's thesis is that the tradition of God delaying the Messiah is a different concept from Paul's κατέχων . The latter affects the coming of the Man of Sin, not of Christ. Admittedly the issue of the passage is the coming (return) of Christ (v.2f), so the κατέχων does refer to this indirectly, but it is not an accusation of delay and defence - almost the opposite. Paul does not answer the false idea that Christ is here by saying "no, he is delayed"; he says "no, he is not here yet". If you expect a train before its scheduled arrival time, a helpful porter will not apologise for its delay, but point out that it is not due until later (this imperfect illustration is not meant to imply an apocalyptic schedule).

Strobel's case is also linguistically unsound:

κατέχω is not synonymous with χρονίζω , which translates

ἴπλ in LXX Hab 2.3.

A doctoral thesis was recently presented on the eschatological section of 2 Thessalonians by D.J. Stephens. He revives the view, found as early as Theodore of Mopsuestia in his commentary on 2 Thessalonians, that the κατέχων /ων is no apocalyptic figure but the plan and will of God. He calls this a theocentric interpretation. The main lines of Stephens' interpretation may be summarized under six points.

- a) The error in Thessalonica concerned their understanding of salvation: they had grasped that salvation is a present fact but had misunderstood Paul's teaching about the nature of the present time, deducing that no spiritual blessing was outstanding and that therefore the Day must be present⁸⁶. This was partly caused by an emphasis on present salvation in 1 Thessalonians.
- b) The mystery of lawlessness is not the gradual preparation for the Anomos with him as its climax: rather it is the product of the Anomos. Το μυστήριον τῆς ἀνομίας is a subjective genitive denoting possession: the secret plan belonging to Anomia⁸⁷.
- c) The κατέχων is God's plan and will. The Day has not come because God's time for certain events has not been reached⁸⁸. The κατέχων is then God himself. Ἐκ μέσου γένηται may be applied to God, since it only states that the κατέχων will come out of the middle, with no implications for the

⁸⁶ D.J. Stephens, "Eschatological Themes in 2 Thess 2.1-12", (Ph.D., St. Andrews, 1976), p.98f.

⁸⁷ Stephens, op.cit., p.348.

⁸⁸ Stephens, op.cit., p.343.

manner of withdrawal, or for its ceasing to exist. It is used in Classical Greek for a voluntary action⁸⁹. Οἶδατε may mean "experience" rather than know conceptually as the Thessalonians were experiencing God and his plan; but this point is not an essential pillar of Stephens' thesis as it is for Giblin⁹⁰.

d) The ἀποστασία is a religious apostasy from within the Christian faith, and is that referred to in 2.10f. It is the final apostasy. Although this expectation of an End-time Christian apostasy is unique in Paul, so are the Anomos and the κατέχων, so Stephens does not see it necessary to find Pauline parallels elsewhere. He adds that Gal 1.6ff has the idea of present apostasy⁹¹.

e) The sources for the Man of Sin concept are: Is 14.13f, Ezek 28.2, Daniel, Antiochus Epiphanes, the growth of belief in Belial as chief evil spirit and deceiver of man, and in Satanic possession. The Man of Sin, however, is a Christian concept, not a Jewish one: he is not a pseudo-Messiah, and is not limited to any religious group. He is the final enemy, the antithesis to Christ.

f) The causation throughout is God's: his influence is not limited to the κατέχων. God sends the Man of Sin⁹², and sets the mystery in motion⁹³.

89 Stephens, op.cit., p.350f; cf. Herodotus History 4.118, 8.22, Plutarch Moralia 150b, Xenophon Anabasis 1.14 (quoted in B IIIIn.45).

90 Stephens, op.cit., p.340.

91 Stephens, op.cit., p.143-7.

92 Stephens, op.cit., p.353-5.

93 Stephens, op.cit., p.348.

There are four major points of criticism to examine, and three minor points.

a) The error: Stephens suggests that 1 Thessalonians was misunderstood because of its emphasis on the present as the time of salvation and blessing. It can scarcely be claimed, however, that 1 Thessalonians disregards the future aspect of salvation. Indeed, 1.10 has a marked futuristic emphasis, and hence is often suspected as nonpauline: ἀναμένειν τὸν Ἰῶν. αὐτοῦ ἐκ τῶν οὐρανῶν... Ἰησοῦν τὸν σὺσάμενον ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἄγνης τῆς ἐρχομένης . If the Thessalonians knew that they were waiting for Jesus to come and rescue them from the wrath, they could scarcely think that his presence with them now was definitive and final. 2.12, 19, 3.13, 4.16 and 5.23 could also hardly be understood as saying that the Day was present: they all look to a future goal of kingdom, glory and coming of the Lord. 1 Thessalonians certainly does teach about present possession of the Spirit, about God's power, salvation, and ethical standards, but these do not erase the references to future completion of salvation.

b) οὐδατέ: Stephens translated v.6 "you are experiencing the κατέχον in order that/so that he may be revealed". It may be a purpose or result clause⁹⁴. But neither alternative makes much sense. If it is purpose, the purpose of their knowing (experiencing) the κατέχον is that Anomos may be revealed: if result, the result of their knowing/experiencing the κατέχον is that Anomos will be revealed.

⁹⁴ Stephens, op.cit., p.341.

Stephens does not explain how their knowledge of the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ can either result in, or aim towards, the revelation of the Anomos. The sentence makes better sense if $\epsilon\acute{\iota}\varsigma\ \tau\acute{o}$ is related not to $\acute{o}\acute{\iota}\delta\alpha\tau\epsilon$ but to the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$. Then the purpose or result of the present activity of the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ is the revelation of the Anomos at the proper time: the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ is at work now, with a view to the future revelation of the Anomos. The $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ operates only in relation to the Anomos; it both purposes, and results in, the revelation of the Anomos at a future date.

There is no reason why $\acute{o}\acute{\iota}\delta\alpha\tau\epsilon$ should be translated "experience". They are not experiencing God's restraining; they are experiencing God by being Christians, and they know that the Man of Sin has not come - but this is intellectual knowledge, not experiential knowledge.

c) $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu / \omega\nu$: If the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ operated in order that/with the result that the Anomos is revealed $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \tau\acute{o}\ \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \kappa\alpha\lambda\omicron\upsilon\omega$ and if the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ is a benign influence, this implies that it is God's plan which the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ puts into operation. The point of dispute with Stephens arises in that he interprets the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ as God's plan tout simplement: although there are undertones of the divine eschatological plan, the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ means more than this. 2 Thess 2.1-12 speaks of agents of God's will, which, ironically, are a mixture of his own and the Enemy's agents. The Anomos is Satan's instrument; the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu / \omega\nu$, although in other respects he may be neutral, is used in this function to God's end. He may be a supernatural emissary wholly in God's service and acting directly on the devil, or the

same working in a human or influencing human affairs (social order, spread of the gospel, etc.), or he may be one of the latter without overtones of supernatural (ie. angelic) influence. Either way, it is not enough - although not exactly incorrect - to interpret the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\lambda\omicron\nu$ / $\omega\nu$ as God and his plan.

d) God's causation: Stephens places too much emphasis on God's causation, and does not attempt to define the respective roles of God and Satan. He insists that only God would have the right and authority to bring about an anti-parousia to Christ⁹⁵, that God sets the mystery in operation⁹⁶, and sends the Lie⁹⁷. But he also stresses the Satanic possession of the Anomos - Satan owns and controls him⁹⁸; his parousia is by Satan's $\epsilon\nu\epsilon\pi\omicron\rho\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ (v.9). If God sends the Man of Sin, it can only be via Satan, as it were, since the Man of Sin is empowered and controlled by Satan; this involves God's withdrawing his restraint on Satan. The $\kappa\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota$ of v.11 must therefore consist of passive permitting rather than active causation, and is expressed actively to bring out the fact that God's ends are ironically achieved by his enemy. Unbelievers receive their just reward (delusion) even before the judgment. V.11 is then almost a secondary thought: that God sanctions the effects of deceit, because of unbelief. Stephens hints at this understanding

⁹⁵ Stephens, op.cit., p.342.

⁹⁶ Stephens, op.cit., p.348.

⁹⁷ Stephens, op.cit., p.352.

⁹⁸ Stephens, op.cit., p.205.

when he says that God's sending the Lie is the equivalent of God's withdrawing (v.7)⁹⁹, which supports our understanding of ἔλαλει as permissive action, passive in sense.

e) Stephens' criteria for testing an interpretation of the κατέχων are:

- i) It should be a common meaning of κατέχειν
- ii) The context of 2 Thess 2 should be considered
- iii) It should have relevance to the Thessalonian community
- iv) The masculine and neuter participles should be explained
- v) The interpretation should be reconcilable with Paul's theology¹⁰⁰.

Of these, (i), (iii), require modifying comment.

i): Since the word is not used elsewhere in the NT in an apocalyptic context it is very difficult to know which would be a likely or unlikely meaning here.

iii): The relevance of the κατέχων may be its function alone (which is the reason for mentioning it in 2 Thess 2) not what or who exercises that function (contra Giblin, for whom relevance to the community means that the κατέχων/ων must be a problem and/or person within the community). If the Thessalonians' problem is "when is the Day?", then to answer "not yet, because there is something preventing the precursor" is relevant to them, even if κατέχων/ων only means "something/someone preventing".

f) Satanic possession of the Man of Sin

Stephens traces the Jewish idea of Satanic possession¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Stephens, op.cit., p.355.

¹⁰⁰ Stephens, op.cit., p.304f.

¹⁰¹ Stephens, op.cit., p.206ff.

and examines NT references to Satanic possession (Judas, Jn 6.70, 13.2, 27; Jews Jn 8.44; apostates 1 Jn 3.8; heretics 1 Tim 4.1f; Ananias Acts 5.3; and 1 Cor 5.5)¹⁰² and to ἐνεργεῖα as the possessing power of God (Phil 2.13, 3.21, Eph 1.19, 3.7)¹⁰³. The real parallel to Stephens' theory of the Satanic possession of the Man of Sin is found in the ἐνεργεῖα references above where he sees God active in individuals by his possessing power. But if the idea of possession is present in those texts, it is by no means their main idea: God working within an individual is not possession. The idea of possession has overtones of loss of personal control which is foreign to Paul's thought. If the Man of Sin is totally manipulated by Satan, then the inward activity of God in a person is not a parallel concept. It is also an oversimplification to see the same kind of power operative in every context: for example, empowering to speak the word (Eph 3.7) is different from subjugating a rebellious creation (Phil 3.21). The concept of possession is in any case superfluous to an understanding of those texts.

The other NT instances of Satanic possession are not all close parallels to the Man of Sin: to be the children of the devil (Jn 8.44), to listen to demons (1 Tim 1.4f) to be 'of the devil' (1 Jn 3.8) only imply that these persons are on the side of the devil rather than of God.

¹⁰² Stephens, op.cit., p.212ff.

¹⁰³ Stephens, op.cit., p.203-6.

The Judas and Ananias references are closer, but here the vocabulary of 2 Thess 2.9 is not found (ἐνέργεια, δυνάμις, ἀλατῆ): the devil enters into Judas (εἰς ἡλθεῖν Jn 13.27) and fills Ananias (ἐληήρωσεν Acts 5.3).

It is not disputed that the Man of Sin is controlled by Satan; merely that the NT evidence for Satanic possession adduced by Stephens is not satisfactory.

g) The mystery of lawlessness

Stephens translates v.7a "for the secret plan of (belonging to) Anomia is already at work": the emphasis is on a production of the Anomos, not evil leading up to the Anomos. Anomia is in effect personified¹⁰⁴. But lawlessness has already been personified in the Anomos. Stephens is translating as if the text read τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ ἀνόμου. Where the personal aspect of Anomia is meant, it is expressed as ὁ ἀνεργῶλος τῆς ἀνομίας (v.3) or ὁ ἀνόμος (v.8). V.7 therefore means that the abstract Anomia is working in secret. Whether this is the hidden and suppressed activity of the Anomos, or the suppressed activity of evil which will culminate, when released, in a personal manifestation, the Anomos, is not explained by Paul.

In conclusion, four points of appreciative comment about Stephens' thesis may be made.

- a) The problem in Thessalonica was not about the delay of the parousia but the presence of the Day (ἐνεστήκεν)¹⁰⁵.
- b) The two signs of the Day are the apostasy and the Man

¹⁰⁴ Stephens, op.cit., p.348.

¹⁰⁵ Stephens, op.cit., p.325.

of Sin¹⁰⁶. The *κατέχον* therefore, not being a sign in the same way, does not necessarily have to be visible to, or directly experienced by the community (Stephens does not draw this conclusion).

c) *σαλευθῆναι* and *εποσεισθαι* denote respectively the disturbance of intellectual faculties and emotions¹⁰⁷.

Again, Stephens draws no conclusion from this, but it does at least demonstrate that Paul's understanding of the error led him to expect that it would affect them in both ways.

d) The Man of Sin sets himself above all deity, and is therefore not to be limited to any one religious group¹⁰⁸.

So he cannot be understood merely as a Jewish pseudo-Messiah - although to the Jews he might appear as such in order to convince them of his authenticity.

Some of these points will be taken up later as we work out a positive approach to 2 Thess 2.1-12.

¹⁰⁶ Stephens, op.cit., p.45.

¹⁰⁷ Stephens, op.cit., p.87-90.

¹⁰⁸ Stephens, op.cit., p.202.

B.V: 2 Thess 2.1-12, τὸ κατέχον as the preaching of the gospel

1. Introduction

This theory has recently been adopted, developed and persuasively argued by O. Cullmann¹. It dates back to Theodoret², who thought that by the κατέχον Paul meant God's decree of when the Man of Sin should be revealed, and the necessity for the gospel to be preached over all the world.

Cullmann argues that the κατέχον is a retarding factor which delays the Antichrist by achieving its own eschatological task. He looks to Jewish traditions about the End for the key to its interpretation, and finds this in discussions about the delay of the Messianic age. The Messiah is believed to be withheld until all Israel repents³; and the Christian equivalent of this is the necessity to preach the gospel universally so that all have a chance to repent, and the

¹ Cullmann argues his case in two essays: "Eschatologie und Mission", Vorträge und Aufsätze 1925-62 (J.C.B.Mohr, Tübingen, 1966), p.348-360 (abbreviated hereafter as V and A); "Le caractere eschatologique du devoir missionnaire et de la conscience apostolique de S. Paul. Étude sur le κατέχον de 2 Thess 2.6f", Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses (1936), p.210-245. (Abbreviated hereafter RHPR).

² Theodoret comm. ad loc., cf. Calvin comm. ad loc.

³ San 97b: "The Messiah cannot come until the people repent and perfectly fulfil the law. 'If all Israel would together repent for a whole day, the redemption by Messiah would ensue'. If Israel would only keep two Sabbaths properly, we should be immediately redeemed", (Schürer, History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (Revised and edited by G.Vermes and F.Millar, T. & T.Clark, Edinburgh, 1973), II ii 163).

judgment of God will be just. "Le κατέχων de 2 Thess 2.6f, considéré sous la forme de la prédication de l'évangile aux païens, n'est donc que la transposition sur le plan chrétien, du לְדַבֵּרֵי־יְהוָה juif qui indique la nécessité de la repentance comme condition préalable de la réalisation du règne messianique"⁴. Non-Pauline support for this theory is found in Rev 6.1-8, Acts 1.6ff, 10.42, 3.19ff, Mt 28.19. Cullmann does not discuss at length the question whether the Synoptic apocalypse, (especially Mk 13.10, Mt 24.14, where the preaching of the gospel before the End is mentioned) is dependent on 2 Thess 2 or vice versa: he believes that the content of the Synoptic Apocalypse was widely known and the teaching about preaching before the End was a common conviction of the first century church. Pauline support for the theory is found in Rom 10.14 and 11.25⁵.

The κατέχων is according to Cullmann Paul himself, who identifies himself with the task of mission to the Gentiles and had a very vivid consciousness of vocation to that mission. The κατέχων is not God himself (as in the Jewish reason for the Messiah's delay) but his instrument, and Paul carries out God's purpose of universal proclamation of the gospel. The removal of the κατέχων is Paul's death when he will have completed his eschatological task⁶. The continuance of mission beyond Paul's death is explained by Cullmann as a repetition of the signs of the End in every

⁴ RHPR, p.226.

⁵ RHPR, p.229-237, V & A, p.353-7.

⁶ RHPR, p.240-43, V & A, p.358f.

age: the church enters into Paul's task and every generation must evangelize the heathen afresh⁷. The personification of the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ in 2 Thess 2 derives from the Jewish expectation of Elijah who would be the precursor of the Messiah and would preach repentance (Mal 3.1)⁸.

Cullmann holds that there must be a mention of preaching in 2 Thess 2.1-8 because the following passages, v.9-12, and ch.3 require it. Unless the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ is so understood, there is no sequence of thought linking these passages, which deal with the consequences of not heeding the gospel, Paul's need of prayer for his mission and the proper Christian diligence resulting from an awareness of the urgent task of mission⁹.

2. Criticism

There are a number of brief points of criticism, but we shall devote most of our attention to a comparison of 2 Thess 2.6f with the Synoptic Apocalypse references to gospel preaching, in order to test Cullmann's theory in a way which he does not seem to have explored. The briefer points will be dealt with first.

a) The $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ not only fights the Man of Sin but retards him, so Cullmann concludes that it must have its own eschatological task to accomplish¹⁰. However, this entity is called the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ because the function in question is its restraining effect. Whether this is delay or (almost) physical restraint is immaterial, and the important fact is

⁷ V & A, p.359.

⁸ RHPR, p.227f.

⁹ RHPR, p.243f, V & A, p.358.

¹⁰ RHPR, p.217.

simply that the Man of Sin cannot come while the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ is active. If it has another function, Paul is not concerned with it here, and there is no way that we can deduce by logic that the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ has another distinct task.

b) Cullmann places much weight on the Jewish antecedent of the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ as a parallel concept; but he also states that the $\nu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ of v.6 introduces a new sign of the End, which has not occurred before in Jewish teaching¹¹. This is contradictory. If Cullman means "new" only in the sense of adapted, then this element is no more new than the rest of the apocalyptic in 2 Thess 2; it has all been adapted from Jewish (or other) sources.

c) There is obvious similarity but also fundamental difference between the necessity for Israel to be totally righteous for the Messiah to be sent, and the Christian task of evangelism. The latter may be aiming at world-wide repentance, but can achieve at most only universal knowledge of the gospel. The effects of the mission were more a polarization of good and evil than universal repentance; and its aim was not so much to convert the world in order that Christ might return, as to spread the gospel on the basis of which men would be judged when Christ returned. Cullmann's theory almost turns the Christian mission into an inhibition of Christ's return: this is a wrong emphasis. Furthermore, the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omicron\nu$ of 2 Thess 2.6f is not said to

¹¹ Ibid.

prevent Christ's parousia, but that of the Man of Sin. Since the latter must precede the former, the κατέχων is indirectly affecting the time of Christ's parousia, but this cannot be compared with the direct causation of the Jewish concept where the Messiah will come immediately upon nationwide repentance.

d) Cullmann explains the origin of the κατέχων as the eschatological figure of Elijah: but the Synoptics are unanimous in identifying John the Baptist as the predicted Elijah figure (Mt 17.12f, Mk 9.13, Lk 1.17). If the two witnesses of Rev 11.3ff are Moses and Elijah, this is not a prediction of their literal return but a symbolic expression of the mission of the whole church, from the days of John the Baptist and Jesus' ministry onwards. Paul may be a part of this mission but he cannot legitimately be seen as the predicted Elijah.

e) Cullmann's non-Pauline evidence is weak. It is not at all certain that the white horse of Rev 6.1-8 signifies gospel preaching: this interpretation is reached by linking 6.1f with 19.11f where the rider of the white horse is Christ. But the close context is more significant than a passage thirteen chapters away, and Cullmann's interpretation violates the coherence and sequence of thought in ch.6. The other three horses are destructive and evil, and for the series to be coherent, the first horse should also be destructive, it probably stands for war (cf. Mt 24.6). Further, when the saints ask "how long" (Rev 6.9-11) the

answer is, when the number of martyrdoms is complete, not when the gospel has been preached everywhere, which we might expect if the white horse is meant to signify the preaching of the gospel.

Acts 1.6ff: here Jesus answers the disciples' question about when the kingdom will come, not by direct reference to their mission, but by saying that the times are not for them to know, and then deliberately diverting their attention from the unknown future to their present concern, which is mission. No connection is made between the completion of the mission and the End.

Mt 28.19f: again, in this commission, Jesus is not limiting the interval before the End to the length of the mission, but is simply assuring the disciples of his power in them as they preach, right up until the End.

Acts 10.42: this verse does show that part of the content of the preaching was that Christ would judge all men; but it does not say that the very preaching ushers in the judgment, not does it even mention Christ's return.

Acts 3.19f: this is the best support for Cullmann's case: the people are urged to repent in order that (ἐλως εἰς) the Christ may be sent. However, it goes on to say that he will remain in heaven until, the divinely appointed time, which weakens the point.

f) Cullmann uses Rom 10.14 and 11.25f as Pauline support and argues that Paul later thought the conversion of the Jews would follow the Gentile mission, since many Jews had rejected the gospel. But this makes the conversion of the Jews contemporaneous with the coming of the Man of Sin after

the restraint of the Gentile mission had been removed, which is rather an unlikely sequence of events. If the Jews had not believed the gospel before the final outbreak of evil, they are not likely to resist the deceiving work of the Man of Sin. Does Cullmann mean that the *κατέχων* was restraining not the Man of Sin but the conversion of the Jews; or that the *κατέχων* includes both the Gentile mission and the conversion of the Jews?

g) The rest of 2 Thessalonians does not require a mention of preaching in 2.1-8: v.9-12 are quite comprehensible as they stand, and if "the truth" needs elucidation, 1.8 mentions the gospel and 1.10 the testimony of the missionaries. The evangelism and action of ch.3 are stimulated, according to Cullmann, by a correct understanding of the *κατέχων* : but ch.3 does not refer back to the *κατέχων* ; and the urgency of Paul's mission springs not from the *κατέχων* but from the nearness of the judgment which operates on the basis of response to the gospel. (Cf.1.5-10, 2.9-14). There is no necessity for the theme of preaching to appear within 2.1-8. Moreover, the action of 3.6ff is almost irrelevant to Cullmann's theory: it is not evangelism which Paul urges the idlers to be active in, but daily secular work. He does not even mention the adverse impression of Christianity which outsiders might receive from their idleness, which might affect receptivity to the gospel.

h) Commenting on J. Munck, who follows Cullmann¹², W.D. Davies

¹² J. Munck, Paul and the Salvation of Mankind (SCM, London, 1959), p.38-40.

writes "Was Paul so completely lacking in geographic awareness in his missionary activity ... as Professor Munck implies?"¹³. Acts shows that it was not eschatological dogma which dictated the mission but the leading of the Spirit¹⁴. These two may not be as mutually exclusive as Davies seems to imply, but Acts does not give evidence of a primarily eschatological motive for mission (that is, that the mission had to be completed before the parousia could take place), and Paul must surely have been aware that he was not singlehandedly reaching the whole world (even the whole known world).

j) A criticism of Cullmann's theory by comparing 2 Thess 2.6f with the Synoptic Apocalypse

Cullmann's basis for using the Synoptic discourse to support his theory is simply that the ideas in the discourse, and specifically the preaching of the gospel before the End, were common convictions in the early church. He does not actually state that Paul knew the discourse but assumes that he was familiar with the material in it. If Paul did not know the material, Cullmann's case at least loses an important support; or if it could be proved that the whole idea of gospel preaching before the End was post-Pauline, this would seriously damage Cullmann's case. But there is no need to suppose either of these possibilities: the eschatological discourse is generally believed to be a

¹³ W.D.Davies, Christian Origins and Judaism, (Darton, Longman and Todd, London, 1962), p.197.

¹⁴ Davies, op.cit., p.198.

relatively self-contained discourse incorporated into the gospels after independent circulation, and therefore with a considerable pre-history. It was not necessarily a "little apocalypse" but probably a highly complex compilation of dominical sayings with suitable redactional elements¹⁵. In fact, the arguments below do not depend on any detailed theory about the discourse: the only presuppositions are Cullmann's own, that Paul and the Synoptics shared a common tradition about the End and the preaching of the gospel as related to the End¹⁶.

Given that Paul was familiar with the material of the discourse, including Mk 13.10, Mt 24.14, what implications does this have for Cullmann's understanding of the *apokalypsis* as referring to gospel preaching?

Paul has been informed about Christian traditions of the End: signs, preliminaries, what to expect. Among this is

¹⁵ See G.R.Beasley-Murray, Jesus and the Future, (Macmillan, London, 1954), for criticism of the little apocalypse theory and arguments in favour of the unity and reliability of the discourse. J.B.Orchard ("Thessalonians and the Synoptic Gospels", Biblica 19 (1938), p.19-42) gives evidence of literary dependence of 2 Thess 2 on Mt 24 (though Orchard interprets the *κατέχου* as the fall of Jerusalem, not gospel preaching). R.H.Shaw ("A conjecture on the signs of the End", ATR 47 (1965), p.96-102) represents the opposite position, that there is no connection between 2 Thess 2 and the Synoptic Apocalypse, the former being Jewish apocalyptic in a Christian setting.

¹⁶ L.Hartman (Prophecy Interpreted, Collectanea Biblica, N.T. Series i (Upsala, 1966), and R.J.Peterson ("The Structure and Purpose of 2 Thessalonians", Ph.D. thesis, Harvard, 1967) both list similarities between 2 Thess 2 and the Synoptic Apocalypse (Hartman, p.197f, Peterson, p.82-100).

the mission of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. He himself has made that mission his prime concern and identifies himself with it as apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11.13) whereas the Jerusalem apostles were to work among the Jews (Gal 2.7f)¹⁷. When the Thessalonians came to rash conclusions about the imminence of the End, Paul wrote to remind them of the teaching he had already passed on to them, and wrote, most probably, in definite and clear terms so as to drive his point home and unfailingly remind them of his oral instruction. So we read of the growth of evil before the End and of the Man of Sin preceding the parousia of Christ. In the middle occurs the term *κατέχον/ων* which plays a vital part in the unfolding of the events of the End by preventing the Man of Sin from coming until it is removed. According to Cullmann, this is Paul's way of referring to the mission of the church. It obviously differs from Mk 13.10 in a number of respects, and for the case to be borne out there must be convincing explanations for the differences.

i) 2 Thess 2.6f is a veiled allusion; Mk 13.10 mentions gospel preaching explicitly. What reason could Paul have for concealing his reference? Elsewhere he is very free in

¹⁷ Although the reason for this agreement may have been either to avoid 'treading on each other's toes' (cf. Paul's motive in Rom 15.20f and 2 Cor 10.16) or to make sure the ground was properly covered with a view to hastening the End. In the context, the debate is not about why Paul is doing his mission at all, but how he is doing it - whether his gospel is authentic. The doubt is not whether the Gentiles should be evangelized but how they should be admitted to the church. The question of sharing the burden of work before the End is not considered.

speaking of mission, even boasts of it (Rom 1.10-15, 1 Cor 1.17, 2 Cor 2.12, Gal 1, Eph 3.2, Phil 1.18, Col 1.5f,23). If he was using this term to refer to one aspect of gospel preaching - its effect on the nearness of the End, for example - one would expect him to include an explanation of his enigmatic term.

ii) The Synoptic discourse represents gospel preaching not as a restraint but as a condition. These are different concepts. A restraint is an active thing (which could therefore easily be personified, cf. iii); something which plays a role in history and apocalyptic. A condition is a circumstance: neuter, abstract and objective. A condition is also a more positive entity: the purpose of the interim period is gospel preaching, which is logical since the judgment which takes place at the parousia is based on response to the gospel. As a restraint, gospel preaching is almost prolonging the agony, and is negative: not until this is dispensed with can the real drama start and history be wound up¹⁸.

iii) Mk 13.10 does not help us to understand the *κατέχω*. There is no personal agent, let alone an individual agent, in the discourse, and certainly no prophecy of a definitive

¹⁸ By "condition" I mean either logical necessity - "it stands to reason" - or divine command - "thou shalt preach the gospel to all nations before the End can come".

figure in the mission to the Gentiles¹⁹. This problem would be easier to solve if Mk 13 were dependent on Paul for its understanding of mission: once Paul had died or was inactive, and the Man of Sin still had not materialized, Paul's personal role would be suppressed in the tradition to allow for a longer period of salvation-history. But such an error in apostolic teaching would seriously undermine Paul's authority and call into question his whole apprehension of mission. Where Paul's authority was questioned, as for example in Corinth, it was not so far as we know over this issue, and in Paul's self-defence he never mentions any special authority by virtue of being the definitive preacher to the Gentiles. The main subject of 2 Corinthians is Paul and his mission, but there is not a single hint of his rôle of holding up the Man of Sin by his preaching. He repeatedly emphasises his personal danger, even to the point of expecting death daily (1.8f, 4.8-11, 6.4f) but never mentions any eschatological consequences of his death. When he is at his most egotistical, driven to boasting (albeit satirically), he speaks of his ministry of reconciliation (5.18-20), of administering life or death (2.14-16), of his pride in opening up new fields of mission beyond where others have reached (10.15f), his right to boast of his

¹⁹ M. Smith ("Pauline problems à propos of J. Munck 'Paulus und die Heilsgeschichte'", HTR 50 (1957), p.107-131) observes that Munck's calling Paul the apostle to the Gentiles is based on Gal 2.7, the division of the mission field. But neither party had the field to divide. Paul was not the only missionary to the Gentiles: the context links him with Barnabas. Neither did the Jerusalem group have a monopoly on the Jews, especially in the Diaspora. The contrast is based on Peter as the outstanding apostle of the Jerusalem group; so Paul is claiming not exclusiveness but pre-eminence. His habitual use of the first person singular pronoun does not imply there were no other workers. When claiming authority, he says not "am I not the apostle to the Gentiles" but, "am I not an apostle" (1 Cor 9.1). Smith thinks that Munck is trying to prove that Paul was an egomaniac.

authority without shame (10.8), his list of credentials both in the past and in his present sufferings (11.22-29) - but in all this he never depicts himself as playing any definitive rôle in eschatology. This seems impossible to reconcile with a burning conviction that he alone is withholding the final outbreak of evil which would follow at his death.

iv) The main point about the *κατέχον* is that when it is removed, the Man of Sin may come: but in Mk 13, nothing is said about the future removal of the necessity (*δέξις*) of gospel preaching, let alone of its agent.

v) The relation between gospel preaching and the End is not as clear in the Synoptic discourse as an equation with 2 Thess 2.6f requires. Mk 13 only mentions the End explicitly in v.7 and 13; v.10 would fit much better in context if *πρωτον* referred not to the End but to the subject of the contextual verses: persecution, suffering and death. In fact, if *τέλος* in v.13 means the End (parousia) the logical conclusion is that anyone who is put to death (v.12) will not have endured to the End and will therefore not be saved. This would be absurd. Mark's *πρωτον* is the equivalent of Luke's *πρὸ θεῶν τούτων πάντων* (21.12): before the famines, earthquakes and wars will come persecution as a result of preaching the gospel. What concerned Jesus' disciples (take heed to yourselves Mk 13.9) was the imminent persecution, rather than the political and cosmic signs. Luke does have the concept of events preparatory to the End stated explicitly (21.9, cf. Mk 13.7) but this is not used in v.13, Luke's version of Mk 13.10: *ἀποβήσεται ὑμῶν εἰς μαρτύριον*. Again, the End is not mentioned in Lk 21.19, Luke's parallel to Mk 13.13: *ἐν τῇ ὕσμονῃ ὑμῶν κτήσεσθαι τὰς ψυχὰς ὑμῶν*. So Luke does use *τέλος* in this context for the end of history (v.9), but he does not connect it with gospel preaching, and he supports the view that Mk 13.13 does not mean the end of

history. If $\alpha\rho\omega\tau\omicron\nu$ in Mk 13.10 refers to the End, it is without specific reference in the context.

Matthew transfers the material of Mk 13.9-13 to the mission of the twelve at 10.17-22. Beasley-Murray²⁰ observes that this cannot be the original setting of the pericope because opposition was not manifest in such a way at that stage: trials before kings and rulers are out of place in this mission. An interesting point, however, in view of the omission of Mk.13.10, is v.23, which states that the disciples will not have finished the mission before the Son of Man comes. That may be understood as set in the brief mission during Jesus' ministry when the mission to Israel could not be completed in the time available; but Matthew has retained it linked with a pericope that really concerns the later mission of the church. Read in this light it provides a striking contrast to the idea that the End cannot come until the mission has been completed²¹. Even in Mt 24.14 where the preaching of the gospel is linked with the coming of the End, the connection is vague and unspecified. The only definite conclusion we can draw from this verse is that before the End comes, the gospel will be being preached all over the world to all nations. $\text{καὶ τότε ἤξει τὸ τέλος}$ is not strong enough to paraphrase as "and only after that will the End be able to come".

²⁰ Beasley-Murray, op.cit., p.211.

²¹ The reference to the "towns of Israel" need not make this verse inapplicable to the Gentile mission - is it an instinctive allusion to Is 40.9? Gentiles as well as Jews are in mind in Matthew, as v.18 says.

So no Synoptic text, including Mk 13.10, has a causative link between gospel preaching and the End. The most they definitely state is that the period before the End will be an opportunity (Lk 21.13) to preach the gospel, or simply that it will be taking place (Mt 24.14, Mk 13.10) as indeed is logically necessary (δεῖ) before judgment can take place. They do not speak of necessary completion or of cessation upon completion.

If in the traditions Paul had received there was no direct causative link between gospel preaching and the End - and if there were, one would expect to find it preserved in the extant forms of the discourse - then could Paul possibly have used the fact of the gospel being preached at the moment as a proof that the End had not come? Our investigation of the Synoptic Apocalypse and 2 Thess 2.6f has failed to substantiate Cullmann's theory: the κατέχου is not the preaching of the gospel.

B.VI. 2 Thess 2.1-12: the interpretation of C.H. Giblin

1 Introduction

In 1967 a major work on 2 Thessalonians by C.H. Giblin was published. This book propounded a radically new theory of interpretation departing fundamentally from previous scholarship, which though divided had followed a limited set of variations of interpretations. Giblin's work therefore deserves individual attention, and this chapter sets out a number of criticisms and reservations.

The main interest in Giblin's interpretation lies in the ending supplied to the anacoluthon of v.3f and his understanding of v.6-8 with the enigmatic figures of the *κατ'εχων/ων* and the *ἀναστασις* (the latter is translated "Rebel" by Giblin and will therefore be referred to as such throughout). It would be impossible to give an adequate summary of the whole book here, but a brief explanation of these most pertinent points should be sufficient.

Where Paul breaks off at the end of v.4 without completing the sentence, the usual assumption is that his train of thought ran thus: "do not be deceived by anything that says that the Day of the Lord is here: for unless the apostasy and the Rebel come first, the Day will not come". Giblin challenges this on the grounds that Paul's concern is not with the date of the End but with the Thessalonians' understanding of the conditions for the Day's arrival, which are due to its nature as a Day of judgment and salvation¹. Hence he enlarges on the negative conditions of

¹ C.H.Giblin, The Threat to Faith. An exegetical and theological re-examination of 2 Thess 2 (Pontifical Biblical Institute, Rome, 1967), p.123.

apostasy, Rebel, *κατέχων /ων* and mystery of lawlessness. These are not enigmatic figures of the future about which the Thessalonians have been informed; neither do the *κατέχων* and Rebel represent opposing sides in the apocalyptic struggle between good and evil. The *κατέχων* is not a benign force: it does not restrain the Rebel. Gibling interprets the *κατέχων* as a "Seizing Power" according to the usage of pagan pseudo-prophetic seizure in Dionysiac ecstasy and the cult of Serapis², and sees it embodied in an anti-charismatic or pseudo-charismatic activity in Thessalonica which had caused the apocalyptic confusion³. The "spirit" of v.2 alludes to false prophecy given within the community by the *κατέχων*. The Thessalonians thus "know" the *κατέχων* not conceptually but experientially: they are seeing him at work now⁴. Gibling explains the relations between apostasy, mystery, *κατέχων* and Rebel thus: the apostasy and mystery are personalized and concretized in the *κατέχων /ων* and ultimately in the Rebel. Apostasy and Rebel find "proportionate verification" in the *κατέχων* of the community, which is the mystery of the rebellion⁵: ie. they are witnessing among them a representative of the pseudo-charismatic activity of deception. The *κατέχων* will eventually be ousted and the Rebel will be shown up in his true colours by the parousia of Christ the Judge. Thus v.8 refers not to the

² Gibling, op.cit., p.197.

³ Gibling, op.cit., p.151f, p.200f.

⁴ Gibling, op.cit., p.164f.

⁵ Gibling, op.cit., p.226.

appearance of the Rebel in the world and his subsequent destruction by Christ but to his revelation in his true nature when Christ comes⁶. The work of v.9-12 is already in process through the *κατέχων*. The Rebel is not an historical person whom the Thessalonians or Paul could name and date: if he is to have an historical realization it is entirely subordinate in importance to his theological and symbolic significance⁷. He represents error, pseudo-charisma, as against truth.

Giblin's work is extremely painstaking and he has succeeded in casting many accepted theories and assumptions into the melting pot. It is to be hoped that his stimulating influence will result in a consensus on a more satisfactory than resolution to the problems of 2 Thess 2/has hitherto been found.

2. Criticism

a) Signs of the End do not necessarily imply a datable End

Giblin's main objection to 'signs' is against the attempt to date the parousia, but his attack is misdirected. The prevalent interpretation of the anacoluthon which he rejects, does not suppose that in saying "the Day has not yet come" (or words to that effect) Paul implies that he knows the date when it will come: he implies simply what is supplied, namely a "not yet". The reference is to the present,

⁶ Giblin, op.cit., p.232.

⁷ Giblin, op.cit., p.72, 97.

not to an irrelevant future (Giblin emphasises the present relevance of the passage): as far as now is concerned, the Day has not come; and as for when, that is unknown (cf. 1 Thess 5.1-11), but we do know that these circumstances will precede it (cf. 2 Thess 2.3-12). It is the Thessalonians' behaviour, state of mind and understanding now that concerns Paul. Giblin is overcautious about 'signs'. They can lead to speculation about 'clock-time' but not if properly understood, and it is quite possible to juxtapose 1 Thess 5 with 2 Thess 2 and understand each in the light of the other. Giblin is quite right to state that "biblical signs concern rather the way things work out, the qualitative aspects of time unfulfilled related to time fulfilled"⁸, but he does not credit most interpreters of 2 Thess 2 with this enlightened viewpoint. Giblin asserts that the appearance of the Rebel "at his own proper time" dismisses the "purely clock-and-calendar aspects of his appearance"⁹. But it explicitly mentions time, and time is chronological. Giblin presumably means that the phrase is a warning against trying to deduce when the Rebel's time will be because all we know is that it will be at the appropriate time.

In interpreting *ὁ ἡμετέρος* v.6, Giblin presents experiential knowledge and conceptual knowledge of a date as exclusive alternatives¹⁰. There are however further possibilities

⁸ Giblin, op.cit., p.137n.

⁹ Giblin, op.cit., p.137.

¹⁰ Giblin, op.cit., p.163.

within the category of conceptual knowledge: especially as in the context, οἶδατε refers to knowledge of an entity, not of a date, and the immediate time reference (whether this refers to the time of knowledge or the action of the κατέχον) is νῦν . If this νῦν is non-temporal (meaning "now then, you know ...") the possibility that οἶδατε refers to conceptual knowledge of a date is still further reduced. In any case, it is not at all certain that the Thessalonians' knowledge should be carried through to naming the Rebel's proper time in v.6b.

Conceptual knowledge is not as such wrong or useless, as Giblin seems to presuppose. It is his insistence on Paul's present pastoral concern which leads him to interpret οἶδατε as experiential knowledge; but conceptual knowledge of certain facts, information, can be as important pastorally as experience. In Thessalonica, a firm grasp on the facts which Paul mentions in 2.1-12 would have prevented the situation described in v.2 which requires pastoral care, and Paul's response to the situation therefore includes a reminder of those facts.

ii) The distinction made by Giblin between sign and condition does not hold

Giblin sets out temporal and pastoral concern as the two alternatives for Paul's purpose in 2 Thess 2. He rejects temporal concern (ie. the presupposition of a datable parousia) and certain kinds of pastoral concern (eg. Frame's interpretation, that the purpose of the passage is to give assurance of salvation to the fainthearted) and posits the

specific pastoral concern of setting out "conditions for the manifestation of God's judgment and salvific power"¹¹. Giblin's rejection of temporal concern is due to his misunderstanding of the kind of sign seen in the chapter. Firstly, signs and conditions are very hard to distinguish: a sign indicates that an event can and must come - in other words, that it is about to come; a condition for an event implies that the event can come when it is fulfilled, and if there are no more conditions, that it is about to come. Secondly, signs are not arbitrary in kind: there is logical consistency between a sign and that which it symbolizes or presages, so that it is no wonder that the signs for the End - apostasy, rebellion, lawlessness - are in accordance with the nature of the End (in its judgmental character, in this case). They do not have to be designated "negative conditions"¹². Giblin tries to distinguish between thinking of the Day of the Lord as just a point in time (the 'sign' aspect) or as a time of judgment or deliverance (for which conditions are more appropriate than signs)¹³ and holds that when Paul speaks of the Day "in this fully eschatological sense" (presumably meaning the parousia) he means the Day of judgment and salvation. But unless Paul himself tells us, or at least implies it, we cannot tell how he thought of the Day in each context, whether in terms of its time or character or both. In 2 Thess 2 the immediate emphasis

¹¹ Giblin, op.cit., p.80 on apostasy, et passim.

¹² passim.

¹³ Giblin, op.cit., p.136.

would seem to be when the Day is, or more specifically that it is not yet, rather than on its character, although that is further enlarged upon later in the passage, v.8ff. The Thessalonians were surely not confused over its character as a Day of judgment and salvation: indeed, because they knew that very well, their difficult situation may understandably have caused them to expect it before its time. Thirdly, to see certain future negative conditions as essential for God to come and judge seems to imply that there is not sufficient for him to judge already. This criticism hinges on the definition of a "condition", which Giblin does not provide - his use of the word is fluid. Sometimes it seems to mean circumstances¹⁴ and sometimes prerequisites¹⁵. This is confusing. Does Giblin mean "in these circumstances, God's judgment will appear", or "only if these have happened can God come to judge"?

iii) Negative conditions are not elsewhere substantiated

Giblin cites the negative conditions of non-justification in Romans, weakness in 2 Corinthians, imprisonment and tribulation in Philippians, insignificance and folly in 1 Corinthians¹⁶ which all pertain in entry on or fulfilment of the Christian

¹⁴ Eg. Giblin, op.cit., p.131, predictive testimony about the manifestation of God's sovereignty or the state of final glory.

¹⁵ Eg. Giblin, op.cit., p.135, "the éclat of God's victory is conditioned on the negative background ...".

¹⁶ Giblin, op.cit., p.274.

life, as supporting his theory of negative conditions pertaining to the return of the Lord. But these are not parallel concepts. The above conditions, especially non-justification, are necessary conditions for the attainment of faith, but in 2 Thess 2, pseudo-charismatic activity is not a necessary condition for Christ to return such that without such false prophecy within the church he could not return. That idea is false to the rest of Scripture¹⁷. The conviction of the NT, including Paul, is that Christ is just about to return - that final victory is virtually immediate, because decisive victory has already been won¹⁸. Where the NT speaks of conditions before Christ's return, it is in the sense of circumstances characterizing that period by which it may be recognised, not as prerequisites.

b) Threat to Faith

i) Are the Thessalonians threatened or not?

The title of the book is only appropriate if the Thessalonians are threatened, as representatives of "faith". But Giblin is unclear on this point. On the one hand he says that the apocalyptic conditions do not directly affect them: "Paul could speak of the ἀποστασία both in 2 Thess 2 and in the earlier catechesis which that text recalls without envisaging it as a defection of the Thessalonians or of Christians in general"¹⁹ because it is more the ultimate

¹⁷ Mk 13.7 δεῖ γενέσθαι has a different connotation: it is not "these things are necessary in order that the End can come", but more "these things have to go on for the time being". It almost warns against concluding that the sufferings and disasters indicate that the End is imminent.

¹⁸ Cf. O.Cullmann, Christ and Time (SCM, 1951).

¹⁹ Giblin, op.cit., p.88.

division between believers and unbelievers than rejection of the gospel. "For Paul, the evil in question is here conceived in opposition to faith rather than as unrighteousness"²⁰. Could Paul conceive of an abstract entity "faith" apart from the people who had faith or God who gave it? This is doubtful²¹. Either the faith of the Thessalonians is being threatened, in which case the apostasy and Rebel are real dangers for them, or the opposition is to God. Naturally an opponent of God has no faith in God (in the sense of saving faith, not belief in his existence, cf. Jas 2.19), but this is the underlying assumption, not the main theme of the passage, which is to depict the Rebel's usurpation of God's place.

On the other hand, the *κατέχου* constitutes a threat to the Thessalonians: it is the "present deception which attempts to victimize them"²². The key theme of 2 Thessalonians is faith, and the consummation of faith tested in trials and considered in apocalyptic perspective: this is the background to the request in ch.2 that they be not deceived, and v.6ff refer to a temptation against faith²³. The *κατέχου*

²⁰ Giblin, op.cit., p.136, of the Rebel.

²¹ Gal 3.23: "before faith came" is parallel to "until faith should be revealed" (v.23), and "until Christ came" (v.24). "Faith" here is a shorthand for Christ, or the gospel, or belief in Christ; cf. v.22, "what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe". Rom 10.17: "faith comes from what is heard" - the context is about those who preach and those who believe. Rom 14.23: "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" - the context is discussing the faith of individuals, cf.v.22. "the faith that you have".

²² Giblin, op.cit., p.246, cf.p.216.

²³ Giblin, op.cit., p.114.

(and mystery of lawlessness) is how the apostasy and Rebel "find proportionate verification in a fundamentally healthy community"²⁴. In the same breath, however, Giblin asserts both that Paul does not fear apostasy at Thessalonica and that "there is some real danger of confusion ... from within the community"²⁵. Later he underlines the first assertion: "he does not want to describe the threat as efficacious for there is no ἀποστασία or real danger of it at Thessalonica"²⁶. At this point Giblin seems to play down the rôle of the κατέχων so much that one wonders why twelve verses (or fourteen, in Giblin's opinion) are devoted to the problem it caused. Either the Thessalonians were in a bad state or they were not, and v.2 clearly indicates that they were. If only a small section of the community were affected, we would expect some indication of this. In ch.3 it is clear, from exhortations addressed as appropriate to those concerned and to others, that only some are ἄτακτοι and if, as Giblin suggests, the deception of 2.1ff originates with the ἄτακτοι ²⁷ there would be even more reason to expect differentiation. Even if no-one were deceived by the activity of the κατέχων, however, the presence of someone acting as κατέχων within the community indicates an instance of apostasy.

24 Giblin, op.cit., p.226.

25 Giblin, op.cit., p.226.

26 Giblin, op.cit., p.235.

27 Giblin, op.cit., p.243.

ii) Is the main concern of the passage truth versus error?

"The term [ie. end] of this one process and struggle is described as a final victory of truth over error"²⁸. This is not however apparent in the passage. The victory of v.8 is described as the Lord Jesus' victory over the Rebel. The activity of the latter previous to his defeat is subsequently described in terms of deception and lies, but more because to believe a lie is the just desert of unbelievers than because this is the subject of the whole text; and the delusion is said by Paul to be sent by God, v.11. Truth versus error is only a subdivision of the overall opposition between good and evil, which characterizes Christ and the Rebel, who are agents or manifestations of God and Satan.

"The manifestation of the Rebel consists in a manifestation of the great lie he embodies. He is manifested for the 'fake' he is"²⁹. The manifestation of v.8 is however successful in deceiving people, v.9-12: they do not see him as a fake. He has a real parousia and it is successful (by his standards). Only when Christ is also manifested, is he shown up as a fake by contrast. Giblin's interpretation of v.8a is necessitated by seeing the Rebel's work as already in progress through the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\omega\nu$, so that there is no final lawlessness left to be committed; the

²⁸ Giblin, op.cit., p.228.

²⁹ Giblin, op.cit., v.8, p.228.

revelation must then be of his true nature and thus be his judgment.

When the true Christ appears the Rebel is exposed as a false Christ, the Antichrist; present faith in Christ is maintained against the false alternatives of faith in other gods (eg. an Antichrist); but this is only to state that there is one God. It does not warrant Giblin's interpretation of the *κατέχων* as a deceiver in the area of faith.

c) The *κατέχων* and Rebel as two parts of the same process of pseudo-charismatic, anti-faith activity

i) *κατέχων* and Rebel as on the same 'side'

Giblin sees them as "two poles and representative figures of a single anti-faith process"³⁰. In fact, he classifies the *μυστήριον, κατέχων* and *ἄνομος* as basically the same thing. The mystery is personalized and concretized as the *κατέχων* and ultimately as the *ἄνομος*: the *κατέχων* is the proportionate representative of the *ἄνομος* in the Thessalonian community. This not only flies in the face of most scholarship but is unjustified by the text. The chief reason put forward seems to involve the question of restraint, binding. Giblin objects to the view that the *κατέχων* restrains the Rebel by pointing out that according to v.7a the mystery is already at work³¹. This does not involve a contradiction; however: lawlessness is at present a mystery because it is restrained. Giblin appears to think that

³⁰ Giblin, op.cit., p.96.

³¹ Giblin, op.cit., p.170f.

'bound' or 'restrained' mean inactive, whereas it only necessarily means limited. Certainly "κατέχω" should not readily be taken with the static connotation 'hold immovable' or 'prevent from acting (coming, etc.)'"³², but this is not the connotation usually understood. Comparisons with the frequent usage for holding onto a doctrine or practice³³ are irrelevant, for to hold on to a doctrine and to hold on to a person are different concepts, and the latter does connote some kind of limitation (whether for the person's good - to prevent their injury - or for the good of others, to prevent the person from injuring them. The latter would be the case in 2 Thess 2.6f). It is also not such a great leap from the sense of limiting truth (Rom 1.18,21, 7.6)³⁴ to limiting evil, especially as "κατέχω" is admitted by GIBLIN not to be a technical term in Paul.

ii) The κατέχων as a false prophet in the community, and as the cause of the error

In the role usually assigned to it, as a restraining force on the Rebel, "the κατέχων then stands in a class by itself, with no real bearing on the Thessalonians and completely other than the hostile forces or personages of which Paul speaks"³⁵. "No real bearing" is unexplained: this understanding of the κατέχων would seem to have as

³² GIBLIN, op.cit., p.187.

³³ GIBLIN, op.cit., p.188f.

³⁴ GIBLIN, op.cit., p.186f.

³⁵ GIBLIN, op.cit., p.167.

much bearing on the Thessalonians as other elements of the chapter. "Completely other than the hostile forces" overstates the case to make it appear ridiculous. If the *κατέχον* is opposed to the Rebel it is "other", but it is not therefore irrelevant. Its relevance lies in its very opposition. By being benign to the Thessalonians rather than hostile, it is not therefore irrelevant.

If the cause of the error is false prophecy³⁶ and this is referred to in v.6 as the situation which the Thessalonians are experiencing, it is strange that in v.2 Paul does not appear to know how the error has been spread. Either between v.2 and v.6 he has fixed on one of the three possibilities, or v.6 does not refer to the cause of the error at all. If Paul knew (or even guessed, or thought most likely) that the error arose from charismatic utterance and that this was an instance of the Rebel at work within the community (a proportionate verification), he would surely have included more explicit instructions in the letter on discernment of spiritual gifts, especially of prophecy. It is not enough to point to 1 Thess 5.9-12 and 2 Thess 2.2 as evidence that this was a slight issue at Thessalonica: 1 Thess 5 is before the event, as it were, and 2 Thess 2 only mentions *διὰ νεφάρως* as one possibility among three for the origin of the error. Not only instruction would be required, if such an effect was achieved as v.2 depicts, but a command

³⁶ Giblin, op.cit., p.204.

to root out the offenders. "Stigmatizing the error"³⁷ is scarcely sufficient, and in Giblein's paraphrase of v.7 the error is positively condoned: "but let the κατέχων be what he is right now, until he is ousted. He must be for the time being and play his part ..."³⁸. This is attributed to the "progression by which one's character or function is realized" but it is unlike Paũl to delay action after evil character and function are known. His usual method of dealing with an undisciplined element is to oust it: permanently (in this life: 1 Cor 5.5) or temporally by social ostracism (2 Thess 3). Giblein adds that Paul does not express the imperative "let the κατέχων be ..." in order to avoid showing approval, especially if the κατέχων should be verified concretely in a person in Thessalonica: but the impression is elsewhere given that Giblein does see the κατέχων concretely in a person in Thessalonica, not symbolically. If Paul is only conjecturing here, Giblein's interpretation of οὐδατε as experiential knowledge collapses.

Giblein admits that κατέχομενοι would be more appropriate than κατέχων to denote "actual possession" by an evil spirit³⁹ but believes that Paul avoided the former term because he did not mean to signify "actual possession" (Giblein's italics) since the community were "fundamentally healthy in the faith". This is the same contradiction as

³⁸ Giblein, op.cit., p.216.

³⁹ Giblein, op.cit., p.240.

we observed above⁴⁰; and it also provokes the question of the alternative to actual possession - slight possession? - sporadic possession? - feigned possession? Giblin leaves it to our imagination, but it makes the whole situation at Thessalonica rather hard to picture⁴¹.

iii) The κατέχων being ousted before the Rebel comes

"Although the pseudo-prophetic menace will be ousted, it 'must be' for the present. But Paul does not dwell on this 'necessity'. He looks forward to the moment of the ousting of this figure (the purification of the community required for reunion with the Lord) and to the Lord's victory over the false prophet"⁴². Why does purification of the community by removal of the κατέχων logically precede the destruction of the Rebel? It is agreed that the community could not be finally united with the Lord until such tainted elements had been purged away (cf. 1 Cor 3.13-15), but why should this take place before the Rebel was even manifested? Only if, as mentioned above,

⁴⁰ In point (b i).

⁴¹ D.J. Stephens "Eschatological Themes in 2 Thess 2.1-12" (Ph.D. thesis, St. Andrews, 1976) comments that Giblin does not make it clear how this translation of κατέχων helps us. There is no actual possession at Thessalonica - but Giblin says that if an object is to be supplied for κατέχων, it must be ἑμᾶς : ie. the Thessalonians are possessed. He also observes that the active participle of κατέχων is rare for the sense of possession, which Giblin admits (p.337).

⁴² Giblin, op.cit., p.247, cf. p.232f.

the manifestation of the Rebel (v.8) is actually his judgment, viz. the parousia of Christ which judges him: for then the parousia of Christ and manifestation of the Rebel are simultaneous, union with Christ follows immediately as the salvific part of the Day, and any necessary purification would have to take place before the Rebel was manifested. Giblin does not explain this, but it seems the only logical explanation, given his interpretation of v.6-8. The same criticisms apply as in (b ii) above⁴³. A further problem is understanding how pseudo-charismatic activity could be ousted, especially if it is merely represented by a figure at Thessalonica. 1 Thess 5.19-21 gives an admonition to test everything, but there is no such advice in 2 Thessalonians, where we would expect a command to put an end to this false prophecy. Giblin does not satisfactorily explain why the *κατέχων* should be let alone for the time being, nor how, when, and by whom the ousting should be done⁴⁴.

d) The Rebel as a theological symbol, rather than a concrete personality

"This figure is a literary foil epitomizing the anti-God"

⁴³ Giblin's interpretation also involves losing the temporal sense of *καὶ τότε*. Stephens (*op.cit.*, p.312f) criticizes this, observing that all the texts Giblin cites with *καὶ τότε* do have temporal force, and that the text of 2 Thess 2 is littered (sic!) with temporal verbs and terms. E.Best (*comm ad loc.*) also holds that "Giblin's attempt, p.232, to rob this phrase of temporal significance fails completely".

⁴⁴ The translation "oust", which interprets *ἐκ μέσου φέρηται* in a derogatory sense, has already been criticised; see B III n.45.

forces according to the apocalyptic genre"⁴⁵; "more as an antithesis to faith than as either a physical presence or a persecutor"⁴⁶. Giblin does not deny that the Rebel may have historical reference but he is at pains to emphasise that this would be "definitely subordinate to its theological, symbolical value"⁴⁷. He then remarks that it is of "particular interest" that Paul gives us a "'humanized' figure": but Giblin has not sufficiently explained the human aspect of the presentation.

Firstly, if the figure is symbolical, why is it necessary to add it to the apostasy, *κατέχον*, mystery of lawlessness and working of Satan? That which it stands for - pseudo-charismatic activity, for Giblin - is amply depicted already.

Secondly, according to Giblin Paul later substitutes similar symbolic concepts for the Rebel in his modified eschatology. In Romans, for example, Law, Sin and Death are personified⁴⁸. These are not comparable with the Rebel, however: they are nouns, not adjectival substantives; they do not become worse at the End than before. They are the powers broken by the cross and resurrection; the Rebel is

⁴⁵ Giblin, op.cit., p.97.

⁴⁶ Giblin, op.cit., p.72.

⁴⁷ Giblin, op.cit., p.72.

⁴⁸ Giblin, op.cit., p.289.

not mentioned in the context of Christ's death, whether or not he signifies pseudo-charismatic activity. He is specifically a feature of the End.

Thirdly, Giblin assumes that the alternatives are "identification of cryptic figures", "esoteric teaching" or principles of catechesis⁴⁹. These are not mutually exclusive: principles can have concrete content without being esoteric, and Paul can foresee an historical figure without either knowing its identity himself or expecting the Thessalonians to be able to 'de-cipher' it. Giblin is more clear when he remarks that the Rebel is not to be taken as "pure myth" but is a "consummate threat to faith, however that threat will be realized in the concrete. The concrete actualization in its precise physical aspects is not the point. Any figure or event which could be judged theologically to verify what the symbol represents would sufficiently ground the symbol in reality"⁵⁰. If this accurately spells out Giblin's view on the Rebel, then his earlier argument is directed against a caricature of the 'historical identification' view. Nevertheless, Giblin has not made his view clear enough: a historical grounding in "any figure or event" theologically appropriate leaves open the question whether this might be a repeated grounding, and if so, how it operates as a sign or condition. In the light of Giblin's "representational" understanding of the Rebel,

⁴⁹ Giblin, op.cit., p.158.

⁵⁰ Giblin, op.cit., p.286.

his contrast between the Thessalonians' knowledge of the *κατέχων* and of the Rebel is curious: the *κατέχων* "is known experientially but obscurely by faith (and is known in the present time); the latter will be self-evident"⁵¹. If the *κατέχων* is a figure in the community and the Rebel not only a future entity but a symbolical, theological one, then the former would be considerably more "self-evident" than the latter.

e) The ἄτακτοι as cause of the error

"Ἄτακτοι could connote a positively disordered action in the sphere of charismatic activity ... one wonders whether [Paul] could have considered the ἄτακτοι simply as idle or disobedient Christians apart from the connotations of 'acting contrary to the Spirit'"⁵². It is true that Paul's notion of charismatic activity is very wide, but there is a gap of logic in Gibling's argument. Acting contrary to the Spirit does not necessarily equal charismatic disorderliness in the area of 'spiritual' activity, which itself is not limited to false prophecy. Gibling has leapt from disobedience to the Spirit to false prophecy. He is right in pointing out of the ἄτακτοι that "not working is hardly the whole story"⁵³: the ἄτακτοι are described as *ἀνεργαζομένους*, which implies not idleness but overactivity or misdirected activity; but his case for regarding them as "analogous to

⁵¹ Gibling, op.cit., p.218.

⁵² Gibling, op.cit., p.148n.

⁵³ Gibling, op.cit., p.144.

those teachers of falsehood mentioned in 1 Thessalonians⁵⁴ is not proven. It rests on Paul's example being counterpoised to both, and on the warning to heed Paul's instruction in 2 Thess 3.14: but Paul used his example in many contexts, and there seems no reason why 3.14 should refer to false teachers - it simply reinforces 3.6. Moreover, the injunction in 1 Thess 4.11 to work with their own hands is coupled with one to mind their own affairs, which implies that the activity substituted for work was minding others' affairs, not necessarily spreading false teaching or prophecy.

3. Conclusion

Giblin's case ultimately turns upon two factors: the kind of knowledge meant by *οἶδατε* and the translation of *κατέχοντες* as pseudo-charismatic possession. "The Thessalonians must recognise that their present peril is an instance of the verification of this principle (that anti-faith must precede the parousia) and what it entails". These points have been criticized above. It remains to observe that, assuming Giblin's construction of the situation to be correct, there could hardly be a more complete vindication of the Thessalonians' error. For if they had been told about the negative conditions of the Day before, and were already experiencing the *κατέχωντες*, they were entirely justified in expecting his ousting, and with that the parousia of Christ to show up the Rebel, at any moment. Paul's way of writing would then scarcely be calculated to contradict this supposition, except possibly to add that the *κατέχωντες* is to "be for the moment", but without explaining why or for how long, and without making this the main import of the passage.

⁵⁴ Giblin, op.cit., p.145.

B.VII: A Suggested Interpretation of 2 Thess 2.1-12

1. Conclusions from critical examination of interpretations

In the process of criticizing the different interpretations of 2 Thess 2.1-12 we have established a number of conclusions about various problems in the passage. The most important of these fall into two categories; conclusions about the Man of Sin and about the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omicron\nu$. These are summarized in turn below without further argumentation: the footnotes show where each point has previously been raised.

a) The Man of Sin

i) The OT sources for the depiction of this figure are generally reckoned to be texts from Daniel, Ezekiel and Isaiah. By comparing these texts with 2 Thess 2 we have decided that the closest similarity is to Dan 7,8 rather than to Dan 11.38 and Ezek 28.2¹.

ii) The Man of Sin is shown as a religious figure rather than a political one in 2 Thess 2. There is no mention of political power, only of self-deification and spiritual influence and deception. This does not necessarily mean that the figure is totally apolitical, but it is certainly not a primarily political figure².

iii) As a religious figure the Man of Sin is not limited to any religious group: he has universal power and influence. He exalts himself above every god and object of worship (v.4)

¹ See p.148.

² See p.171.

and deceives everyone who does not love the truth (v.10). He is therefore not a pseudo-Messiah, whose influence would be limited to Jews. Admittedly it might happen that to the Jews he appears as a pseudo-Messiah because this would be the best way to deceive them; but this would not preclude his having equal effect among the Gentiles. The characteristics of blasphemy and self-exaltation (v.4) make it impossible that the Man of Sin is conceived of primarily as a pseudo-Messiah³.

iv) The Man of Sin is a ^{satanic counterpart to} ~~caricature~~ of Christ. This becomes more evident when he is later called Antichrist, but even in 2 Thessalonians his actions and the language used define him as a satanic counterpart to Christ. He has his own ἀνοκάλυψις and σημεῖα ; he works signs and wonders; he has the power of Satan instead of God's; he seduces exactly those who have not believed the true Christ⁴.

v) He is an individual figure, not a ^{multiple} ~~collective~~ one or a general entity: he is referred to in the singular with the definite article and depicted as a definitive final embodiment of evil. His correspondence to Christ also suggests individuality⁵.

vi) His revelation is prevented by the κατέχον⁶ and will follow the removal of the latter.⁷

vii) See p. 287

viii) The Man of Sin immediately precedes the promise of Christ.*

³ See p.190-191.

⁴ See p.244; p.189; p.224

⁵ See p.208.

⁶ See p.215.

⁷ See p.210.

* See p.220f, 225

b) The κατέχων /ωv

i) The κατέχων is an active entity, not a passive one⁸. It plays a negative rôle of restraint, not a positive one as a precondition⁹. The action is that of limiting, suppressing, rather than possessing, controlling or holding sway.

ii) The negative and masculine participles signify its personal and impersonal aspects, the agent and his effect¹⁰.

iii) The κατέχων is on the side of good, not of evil; but it is not merely God's will as such. It is the agent of his will¹¹.

iv) It is not a political entity or person, and possibly not even an historical one¹².

v) The κατέχων is not a sign in the sense of something indicating the proximity of the parousia. It does not have to be observable, and the Thessalonians' knowledge of it is not experiential but intellectual¹³. It is the explanation of why the Man of Sin is not yet revealed¹⁴.

vi) The κατέχων is opposed to the Man of Sin and acts upon him, and only indirectly upon Christ. It is not the reason for the delay of Christ's parousia¹⁵.

[vii) ^{To page 286} Satan is not identified with the Man of Sin but is the source of his power in such a way that Satan can work through him much more directly and powerfully than through any other person¹⁶.]

8 See p.164.

9 See p.259.

10 See p.216.

11 See p.243.

12 See p.149.

13 See p.267-8.

14 See p.197.

15 See p.253, p.210

16 See p.246.

2. The interpretation of the Man of Sin and κατεχόν/ων
resulting from the previous conclusions

From these conclusions we may proceed to outline an understanding of the Man of Sin and the κατεχόν which seems most satisfactory.

a) The Man of Sin

Since the Man of Sin immediately precedes the parousia of Christ as a sign of the latter, and is an individual figure, it follows that he must still be in the future (always allowing for the possibility that that future may be imminent) and cannot therefore be identified with any historical person. We can only sketch out the kind of person expected. Most of the characteristics are listed above; he will be an individual, religious figure of universal appeal, the supreme instrument of Satan and counterpart to Christ. As a sign of the parousia he must be evident to the church, and this may be because only those who know the true Christ will perceive the falsity of the imitation Christ. The Man of Sin's deceptive powers may be such as to take in everyone who has not believed the gospel. This is their fate, the irony of self-judgment which God decrees shall be so (v.11): declaring themselves unable to believe the truth and therefore implying it to be false, they believe instead a 'real' lie. The effect of the Man of Sin is the apostasy of v.3, spelled out in v.9-12. It is often said that apostasy presupposes a faith to be rejected, and the conclusion is drawn that some Christians and/or Jews will be deceived by the Man of Sin. The elect are indeed elsewhere warned, to keep them alert (Mk 13.22, Mt 24.24), and are here reassured of their

safety (2 Thess 2.13), both emphases being necessary to prevent either complacency or panic. But it may be that those who apostasize from the church never really loved the truth (v.10, cf. 1 Jn 2.19) and are called apostates because in human terms they have fallen away from the church, and in the way Paul describes their choice, they have rejected the possibility of faith when it was offered to them. That turning away from proffered truth to its opposite pole, satanic falsehood, is apostasy.

b) The κατέχων /ων

i) Outline of interpretation.

If the κατέχων is that which prevents the Man of Sin coming before the right time, then it is either a future figure (but preceding the Man of Sin) or a present, long-standing one. If the ῥῶν of v.6 is temporal in meaning¹⁷, then Paul thought the κατέχων was active already: whether ῥῶν qualifies οἰδατε or κατέχων, the restraining is taking place "now". Various suggestions for a collective or general κατέχων have been considered and rejected, but one needs further consideration: the theory of the archangel Michael as influencing Paul's concept of the κατέχων. This has of course been proposed by Gunkel, Prat and others¹⁸. It is an unpopular theory, and rarely held by contemporary scholars, some of whom dismiss it without due consideration. Frame passes over the idea of a "friendly supernatural being",

¹⁷ This is discussed in B.VL2.a.i.

¹⁸ H. Gunkel, Schöpfung und Chaos (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1921²); F. Prat, The Theology of St. Paul, Burns and Oates, London, 1964), I, p.82f.

that is the "angel prince of Daniel", though he does discuss a general mythological interpretation of the κῆτεχον without specific identification¹⁹. E. Best comments sceptically, "In Rev 20.2 it is an angel who binds Satan; is the katechon then an angel? Angelic powers might be referred to by this term"; but even though he doubtfully admits the possibility he thinks identification is impossible because "apocalyptic thought allowed for a multiplicity of such figures"²⁰. The sceptical attitude to this interpretation is partly due to the contemporary tendency to shy away from the supernatural, which is not limited to deliberate anti-supernaturalists such as R. Bultmann. Even if we accept the existence of angels and demons, we tend to feel that they are irrelevant to real life. This is a short-sighted attitude, for natural and supernatural cannot be separately packaged in this way. A. Mantel argues that "die endgeschichtliche Auseinandersetzung findet nicht nur zwischen guten und bösen Menschen statt - das zu meinen, wäre eine anthropologische Verkürzung der Heilsgeschichte; auf beiden Seiten kämpfen Geistmächte mit, hier Engel, dort Dämonen (vgl. Eph 6.10-12)"²¹ and similarly H. Schlier points out that in history, God works through angels: "Gott ruft solches Endgeschehen der Geschichte ... durch seine Engel hervor. Was geschieht, antwortet auf Engelrufe"²². Our understanding of these matters is necessarily

¹⁹ Frame comm. ad loc.

²⁰ Best comm. ad loc.

²¹ A. Mantel, "Die Dienste der Engel nach der Apokalypse des Johannes", Bibel und Leben 2 (1961), p.59-65: p.63.

²² H. Schlier, "Die Engel nach dem Neuen Testament", Besinnung auf das Neue Testament (Herder, Freiburg, 1964): p.160-175, p.173.

limited, but we need not remain complete agnostics, as G. Tavad observes: "Es wäre verfehlt, aus der Schrift so etwas wie eine systematische Angelologie oder Dämonologie aufbauen zu wollen. Aber die Aussagen können den Blick öffnen, mit welchen Mächten zwischen Gott und sich der Mensch rechnen kann, auch wenn er diese Mächte in ihrer Eigenart und Wirksamkeit nur wenig kennt"²³. In the case of 2 Thess 2, we can go a considerable way towards identifying Michael as the particular supernatural figure behind the *κατέχων*. How can we test this theory? A supernatural power is not available for examination as an historical person or circumstance is: we can only search the OT and other Jewish and early Christian literature for hints of a restraining rôle being attributed to Michael which Paul would have known and shared. We must not, however, expect to find an exact equivalent to the *κατέχων* in Jewish sources: the rôle of restraining the Antichrist is hardly likely to appear where there is no expectation of an Antichrist, and we have found the evidence for a pre-Christian Jewish Antichrist tradition rather weak and late²⁴.

ii) The rôle of Michael in Jewish and early Christian tradition
General

i) Michael is primarily guardian angel of Isral, and later of all the righteous (Dan 10.21, 12.1, 1 Enoch 20.5, of all righteous, T. Levi 5.6f, 1 QM 13.10.

²³ G. Tavad, Die Engel (Herder, Freiburg, 1968), p. 19.

²⁴ Cf. B. III. 2. c.

- ii) He is the great prince among the heavenly host (Dan 10.13, 1 Enoch 90.21f), the chief of all angels (Berakoth 4b, Yoma 37a).
- iii) He is the angel of mercy (1 Enoch 40.3).
- iv) He is the intercessor before God (T.Levi 5.6, T.Dan 6.2).
- v) He holds the merits of the righteous and brings them before God (3 Baruch 11.9,12).
- vi) He is the recording angel (Ascen.Is 9.22f (unnamed), 1 Enoch 89.61, 90.14).
- vii) Guide of souls after death (Deut.Rabbah 11.6, Midrasch Petirat Moshe, Jude 9, 1 Enoch 71.3, 2 Enoch 22.6f).
- viii) He was the lawgiver on Sinai (Deut.Rabbah 11.6, Apocalypse of Moses 1, Jubilees 1.27,2.1, Philo De Somniis, Josephus Antiquites 15.5.3, Gal 3.19, Ascen.Is 11.21, Hermas 8.3.3).

Specific

- i) Michael is involved in Sammael's fall from heaven,
Pirke Rabbi Eliezer: "In the hour when the Holy One, blessed be He, called Sammael and his band to descend from heaven, from their holy place, he caught hold of the wings of Michael to make him fall with himself, and the Holy One, blessed be He, saved him from his power".
- ii) Michael binds Sammael for a long period. 1 Enoch 10.11ff:
"And the Lord said unto Michael, Go, bind Semjaza and his associates who have united themselves with women so as to have defiled themselves with them in all their uncleanness. And when their sons have slain one another and they have seen the destruction of their beloved ones, bind them fast for 70 generations in the valleys of the earth, until the

day of their judgment and of their consummation, till the judgment that is for ever and ever is consummated. In those days they shall be led off to the abyss of fire: (and) to the torment and the prison in which they shall be confined for ever". 1 Enoch 88.3: "... one of those four (ie. Uriel, Raphael, Gabriel and Michael, 10.1-14) who had come forth, stoned them (the fallen angels) from heaven and gathered and took all the great stars whose privy members were like those of horses, and bound them all hand and foot and cast them in an abyss of earth". Acts of Pilate 22.2: "Then the king of glory seized the chief ruler Satan by the head and handed him over to the angels saying 'Bind with iron fetters his hands and feet and neck and mouth'. Then he gave him to Hades and said 'Take him and hold him fast until my coming'". cf. Rev 12.7-12.

iii) Michael defeats Satan at the End. Assumption of Moses 10.1f: "Then Satan shall be no more ... then the hand of the angel shall be filled who has been appointed chief, and he shall forthwith avenge them of their enemies". LXX Dan

8.11: καὶ ἕως αὐτοῦ ὁ ἀρχιστράτηγος ῥύσεται τὴν αἰχμαλωσίαν.

Dan 12.1: "At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble ... but at that time your people shall be delivered"²⁵

²⁵ J.Chr.K. von Hofmann (Die Heilige Schrift Neue Testament I², Nordlingen, 1869, p.318-326) thinks that the κατέχων is the angel helping Michael in Dan 10.13,20.

History of Daniel (9th century; trans.Luecken) "Darauf werden sie (Michael and Gabriel) den, der sich für den Messias ausgegeben, töten". After this, Messiah ben David comes and kills the false Messiah. This late Jewish writing with Christian influences shows how the tradition of Michael's great battle at the End has survived alongside the parallel Jewish tradition of God (represented here by the true Messiah) as the final victor, and the Christian tradition of Christ defeating the Antichrist. 1 QM 13.10: "And the Prince of Light Thou hast appointed from ancient times to come to our support; all the sons of righteousness are in his hand, and all the spirits of truth are under his dominion"²⁶ The Qumran texts depict a Prince of Light, leader of the angels of light against Belial and the angels of darkness in the eschatological battle. All the righteous are in the care of this Prince, who is probably to be identified with Michael.

iv) Michael judges the fallen angels. 1 Enoch 54.6: "And Michael, Gabriel, Raphael and Phanael, shall take hold of (the hosts of Azazel) on that great day and cast them on that day into the burning furnace, that the Lord of Spirits may take vengeance on them for their unrighteousness in becoming subject to Satan and leading astray those who dwell on the earth".

²⁶ Translation from G.Vermes, The Dead Sea Scrolls in English, (Penguin, London, 1968).

v) Michael forbids the angels to depart from men, so that the enemy would not prevail 3 Baruch 3.2: "Michael said, Ye cannot depart from them, in order that the enemy may not prevail to the end".

Summary

We have found traditions of Michael casting Satan into the pit; also of a battle in the last days between Michael and Satan. We do not find a tradition of the removal of the restraint before the End, nor of the purpose of the restraint as preventing the Antichrist being sent by Satan. However, the traditions of Michael as protector of the righteous against evil, subduer of demons and great warrior, could lead to an emphasis on his current suppression of Satan rather than his final climactic battle, especially as in Christianity the final victor is Christ (as sometimes in Judaism, God or the Messiah is said to defeat Satan finally). The name Michael is itself a clue to the identity of the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$: according to Jewish tradition it is a collation of Ex 15.11 and Deut 33.26, and means "who is like God?"²⁷. The Man of Sin claims to be God - this is his identifying characteristic. Michael's very being, as expressed in his name, denies this blasphemous claim by asserting that there is none like God.

If we hold that the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\chi\omega\nu$ is Michael (or an unnamed good supernatural power as agent of God's will), can this be combined with the Caird's view of powers behind the state?

²⁷ Pesiqtha Rabbathi 46.188a.

He understands the *κατέχων* as the state when correctly fulfilling its God-given function of maintaining law and order.

α) In Jewish tradition, Michael is the special protector of Israel. For Paul, coming from this tradition, it would be a considerable volte-face to believe that the power behind the Roman government, an oppressor of the Jews²⁸, was the same personage. Even though Michael's protection was later extended to all the righteous without specifying Israel, it would still be a drastic re-interpretation. Far more logical would be a re-interpretation or extension of Michael's rôle as guardian of the church as Israel's heir and fulfilment. Admittedly Rome did sometimes protect Christians against the Jews, but it was not entirely satisfactory in this respect (Cf. Acts 16.20-24, 1 Thess 2.2: Paul and Silas beaten by magistrates at Philippi; Rom 8.35f, 1 Cor 4.9,12, 2 Cor 6.4f,9, 7.5, 11.23-6,32: general opposition). Many texts do not specify the source of Paul's suffering, but even when the suffering was not caused by Rome, as at Philippi, the Romans do not always seem to have protected him.

β) According to Caird, the spiritual power behind government is good when it fulfils the rôle given it by God, but becomes demonic as soon as it usurps God's prerogative. This is different to saying that Michael (as *κατέχων*)

²⁸ For an apocalyptist at least, Rome was the latest in a succession of foreign oppressors, against whom Israel, by the help of God and the archangel, would finally triumph. (cf. Dan 2,7, 12.1).

is behind government, and the Man of Sin, a demonic individual, will only arise when he withdraws and law and order break down. Caird is arguing for an ambivalent spiritual power; we are arguing for two separate and opposed powers.

- γ) The powers of the state are themselves restrained by Christ's victory over them on the cross, since which time they have been kept 'on a leash'²⁹: but the *κατεχων* of 2 Thess 2 is a restrainer, not that which is being restrained.
- δ) The removal of law and order (*ὁ κατεχων ... ἐκ μέρους γένηται*) is not an appropriate way to speak of the annulment of Christ's victory over the powers behind government. They would be breaking out, not being removed. The Man of Sin and the *κατεχων* are two different entities, not the same one behaving in different ways.

The reason why the political interpretation is so popular and has much to be said for it is that it may be a half-truth. Some scholars who follow the Michael theory understand Michael as the spirit of law and order, of social structure: von Hofmann describes him as "der Geist des in sittlicher Rechtsordnung verfassten Völkertums"³⁰. But it must be emphasised that this is an application, an interpretation. It would be easy to overemphasise law and order as evidence for Michael's restraining activity, until

²⁹ Cf. C.Morrison, The Powers that Be: earthly rulers and demonic powers in Rom 13.1-7 (SCM, London, 1960), p.32.

³⁰ Quoted in H.Preuss, Der Antichrist (Biblische Zeit- und Streitfragen, 5,4. Berlin 1909), p.12.

the figure of Michael faded into the background and was forgotten - but this would result in a general political interpretation, which we have found to be inadequate. We do not know exactly how Paul taught the concept of the *κατέχων* : he may have only taught the Thessalonians about a supernatural restraining power on the Man of Sin; he may have named this power as Michael; and he may, or may not have pointed to civic order and social structure as evidence of Michael's activity. As far as 2 Thess 2 is concerned, however, the text makes best sense if the reference is limited to the supernatural power (which we may choose to assume is Michael).

iii) The main objections to this theory

1) A supernatural restrainer could not be a sign to the Thessalonians.

We have already seen³¹ that the *κατέχων* does not need to be a visible being since it is not in itself a sign of the parousia. There is no need for the Thessalonians to do more than know about it.

2) It implies that the Man of Sin must be pre-existent or collective.

We have already argued against collectivity³², and have argued in favour of an individual End-time figure, which precludes pre-existence. To retain the shape of the myth, we would have to say that the spirit of Antichrist, or Satan himself is bound; but it is not imperative to

³¹ B.VII.1.b.v.

³² B.IV.2.

demonstrate the presence of a fully logical and cogent myth behind 2 Thess 2: Paul has not simply taken one over, but has used a recurrent feature of the myth for the function of explaining why the Man of Sin has not yet appeared.

3) This theory relates the activity of the *κατέχων* to Satan, not to the Man of Sin directly.

This is partly due to the lack of an Antichrist concept within pre-Christian Judaism; and in the context it is a particular restraint on Satan which is referred to: Michael is restraining Satan with respect to the coming of the Man of Sin. If any other limiting is performed by Michael, it is irrelevant here, although there is a close logical link. The coming of the Anomos brings a great deception and apostasy which indicates a swing over to Satan and is bound to involve increasing evil.

4) Michael is not named in the text and Paul does not have a developed angelology.

Paul does, however, mention angels: the archangel of 1 Thess 4.16 is generally supposed to be Michael, and at his parousia, Christ is accompanied by angels (2 Thess 1.7)³³. Paul's reason for not using names may be to discourage irrelevant speculation about angelic hierarchies such as are found in Jewish literature; also to guard against the

³³ Cf. M. Dibelius, Die Geisterwelt in Glauben des Paulus (Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, Göttingen, 1909), p. 181f: Paul undoubtedly inherited the Jewish tradition of ranked angels (1 Enoch 69.2ff, 2 Baruch 59.11) but we do not know his opinion about it.

dangers of angel-worship (cf. Col 2.18). It is impossible to say whether Paul would have told the Thessalonians about Michael by name: he may only have spoken of a supernatural power or person, or he may have described Michael as the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ and therefore only needed to repeat this term to recall his teaching to them.

3. Conclusion

According to our interpretation of the Man of Sin and the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$, Paul is speaking of two figures, one present and one future, both of whom the Thessalonians know about. The $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ pertains to the present: this is a supernatural power, possibly previously named as the archangel Michael, who exercises a certain restraint which prevents the Man of Sin from arising until the right time. When this time comes, the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ will withdraw and the parousia of the Man of Sin will occur. Paul describes neither the manner of restraint, nor how the restrainer withdraws, nor is he precise about whether the restraint is exercised upon Satan or the Man of Sin or evil in general. This is by no means a detailed, carefully constructed apocalypse; it merely emphasizes the salient points which will correct the Thessalonians' understanding. These are the two reasons why they should know that the Day has not come. The $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ is still active, and the Man of Sin, whom they will be able to identify by the characteristics listed, has not yet appeared. It is interesting but perilous to speculate how much more Paul may have already taught them; we simply do not know. It seems probable, however, that by the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ Paul means a supernatural agent of God, and the figure of Michael is the closest to the $\kappa\alpha\tau\acute{\epsilon}\chi\omega\nu$ in characteristics and

rôle which we can find in Jewish and Christian literature.

C.I. The Apocalyptic Error at Thessalonica

1. Introduction

Ἐρωτῶμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, ... εἰς τὸ μὴ ταχέως σαλευθῆναι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς
μηδὲ θροεῖσθαι, μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι' ἐπιστολῆς
ὡς δι' ἡμῶν, ὡς ὅτι ἐνέστηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ Κυρίου.

There are two principal problems in this verse: the meaning of ἐνέστηκεν, and the three-fold source of the error, spirit, word and letter. These will be dealt with in turn as the nature and source of the error. Finally a reconstruction of the situation will be suggested.

2. Nature of the error

The grammatical meaning of ἐνέστηκεν is clear.

Arndt and Gingrich give two meanings of ἐνίστημι : to impend, be imminent¹; and in the past tense, to be present, to have come². The usage of 2 Thess 2.2 is listed under this latter meaning. Moulton and Milligan concur, stating that "contemporary usage makes it clear that in 2 Thess 2.2 (quoted) ἐνέστηκεν should be rendered as pointing to strictly present time"³. They quote several uses of ἐνίστημι as referring to the current year or month⁴. Ἐνέστηκεν is

¹ Herodotus, Polybius, PGM 13, 1049; LXX, Josephus Antiquities 4.209, 2 Tim 3.1, 1 Cor 7.26, Barnabas 17.2, (AG S.V.).

² 2 Thess 2.2, PGM 13, 364: ὅταν ἐνοστῆ ἡ ἡμέρα
Josephus Antiquities 12.175: ἐνοστάσης τῆς ἡμέρας
(both meaning "when the day came"); ὁ καιρὸς δ' ἐνέστηκώς
Polybius I 60, 9, 21, 3, 3; Josephus Antiquities 16, 162;
Heb 9.9 (meaning "the present time").

³ Moulton and Milligan s.v.

⁴ BGU I 22⁶ (AD 114): τῆ δ τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος μηνός
P.Fay 28¹⁰ (AD 150-1): εἰς τὸ ἐνεστὸς ἴδ (ἔτος)
P.Tebt II 383³⁷ (AD 46): certain shares are assigned to
contracting parties ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνεστῶσης ἡμέρας ἐλὶ τὸν ἅπαντα χρόνον
P.Lond 1164 (AD 212): ἀπὸ τῆς ἐνεστῶσης καὶ ὑλοκελευμένης ἡμέρας
P.Oxy I 37¹, 11 (AD 49): ἐνέστη ἡ προθεσμία τοῦ δευτέρου ἐνιαυτοῦ,
καὶ πάλιν ἀπέλαβεν "the appointed day in the second year came,
and again she received her wages".
P.Flor I 1⁶ (AD 153): τῆς προθεσμίας ἐνοστάσης

therefore the perfect indicative of ἐνέστημι and means "has come", "has taken place". The sense, however, is difficult to grasp. How could the Thessalonians be under the impression that the Day of the Lord was present (if it is conceived of as a period/time) or past? Their understanding of eschatology must have been seriously deficient if they thought that the Lord could have returned (v.1) and judgment taken place without their being aware of it so that they had somehow missed it; or are we to credit them with a sophisticated concept of 'realized eschatology'? Various solutions to this problem have been put forward.

a) Imminence

One of the most common solutions is that the sense of ἐνέστηκεν is really "is imminent" and that this verb has been chosen to express the vividness of expectation. "On a adopté 'imminent' non pour des raisons de lexique ou de grammaire mais parce que les Thessaloniens ne pouvaient vraiment pas penser que le jour du Seigneur était réellement déjà arrivé"⁵. The Thessalonians believe that the Day is about to happen any minute now, and this heightened expectation has put them in an agitated state. Thus A.M.G. Stephenson concludes his study of lexica, commentaries and Bible versions: if the translation "is present" is accepted, he says, it can mean only one of three things, all of which are impossible:

i) The Thessalonians thought the rapture had happened and they had been left behind - but they had evidently written

⁵ Rigaux comm. p.653.

to Paul instead of assuming, as one would expect, that he was no longer there; ii) the resurrection was believed to be past, cf. 1 Cor 15.11, 2 Tim 2.18 - but Paul's refutation is obviously not of this error (cf. 1 Cor 15), neither is he arguing against gnostic ideas; iii) the Day is a long period and Paul is denying that it had begun - but there is no support for the idea of a long drawn-out Day in 1 and 2 Thessalonians. The parousia and Day are synonymous (1 Thess 4.15-5.2): if it were a series of events these would include the parousia of the Man of Sin, but Paul argues that the Day/parousia will not happen until after the Man of Sin has come. Stephenson therefore concludes that the sense "is present" which has prevailed in scholarly opinion since the mid-19th century must be wrong and prefers "is imminent", "is at hand"⁶. Wrede also argues strongly for this sense: being on the threshold of the last days⁷, expecting the End at any moment⁸, an immediate parousia rather than a near parousia "im unbestimmten Sinne"⁹. It is "klar" that it cannot mean "bereits gewesen"¹⁰, though Wrede does not explain why this is clear - he seems to reject it without consideration. He therefore defines the error as an extremely near parousia instead of a fairly near one.

⁶ A.M.G. Stephenson, "On the meaning of ἐνέσθηκεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ Κυρίου in 2 Thess 2.2", TU 102 (1908), p.442-451: p.449-51.

⁷ W. Wrede, Die Echtheit des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefs untersucht, TU, XXIV, (Neue Folge 9, 2), Leipzig 1903, p.41.

⁸ Wrede, op.cit., p.42.

⁹ Wrede, op.cit., p.68f.

¹⁰ Wrede, op.cit., p.41.

This solution is an attractive one because it avoids the problem of explaining how the Day could be thought to be present, and entails simply an exaggeration of Paul's teaching on imminence; but it is not satisfactory because it cannot explain the verb ἐρέστηκεν . According to the principle of "difficilior lectio potior", the translation "is present" should stand: the verb could have been changed by a later scribe or redactor to mean "is imminent" but the reverse of that process is unlikely, and there is no textual problem. Moreover, if the letter were inauthentic and written by a Paulinist to defend Paul's eschatological teaching when expectation had become distant, the writer would scarcely have chosen such an incomprehensible expression. He would be toning down an imminent expectation and would therefore describe the error as imminence, not presence.

b) Gnosticism

This solution gives full weight to the translation "is present" and understands the error as a gnostic concept expressed in apocalyptic language - "eine gnostische Vorstellung apokalyptisch ausgedrückt"¹¹. The gnostic, possessing the Spirit, had already risen in spirit and so would say "die Vollendung ist schon da" which in apocalyptic language is "the Day is here"¹². This gnostic misconception

¹¹ W.Marxsen, Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Gütersloher Verlagshaus, Gütersloh, 1963), p.40.

¹² Ibid.

of resurrection in Thessalonica led to libertinism, according to W.A. Marxsen. Similarly, W. Schmithals translates "ist schon da"¹³ and since this cannot mean that the Day of salvation and judgment is there, the alternative is a gnostic influence on the community to the effect that the resurrection had already taken place. "Die Behauptung, die Auferstehung sei durch den Empfang der Gnosis schon geschehen, eliminiert radikal die kirchlichen Zukunftsvorstellungen. Ein 'Tag des Herrn' ist als zukünftig nicht mehr denkbar"¹⁴. J.W. Drane agrees that the error was (partly) gnostic: the Thessalonians believed that their own present experience was the only eschatological reality of the Christian faith. In reply to this, Paul emphasises that his eschatology "is in essence little different from that of his Jewish predecessors and is to be grounded in history"¹⁵.

This raises many questions about the dating and extent of gnostic beliefs, for which there is very little early extra-biblical evidence. The subject cannot be dealt with exhaustively here: it must suffice to make a few comments.

¹³ W.Schmithals, Paulus und die Gnostiker (Herbert Reich, Evangelischer Verlag, Hamburg-Bergstedt, 1965), p.146.

¹⁴ W.Schmithals, Die historische Situation der Thessalonicherbriefe, (Herbert Reich, Evangelischer Verlag, Hamburg-Bergstedt, 1965), p.147.

¹⁵ J.W.Drane, "Theological diversity in the letters of Paul", Tyndale Bulletin 27 (1976), p.3-26; cf. F.Laub, Eschatologische Verkündigung und Lebensgestaltung nach Paulus (Verlag Friedrich Pustet, Regensburg, 1973), p.138.

i) If the error is of a gnostic nature and corresponds to the gnostic belief in a present resurrection, then Paul's argumentation in 2.2-12 is quite beside the point. Schmithals explains 2.1-12 as "unreflektierte Reaktion auf eine nur halb verstandene Nachricht"¹⁶ but this will not do. Even if Paul did not have all the details about the error, he was quite capable of arguing against an erroneous concept of resurrection, as 1 Cor 15 shows¹⁷.

ii) Not only are we ill-informed as to the early stages of gnosticism, but there are also strong differences of opinion about gnostic eschatological beliefs. M.L. Peel disputes the traditional view of a totally realized eschatology, using some Nag Hammadi texts to demonstrate that there was no such uniformity in belief as is generally assumed. Proto-gnosticism (ie. an early but defined system of gnosticism) in particular was a growing, changing, entity, not a static system¹⁸. Similarly, R.McL. Wilson comments that "the New Testament reveals a variety of response and reaction to what appears to be a developing movement. Unless we begin by presupposing gnosticism at every turn, there is nothing in Paul's letters to Thessalonica or Philippi which demands a gnostic interpretation"¹⁹. Peel also points out

¹⁶ Schmithals, Paulus und die Gnostiker, p.152.

¹⁷ This point stands even if Paul had misunderstood the Corinthian situation as some hold. We find there an argument about the resurrection which is entirely different from the line of argumentation in 2 Thess 2.

¹⁸ M.L. Peel, "Gnostic eschatology and the New Testament, NovT 12, (1970), p.141-165: p.164.

¹⁹ R.McL. Wilson, Gnosis and the New Testament (Blackwell, 1968), p.58.

that whilst an immediate experience of the eschatological hope is emphasised in gnosticism, this is usually in the context of a futuristic goal when all the individual sparks of light would be reassembled in the heavenly realm of light. There are cosmic, universal and futuristic aspects to gnostic eschatology²⁰. We cannot therefore immediately assume that any realized eschatology in the NT is due to gnostic influence.

c) The Day as a period

The third solution is a popular one among commentators and has already been mentioned; the Day can be present if it is conceived of as a period of time rather than an instantaneous and once-for-all event. Supporters of this view include Frame, Findlay, Bicknell and Morris, and more cautiously, Best and Lünemann. Frame explains that "the period indicated by *ἡμέρα* has dawned and the Lord is expected from heaven at any moment"²¹, and Neil that "the period of time signified by the word 'day' has begun and now at any moment the crisis may be upon them". Since *ἐνίστημι* is used in papyri for the current year, Neil paraphrases the error "the world is about to come to an end this year! Paul has said so!"²².

Stephenson's criticism of this view has already been mentioned²³: there is no source for the idea of a drawn-out Day in Thessalonica (the erroneous teaching is not said to have originated this idea; rather, Paul is supposed to have

²⁰ Peel, op.cit., p.163.

²¹ Frame comm. ad loc.

²² Neil comm. ad loc.

²³ Cf. section 2a.

taught it and the error lies in asserting that the period had begun). Best agrees²⁴, and the picture in 1 Thess 5 is certainly of a sudden, catastrophic event (v.3). Stephenson also makes the point that a complex of events would include the parousia of the Man of Sin, which Paul explicitly places before the Day²⁵. If this view is correct, therefore, the error would have to include the idea of the Day as a period as well as the assertion that it had begun: but in that case Paul could refute it by denying that the Day is a long period - which he does not do.

d) Presence

Most commentators now accept the translation "is present", although most explain it in one of the above ways. There are however alternative explanations which are more satisfactory than those above. J. Knox writes a brief note in support of the translation "is present" and suggests an explanation of the situation: "to take the clause at its face-value does not involve the conclusion that the Thessalonians were under the incredible misapprehension that the 'Day' had come, but only that the author of 2 Thessalonians understood that they were"²⁶. Paul had received news of a disturbance at Thessalonica caused by an unhealthy excitement about the parousia, and could only account for it by inferring a belief

²⁴ Best comm. ad loc.

²⁵ Stephenson, op.cit., p.451.

²⁶ J.Knox, "A note on 2 Thess 2.2", ATR 18 (1936), p.72f.

on their part that the parousia had taken place²⁷. Since he has not said or written anything to that effect, he concludes that someone else must have done.

This is more plausible but not entirely satisfactory. There was no need for Paul to infer this belief about the parousia: the disturbance could be accounted for more simply by an exaggerated imminent expectation, or a wrong reaction to the imminent expectation. It also fails to explain how the Thessalonians, who had already been instructed on this topic by Paul (1 Thess 1.13-5.11, 2 Thess 2.5,15) could have accepted the error.

A more satisfactory solution may be reached by taking Knox's theory one step further and supposing that the disturbance, though caused by the apocalyptic error, was not caused by the Thessalonians accepting the error; merely by the existence of the error in some form. This theory will be expanded below.

R.J. Peterson's²⁸ treatment of the Thessalonian error is angled towards finding which question the text aims to answer, by comparison with the similar apocalypses in the Didache and the Synoptics. The difference between these three consists not so much in the material used as in the questions asked. In the Synoptics and Didache 16, the emphasis is on waiting and watching faithfully, and on signs of the End, when faithfulness will be vindicated.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ R.J. Peterson, "The Structure and Purpose of 2 Thessalonians," (Ph.D. thesis, Harvard, 1967), p.100-130.

The question is therefore "when will the Lord come?".

In 2 Thessalonians, the emphasis is on what the Lord will do when he comes, ie. inflict vengeance and slay the Man of Sin. The question here is "have any of these things happened?". It is true that the Synoptic apocalypse and Did.16 do not emphasise what the Lord will do when he comes, but just his coming, gathering the elect (Mt 24.30f), being visible to all (Didache 16.8) and punishing wicked servants (Mt 24.51); whereas 2 Thessalonians does stress the vengeance (1.6-9) and destruction of the Man of Sin (2.8). But the latter are not the main emphases of 2 Thessalonians - vengeance does not even appear in ch.2, which Peterson is discussing - and the question is not whether the consequences of the parousia have taken place but whether the heralding events have happened. Peterson's question is more correct if "these things" refer to the preceding events. But this question is posed by the speaker (writer) rather than the hearer as in the Synoptics and Didache. If we want to formulate a question asked of Paul by the Thessalonians, it would run something like this: "we have heard this rumour - is there any truth in it?" or more directly, "is the Day of the Lord present/past?". They were not concerned with how far distant it was, and were getting confused because they were forgetting the signs, so they would not ask "when is it?" (implying a delay) nor "have these things (signs or results of the parousia) happened?".

Peterson's second point about 2 Thess 2 concerns the

idea of an apocalyptic timetable. The positive aspect of the timetable is its existence, ie. the fact that the Lord will return. The negative aspect is the order, the 'when' of a timetable. In Thessalonica, the transition from positive to negative (an unhealthy trend) began when some Christians died and the rest began to think about the order of events (1 Thess 4.13ff). 2 Thess 2 is then directed to the order, the 'when' of a timetable, not the fact that the Lord will come, and is therefore an apocalyptic apologetic for the delay of the End.

There are several points of criticism to make. i) The fact that Jesus is coming back soon is not a 'timetable'. It is the mere fact of his expected return, and a timetable is an attempt to define 'soon' by relating events in sequence. ii) An apocalyptic timetable can be negative if it is used to date the End, but it need not be used for this purpose. In 2 Thess 2 Paul uses it to correct an error, which is a positive and healthy use. iii) The question of order does not equal the question of 'when'. A sense of order in the End-events does not presuppose a knowledge of how long they will last. iv) According to 2 Thess 2.5 Paul had taught the Thessalonians an apocalyptic timetable with an order of events, but this does not mean that he taught them to date the End (so there is no contradiction with 1 Thess 5.1-11). v) 2 Thess 2.1-12 reaffirms the fact of a timetable - that some things have to happen before the parousia - because if they had remembered that, they could not believe that the Day was there. Paul does not correct a wrong interpretation

of the Man of Sin, apostasy and the κατέχων ; neither does he rearrange them in order: he merely states them as facts.
vi) 2 Thess 2.1-12 is not apologetic for a delayed parousia: 'delay' implies that something had gone wrong, which Paul was not saying. He says rather, "you knew all along that it would be like this".

L. Hartman²⁹ also discusses the respective issues of 2 Thessalonians and the Synoptic Apocalypse, comparing Mt 24, Lk 21 and 2 Thess 2; but he holds that the issues are very similar. The danger in Matthew is that people will appear and say they are the Christ; in Luke, the time is at hand; and in 2 Thessalonians, there is false teaching that the Day has come. These are, however, very different issues. Lk 21.8 is an over-emphasis on imminence; Mt 24.5 has pseudo-Messiahs; and ⁱⁿ 2 Thess 2 the issue is whether the Day is present. 2 Thess 2 goes beyond Matthew and Luke: not mere imminence, not the coming of pseudo-Messiahs (cf. the Man of Sin) is claimed, but the actual arrival of the Day.

3. The source of the error

... μήτε διὰ πνεύματος μήτε διὰ λόγου μήτε δι' ἐπιτολής ὡς δι' ἡμῶν...

The problems with this phrase are firstly, which nouns ὡς δι' ἡμῶν refers back to, whether the last one or two or all three; and secondly, exactly what is designated by word, spirit and letter.

²⁹ L.Hartman, Prophecy Interpreted (Coniectanea Biblica NT Series 1, Uppsala 1966), p.198.

The options for the reference of $\omega\varsigma \delta\acute{\iota} \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu$ are
 1) $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\eta$, ii) $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\eta, \lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, iii) $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\eta,$
 $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma, \lambda\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\alpha$ ³⁰. In favour of (iii) is that the three
 appear as a series, each preceded by $\mu\eta\tau\epsilon \delta\iota\acute{\alpha}$, and therefore
 the source is Paul, by either his oral teaching, his inspired
 utterance or his correspondence. In favour of (ii) is that
 v.15 links word and letter as sources of correct tradition
 which the Thessalonians should follow, and that whilst
 Pauline preaching could have been misrepresented or
 misremembered later, or his letters misunderstood, an
 utterance in the Spirit would be delivered in their presence
 when Paul could explain it. Option (iii) therefore has to
 postulate a false report of an inspired utterance by Paul.
 $\lambda\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\mu\alpha$ according to (ii) refers to an inspired utterance
 within the community. In favour of (i) is that 3.17 indicates
 either suspicion or knowledge of a forged letter supporting
 the error; then the word and spirit would be influences
 within the community, supported by a forged Pauline letter.

The only certain reference of $\omega\varsigma \delta\acute{\iota} \eta\mu\acute{\omega}\nu$ is $\acute{\epsilon}\lambda\iota\sigma\tau\omicron\lambda\eta$.
 But this cannot be taken as proof of a forgery (or anonymous
 letter accepted innocently) despite 3.17. It was Paul's
 custom to sign his letters, and 3.17 does not presuppose a
 special need for identification ³¹. If Paul had certain

³⁰ Supporters of these are: i) Bornemann, Graafen, Rigaux,
 ii) Lünemann, Lillie, Ellicott, Schmiedel, Wohlenberg, Oepke.
 iii) Erasmus, Lightfoot, Milligan, von Dobschütz, Harnack,
 Dibelius, Buzy, Amiot, Neil, Frame, Best. Cf. Frame and
 Rigaux comms. ad loc.

³¹ Contrast G.J. Bahr ("Paul and letter-writing in the first
 century", CBQ 28 (1966), p.465-77: p.466) "he probably added
 the postscript with the special purpose of guarding against
 further forgery of his letters".

information about a forgery, he would be far more severe in refuting it. When misrepresented orally, as for example in Corinth, his self-defence is rigorous. How much more indignant and forceful would he be if a forger was using his name to lend authority to his own letter? Moreover, if Paul knew about a forgery, then the misrepresentation by word and spirit (whether attributed to Paul or not is immaterial) would pale into insignificance by comparison, and yet they are mentioned alongside ἐπιστολή.

Some would refer ἐπιστολή to 1 Thess 5 (eg. Wrede³²) as the source, or at least a supporting source, of the error. This is credible if the error is believed to be exaggeration of imminence (as Wrede thinks) but not if it is presence of the Day. 1 Thess 5 says the Day ἔρχεται (v.2), but as a thief in the night, so at an unknown time, and they must not be surprised at it (v.4): the inference is that the Day is future. The teachers of the error could not even argue that the Thessalonians had been sleeping (thus using 1 Thess 5) and had missed the Day, because 1 Thess 5.3 says that even those who are not expecting it, the Pagans, will have no escape from sudden destruction. In fact, nothing in Paul's epistles gives the impression that the Day is present³³. 2 Cor 6.2 perhaps comes nearest:

³² Eg. Wrede, op.cit., p.46.

³³ J.Graafen (Die Echtheit des zweiten Briefes an die Thessalonicher (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen XIV 5, Aschendorff München, 1930) points out that 1 Thessalonians could have caused (more likely exacerbated) the error by its silence on the point, if the error already existed and 1 Thessalonians did not contradict it (p.32). However, although 1 Thessalonians does not explicitly deny the error, it is hard to understand how the error could be reconciled with what 1 Thessalonians did say.

ἰδοὺ τῶν ἡμερῶν σωτηρίας, but the rest of the epistle makes it clear that Paul does not mean the End here. Even the Captivity Epistles have verses like Eph 4.30 (sealed for the day of redemption), 1.21, 2.7 (coming ages), Phil 1.6 (bringing to completion at the Day), 1.10 (being pure for the Day), 3.11f (not yet having obtained resurrection), Col 1.23 (transferral to the kingdom, reconciliation in order to be presented blameless provided they continue in faith), 3.24f (future judgment and reward).

J.D.G. Dunn, by contrast, sees the main source of the error as ἀνεύουα . He holds that there was a problem in Thessalonica with charismatic enthusiasm: some were despising prophecy, others needed a reminder to evaluate it (1 Thess 5.19-22). "The clearest evidence of all ... is 2 Thess 2 ... an utterance whose manner and/or content seemed plainly to indicate, 'This is the ultimate, the eschatological experience of God'"³⁴. This had divisive and unedifying results: Paul was regarded condescendingly, the church was divided on the value of spiritual gifts, and the lifestyle of some was dishonourable and a burden to the community.

However, (a) it is doubtful whether prophecy was such a great problem in Thessalonica, especially not by the time of 1 Thessalonians: 5.19-22 is in the midst of a list of brief, general exhortations as regular paraenesis, not particular correction. There is not enough emphasis to

³⁴ J.G.D.Dunn, Jesus and the Spirit (SCM, London, 1975), p.269.

warrant the hypothesis of a major problem. In 1 Corinthians we find an explicit statement of the division in the church before the attack on wisdom, presence and eloquence (1.10-17).

(b) Paul's account of his behaviour in Thessalonica may not be because of particular criticism but merely to recall his mission and ethical example, and possibly because he was accused of ulterior motives, or of taking advantage of people. It need not be a specific defence, especially not against criticism from the community. If they were scorning Paul, we would expect a mention at 1 Thess 2.6 in Timothy's report - but this states the opposite, that they were longing to see him. The whole 'self-defence' of 1 Thessalonians is in a very affectionate tone. (c) 2 Thess 2.2 is not as clear as Dunn assumes: $\alpha\lambda\epsilon\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ is only one of three possibilities for the source of the error, and we have argued elsewhere that if charisma were a problem, Paul would deal with it here³⁵. (d) Nor is there any evidence in 2 Thessalonians that Paul was regarded condescendingly; if his authority were being ignored in favour of charismatic utterance, he would surely defend himself. The apostolic commands of 2.15, 3.6, 3.12-14 are given on the assumption that the Thessalonians recognise his authority. Paul does not defend his authority: he simply uses it. If Dunn is right, Paul should not only have repeated his apocalyptic teaching but also his teaching on discerning spirits - but he does not.

³⁵ Cf. B.VI.2.c.ii.

The popularity of astral prediction in the ancient world and the considerable respect amounting to fear and dread accorded to it, might suggest that the Thessalonian error originated in this area. A.J. Festugière quotes a description of the effect of astral beliefs and prediction which bears some resemblance to the Thessalonian situation: "they submit to these fears not as a result of mature opinion but of some irrational suggestion, so that, as they do not define the danger which is to come, they suffer a disturbance as severe or even more extensive than if they had formed an opinion on these matters. Peace of mind consists in being delivered from all these fears and in keeping constantly in mind the general and essential truths"³⁶. However, Paul does not denounce astral prediction in this letter: if the Thessalonians still thought that the stars as gods ruled their destiny, he would surely disabuse them. Either he was unaware of this and did not even suspect it, or this is not the cause of the error.

V.3 hints that the list of v.2 is not exhaustive - "let no-one deceive you in any way"³⁷. It seems most likely that Paul was uncertain, or totally ignorant, of the sources of the error and merely lists possibilities to cover every eventuality³⁸.

4. A reconstruction of the error and situation

Some kind of communication (2.2) had asserted that the

³⁶ A.J. Festugière, Epicurus and his gods (Blackwell, Oxford, 1955), p.79. Festugière is quoting from the Letter to Pythocles 81-82.

³⁷ Cf. Frame comm. ad loc.

³⁸ Cf. Best comm. ad loc.

Day was present. The Thessalonians knew it could not be (because of Paul's teaching, 2.5, and the futurist emphasis of 1 Thessalonians, especially 1.10) but since the communication had apparent authority (rumoured, or claimed to be from Paul 1?) they were thrown into confusion (ἑρπεῖσθαι), beginning despite themselves to question their sane assessment of the truth (σαλευθῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ νοῦς). If they concluded anything, they probably thought "it must be nearer than we thought". This could result in (a) not knowing which to rely on most - Paul's previous outline or the new teaching - which should interpret the other? Were Paul's signs as obvious as they had thought? It could also result in (b) ἀτάκτως κερικατεῖν; both emotional upset and the conclusion that there was very little time left could lead to ~~demotivation and~~ demoralization. This could result from the situation even if they did not conclude anything.

This interpretation reads ἐνεστήκεν in its natural sense; gives the Thessalonians full credit for intelligence; includes their previous teaching according to 2.5; explains their reactions; explains why Paul is not more severe - if they have not swallowed the error whole but are just confused (and maybe hypothesizing) and therefore consult him about it. It does not explain the origin of the error, but if Paul does not know how it came, let alone from whom, it is unlikely that we could discover it when our only source of information is Paul's letter.

It must be emphasised that the problem was not that the Thessalonians were tired of waiting for the Day: it was not that kind of impatience, which would suggest a late date for

the letter. Rather they were excited and agitated with the kind of impatience which springs from being on tenterhooks. The first kind of impatience does not accompany excitement but boredom, cynicism and loss of zeal.

C.II. The Thessalonians in Affliction: 2 Thess 1

1. Introduction

In the thanksgiving which opens the letter, Paul refers to the *διωγμοὶ καὶ ἐλύψεις* which the Thessalonians are undergoing. Evidently the church was being opposed in some manner, but the extent and consequences of this opposition are debated. In this section our study will focus upon the question whether the apocalyptic error of chapter 2 was caused by the persecution mentioned in chapter 1: more specifically, as it is usually formulated, whether the Thessalonians believed that they were undergoing the Messianic woes, and therefore concluded that the Day of the Lord had begun. According to this theory, the Day is a long period which includes the Woes. Other points of interpretation in the chapter which have indirect relevance to our main question are: the reason for the 'obligatory' thanksgiving of v.3; the meaning of v.5f with the hapax legomena *ἐνδειγμα*; the place of retributive justice, v.6-9; and whether Paul sees suffering as expiatory, v.5. These points will be dealt with first.

2. Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν τῷ θεῷ πάντοτε ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν...

By the use of *ὀφείλομεν* and its reinforcement with *καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν*, Paul seems to express some kind of obligation to thank God for the Thessalonians. Frame argues that this indicates considerable discouragement among them: they were "fainthearted"¹, because of the pressure of persecution (among other reasons) and since the writing of 1 Thessalonians they had declared themselves unworthy of the praise Paul bestowed on them there. Here he refuses to

¹ Frame comm. passim.

withdraw his praise, and instead reinforces it in order to encourage them and boost their confidence. Neil also suggests that they had deprecated Paul's praise, and most commentators are agreed that Paul is by no means reluctant to thank God on their behalf: rather, his choice of words indicates strong personal desire and intention². Rigaux

² In 1 Clement 38.15, Barnabas 5.3, 7.1, ὀφείλομεν is used with εὐχαριστεῖν without any sense of onerous duty. 1 Clement 38.15: ταῦτα οὖν πάντα ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἔχοντες ὀφείλομεν κατὰ πάντα εὐχαριστεῖν αὐτῷ. Barnabas 5.3: Wherefore we ought all the more to give thanks unto God, for that he hath both declared unto us what is passed, and hath not suffered us to be without understanding of those things that are to come". Barnabas 7.1: "Understand then, my beloved children, that the good God hath before manifested all things unto us, that we might know to whom we ought always to give thanks and praise" (Translation from Ancient and Modern Library of Theological Literature. The Apostolic Fathers. Part I, ed. Burton, Griffiths and Co. London). Compare: P.Oxy VII 1021¹⁴ (AD 54): διὸ πάντες ὀφείλομεν... θεοῖς χάσι εἰδέναι χάριτας "therefore we all ought to give thanks to all the gods". P.Ryl II 77⁵⁹ (AD 192) ἐναδιζήμενος τὴν μείζονα ἀρχὴν οὐκ ὀφείλει τὴν ἐλάττω ἀποφεύγειν "a person who has offered to undertake the greater office ought not to shun the lesser". P.Giss I 40¹¹²³ (AD 215); ἐ[κένου] κωλ[ύ]εσθαι ὀφε[ί]λουσιν, οὔτινες φεύγουσι τὰς χώρας τὰς ἰδίας "those who flee their own country should be prevented" (Moulton and Milligan s.v.; the translation of P.Giss is mine). ὀφείλω seems to indicate how things should be, the natural state of affairs, rather than any reluctance or grudging observance of duty. R.D. Aus has demonstrated that both ὀφείλομεν εὐχαριστεῖν and καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν are regular forms for liturgical thanksgiving, and that they are especially suitable for a context of suffering: "The texts examined above, especially Hermes Sim. IX 28.5; Pesahim 10.5; Berakoth 9.5; and Rev 3.4; 5.9,12, show that the two liturgical phrases the author of 2 Thessalonians employs to express the necessity and propriety of thanking God are indeed appropriate to a context of suffering". There are therefore no grounds for concluding from these phrases that the letter is non-Pauline or that the author is using a cool tone. ("The liturgical background of the necessity and propriety of giving thanks according to 2 Thess 1.3", JBL 92 (1973), p.432-38: p.438 quoted).

explains the addition of *καθὼς ἄξιόν ἐστιν* as the human side: not only were thanks due to God, but the Thessalonians themselves had indeed played their part and merited praise³. Lünemann sees the phrase as the objective side of the obligation: both internal conviction (*ὀφείλομεν*) and external fact, their observable behaviour, gave rise to thanksgiving⁴.

Frame's theory of the fainthearted is a central feature of his commentary on 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and colours his whole interpretation. This is a suitable point at which to make some critical and modifying comment on the theory. Briefly, it derives from the *ἐλιγοψύχοι* of 1 Thess 5.14, who Frame believes are fainthearted because of the death of some Christians (4.13-17) and a lack of assurance about their own salvation (5.1-11). The same group are treated again in 2 Thess 1.3-2.17: hence the encouragement in persecution and emphasis on certain salvation in 2.13-17. There is, however, no evidence that *ἐλιγοψύχοι* in 1 Thess 5.14 refers to those addressed in 4.13-5.11⁵: 4.13-17 is not precisely a cause of personal discouragement but a muddle over the order of events (*οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας* v.15). This is a matter for concern and might result in discouragement, but even so there is no connection between this problem and that of 2 Thess 2. The worriers of 1 Thess 4 knew that the Day was not yet here: that was

³ Rigaux comm. ad loc.

⁴ Lünemann comm. ad loc.

⁵ Cf. D.G. Bradley, "The *τέλος* as a form in Pauline paraenesis" JBL 72 (53), p.238-46: p.245.

precisely the problem, since the Christians who died would not, they feared, see the Lord at his coming. 1 Thess 5.1-11 is not an assurance of salvation but an answer to the question "when?". Paul argues that the Day will come suddenly, so they must maintain continual expectation and preparedness. Frame holds that because they know all too well the need for readiness, and the moral stricture of judgment, they are afraid of not proving acceptable⁶: but if this were so, then Paul would not need to urge sobriety and wakefulness, and to do so would exacerbate their faintheartedness, not calm and strengthen them.

In the case of 2 Thessalonians, Frame argues that the emphasis on certain salvation in 1.5-12 and 2.13-17, and the statement that the advent of the Anomos is for unbelievers, show that this whole section is directed to the fainthearted⁷. The persecutions, the assertions about the Day and their own sense of unworthiness lead to despair. Hence Paul's insistence on thanksgiving. However, the word ὀλιψοψύχοι does not appear at all in 2 Thessalonians, and the results of the error are confusion and excitement (2.2) rather than faintheartedness. 1.4 indicates that they were maintaining hope in persecution - surely Paul would not boast of this in order to produce it, but only because it was already there and he wished to confirm and increase it by his encouragement. The passage 2.13-17 describes the

⁶ Frame comm. p.11.

⁷ Frame comm. on 1.3.

destiny of believers in contrast to that of unbelievers (2.9-12), but this is by no means necessarily because the Thessalonians tended to rank themselves with the latter. It continues the mirror-image contrast between the Man of Sin and Christ, describing the future destiny of the followers of each as this is bound up with their present allegiance.

It is fair to comment that the situation of the early church was difficult, and there is a high probability that some members of each church were daunted by it, needing continual encouragement. But this is no reason to hypothesize a specific and (by implication) exceptional group in Thessalonica, and then trace most of the church's problems back to this group.

3. What is the sign (ἐνδειγμα) of v.5?

Ἐνδειγμα is a hapax legomenon in the NT; the cognate ἐνδειξις occurs at Rom 3.25f, 2 Cor 8.24 and Phil 1.28. Both mean a sign in the sense of evidence, proof. In our text it is not altogether clear what is the proof, whether the affliction or the Thessalonians' endurance or both, their endurance under affliction. As most commentators agree, the third possibility is most likely. The suffering is due to the Thessalonians' Christian allegiance, and by their endurance they demonstrate that they are God's people. So the final judgment, accepting them and rejecting their persecutors, will be just. Its justice may be seen now in the situation which highlights the division between those working with God, and those against him. The thought of Phil 1.28-30 is very similar, although there Paul speaks of an omen to the persecutors, whereas in 2 Thessalonians

the ἔνδειγμα is not referred to any party in particular. Best extends the ἔνδειγμα still further, to include Paul's boast: "the sure sign is that Paul boasts of their faith and endurance in persecutions and tribulations"⁸.

4. Retributive justice, v.6-8

Is Paul here expressing an arbitrary, vindictive idea of judgment, more suited to the Jewish pseudepigrapha than a Pauline letter? S. Travis has made a study of retributive thought in Paul, acquitting him of this accusation. He points out that Paul rarely uses retributive vocabulary (eg. μισθός, ἐκδικέω) and those usages are often in a non-retributive context. The vital distinction between Paul's doctrine of retribution and any arbitrary concept is that for Paul, retribution is always treated in terms of relationship to God. This forms both the criterion of judgment and the manner of punishment or reward. "Paul means this when he speaks in terms of judgment according to works, and to interpret these passages moralistically is to misinterpret them. This 'relational' idea underlies even an apparently retributive passage such as 2 Thess 1.6"⁹. The punishment is exclusion from the presence of the Lord (2 Thess 1.9); the reward is correspondingly inclusion within his presence (2 Cor 5.8, 1 Thess 4.17, 5.10, 2 Thess 1.10, 2.1). Eschatological salvation is the continuation and

⁸ Best comm. ad loc.

⁹ S.Travis, "The Place of Divine Retribution in the Thought of Paul", (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1970), p.276.

consummation of the relationship with God already experienced. "To call this 'reward' in the strictly retributive sense would be equivalent to calling marriage a reward for engagement"¹⁰. The idea of retribution occurs in 2 Thess 1 because of the situation of persecution; but it remains non-vindictive, based entirely on disobedience to the gospel. This is the reason behind the persecution: the persecutors are condemned not so much for their persecution of the church but for the underlying rejection of God which this behaviour demonstrates. The whole passage is highly restrained, compared with such lurid descriptions of retributive punishment as 4 Ezra 7.80-87, 1 Enoch 22.

Retribution is a natural and constant theme in apocalyptic. The point about it is that finally, justice will be done without arbitrariness or partiality, which, for the oppressed, is good news. Objections to this concept seem to assume that it is unfair. As Best points out¹¹, without this ultimate justice the universe would be immoral - and that is the apocalypticist's worst fear¹².

¹⁰ Travis, op.cit., p.278.

¹¹ Best comm. on 1.5.

¹² 1 Thess 2.16, although outside our text, ought to be mentioned here, since it apparently states that the judgment of God has already fallen on the Jews as a punishment for their rejection of the gospel. This is an extremely puzzling verse and there are many different interpretations. It could mean a final condemnation of the Jews from that time, or their current state of rejection which would later be reversed (cf. Rom 11), it could refer to an historical calamity which Paul understands as a temporary judgment on the Jews, or a prophetic statement about the judgment which was hanging over them because of their rejection of the gospel but which would not fall until the End. Whatever Paul was referring to, and however we interpret this controversial verse, the principle is clear and coincides with the principle of 2 Thess 1.6-8: those who reject the gospel (and therefore oppose it, whether silently or actively) will themselves be rejected and punished by God.

5. Is the suffering of the Thessalonians expiatory? (v.5)

"Paul could become so caught up by his great desire to comfort a congregation in its afflictions, that he does not hesitate to apply here the seemingly unchristian (for the Gentile Christian of today) idea of suffering as expiatory or beneficial in regard to the future life, an idea which he as a former Pharisee would have shared with his fellow Jews before his conversion"¹³.

Paul was certainly aiming to comfort and encourage the church: but it is quite unnecessary to interpret v.5 in an expiatory sense. The crucial word, *καταξιῶν* is better translated "deem or count worthy" than "make worthy". The commentators adduce Lk 20.35 and Acts 5.41 in support of the former translation: the Luke text is inconclusive but the Acts one only makes sense if translated "deem worthy". There is a vital distinction between "expiatory" and "beneficial", which Aus lumps together: the latter is the appropriate term for 2 Thess 1.5. The sufferings serve a positive purpose of trial and testing. Selwyn describes them as the school of humility, faith and hope, and joy in suffering purges the character, unites it with Christ and is a prelude to glory at the End¹⁴. This, though a comment on 1 Peter, is equally relevant to 2 Thess 1, where the chapter ends by looking forward to a goal of mutual

¹³ R.D.Aus, "Comfort in Judgment: the use of Day of the Lord and theophany traditions in 2 Thess. 1", (Ph.D. thesis, Yale, 1971), p.74.

¹⁴ E.G.Selwyn, The First Epistle of St. Peter (Macmillan, London, 1947), p.78f.

glorification - of Christ in his church and vice versa (v.10-12).

This, then, is the sense of v.1-7: the final judgment of God will be just; the verdict will be acquittal of the persecuted and conviction of the persecutors. Thus the persecuted will be deemed worthy to share the kingdom, because they are at present demonstrating their allegiance to God. The justice of the judgment may be seen now in the fact that the Christians are faithfully enduring the suffering inflicted on them by the enemies of the gospel.

6. Did the Thessalonians think they were experiencing the Messianic Woes?

One explanation for the apocalyptic error in Thessalonica is that the persecution was such as to lead the Christians to think that they were undergoing the final birthpangs, which according to Jewish tradition would herald the coming of the Messiah. This Jewish belief was adopted by the church and transferred to the second coming of Christ. Hence the Synoptic Apocalypse speaks of wars, tumults, disasters and general affliction, and Revelation envisages a crescendo of disastrous events and a steady collapse of the natural order up to the End¹⁵. If this was the Thessalonian error, then the claim that the Day is here could have meant that

¹⁵ D.R.A.Hare, (The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to Matthew, CUP, 1967), remarks that although the concept of the Woes was quickly appropriated by Christians (Mk 13.8), "the motif is almost completely absent from Paul's letters" (p.78). This is an argument from silence, but it does carry some weight, since Paul does discuss persecution in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and this would be an ideal place to explain the doctrine of the Woes, especially as the Thessalonians were anxious about the parousia in various ways.

the Day has begun, if the Woes were seen as part of the final drama, all of which was designated "Day of the Lord"¹⁶. This theory is held by R.D. Aus, who finds the background for 2 Thess 1 in Is 66 and scattered verses of Jeremiah¹⁷. The verb κατέχειν is directly associated with the birthpangs in Jer 6.24, 13.21, 37.6, and the delaying factor may be seen in Is 66.9. Aus implies not only that the Thessalonians believed they were suffering the Woes, but that this is the meaning of τὸ κατέχον.

It is unclear where Aus finds a delaying factor in Is 66.9: the passage uses the image of childbirth to emphasise the immediacy of God's action - "shall I bring to the birth and not cause to bring forth? says the Lord" - not a delay, and birth is said to take place even before labour pains have begun. The Jeremiah verses are as follows: Jer 6.24 Θλίψις κατέσχευεν ἡμᾶς ; Jer 13.21 οὐκ ᾔδινες κατέξουσιν σε ; Jer 37.6 ἔρωτησατε, καὶ ἴδετε ... ἕως φόβου, ἐν ᾧ καθέξουσιν ὄσφυν καὶ σωτηρίαν. In these verses, the woes seize the people. If Aus is implying that the κατέχον is the Woes which the Thessalonians are going through, this raises problems of interpretation. The κατέχον is removed at the coming of the Man of Sin - but the Woes are to herald the Messiah's coming; they are not expected to cease at the point where wickedness is let loose ultimately. Logically, this would be the time of the

¹⁶ The theory of the Day as a period is discussed in section C.I.1.c.

¹⁷ R.D.Aus, "The Relevance of Is 66.7 to Revelation 12 and 2 Thess 1." ZNTW 67 (1976), p.252-268.

Woes. Paul would also seem to be confirming the Thessalonians' ideas about the Woes which had caused the error. We would expect him to state that these sufferings were not the Woes - or, if he had taught that the Day commenced with the Woes, he would point out that this was only the beginning.

1 Thess 3.3 is also used to support this theory: Paul has taught that affliction is to be expected and indeed is necessary, and this is taken as a reference to the birthpangs of the Messiah. But since there is no direct reference to the birthpangs elsewhere in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, this remains only a possible interpretation, and the verse may be adequately explained as referring to the inevitable consequences of belonging to the church, and the particularly Pauline consciousness of suffering with Christ¹⁸. Aus holds that in 1 Thess 3.3 Paul did mean the Messianic Woes, but when the Thessalonians concluded that the Woes were in progress, he contradicted this, replacing it with a positive evaluation of suffering as increasing faith and hope (2 Thess 1). Again it must be objected that Paul does not explicitly contradict any ideas about suffering in 2 Thess 1, and the corrective teaching of 2 Thess 2 makes little sense if applied to the concept of Messianic Woes.

Selwyn observes that the Woes of Jewish eschatology did not include persecution of the godly, and concludes that

¹⁸ According to H.St.J.Thackeray (The Relation of St.Paul to contemporary Jewish Thought, Macmillan,1900), 1 Thess 3.3 refers to persecution by Jews, either past or imminent, "and there is no ground for tracing a connection with the final woes" (p.105).

this is a characteristically Christian addition: "That was a distinctively Christian view, and represents a definite addition to the features of the Jewish eschatological expectation"¹⁹. Selwyn does not draw the conclusion that a context which speaks specifically of one kind of suffering, namely persecution or generally human affliction (ἐπίψις) might therefore not be about the Woes at all. The main references in Jewish literature describe wars, famines, drought, earthquakes and other natural disasters, portents in the heavens - and the only recurrent human aspect is the loss of human affections, so that children are abandoned and murders abound. Some texts describe vague, generalized moral breakdown, but none mention persecution of the godly by the ungodly, and even religious apostasy is rare²⁰. Several texts in Daniel describe persecution of the godly by their great enemy, Antiochus Epiphanes²¹; but this is described as part of the Woes. If this feature ever was present in the concept of the Woes, by the later apocalyptic writings it has been superseded by a preoccupation with cosmic catastrophes. The nearest Paul approaches to these in 2 Thessalonians is in the second chapter with the apostasy and mystery of lawlessness; but these are undefined and from

¹⁹ Selwyn, op.cit., p.301.

²⁰ Cf. 2 Baruch 27, 1 Enoch 80.2-8, 91.5-7, 93.9, 99.4-9, 100.1ff, Jubilees 23.13-23, Sibylline Oracles 3.538ff, 633ff, 796ff, 5.512ff, 2 Baruch 32.1, 48.32-8, 70.2ff, 4 Ezra 5.1-12, 6.21-4.

²¹ Dan 7.21, 8.11f, 24, 11.28,30, cf. 2 Maccabees 6,7.

the context probably religious phenomena, far removed from the predominantly cosmic and cataclysmic character of the Woes.

In any case, the sufferings of the Thessalonians may not have been grave enough to precipitate the idea that they were the Woes. The words ταῖς θωγμοῖς καὶ τοῖς θλίψεσιν v.4, are almost synonymous, though a slight distinction may be drawn between θωγμός which more often denotes religious persecution than θλίψις which is used for general affliction. They are almost interchangeable, and are used together elsewhere (cf. Mk 4.17, Mt 13.21), suggesting that they formed a well-worn phrase for general usage, rather than distinguishing between two types of suffering. Paul is therefore quite unspecific in referring to the Thessalonian sufferings, and no conclusion can be drawn about the exact nature or cause of the suffering. We may hazard a guess that it was informal, sporadic harassment, rather than organised, official suppression, for which we have no evidence before AD 112, in Pliny's correspondence with Trajan about the Christians of Bithynia.

7. Conclusion

We have argued that the purpose of 2 Thess 1 is neither to encourage a specific group of Christians who are "fainthearted", nor to dispute an understanding of present suffering as the Messianic Woes. Positively, it may be asserted that the chapter definitely aims to encourage the church in a difficult situation which Paul himself had experienced (Acts 17.1-10) and feared might cause further

trouble for the church (1 Thess 3.1-5): but there is not enough evidence to support the view that the apocalyptic problem dealt with in chapter 2 was caused by the persecution. The two chapters treat separate subjects, although Paul moves smoothly from one to the other, since he encouraged the suffering Christians to look forward to the glory awaiting them at the parousia (1.10-12) which leads into a discussion of when that parousia is to be expected. Aus makes the point that the encouragement and future vision of chapter 1 is a suitable prelude to the potentially dampening teaching of chapter 2²², which on its own might make the future goal seem rather remote. Paul needs to correct misplaced apocalyptic zeal without destroying the church's lively expectation and hope, and he does so by first assuring them of the certainty of the final outcome and the eternal significance of their present daily life, before reminding them that the consummation is still to be waited for patiently.

²² Aus, Comfort in Judgment, p.37f.

C.III. The ἄτακτοι : 2 Thess 3.6-11

1. Introduction

In this chapter we shall be concentrating on one issue raised by 2 Thess 3.6-11: the question of whether the problem of the ἄτακτοι was caused by the apocalyptic error to which Paul wrote 2.1-12. Opinions as to the connection between ch.2 and 3 fall into two broad categories: those who think the apocalyptic error gave rise to the ἄτακτοι problem; and those who think the two are unconnected.

The interpretation of ἄτακτοι assumed throughout is the neglect of secular work. The translation is disputed, the chief alternatives being "idle" or "disorderly"¹ but the two

¹ The debate centres round usage in the papyri, especially P.Oxy 725, which lists reasons why an apprentice might fail to work the stipulated number of days in the year: εἰαν δὲ κλειόνας τούτων ἀργήσῃ ἢ ἀσθενήσῃ ἢ ἀτακτῆσῃ ἢ δι' ἄλλην τινα αἰτίαν. Milligan (comm.p.154) deduces that ἀργήσῃ and ἀτακτῆσῃ are here practically synonymous, so ἄτακτος indicates not "actual wrongdoing" but "a certain remissness" (comm. p.153) in conduct. Frame (comm.p.197) agrees with Milligan and clarifies the interpretation as culpable idleness. In his essay on the subject ("οἱ ἄτακτοι" "Essays in Modern Theology to C.A.Briggs, C.Scribner's Sons, New York, 1911; p.191-206) Frame expands this to show that he is arguing against the translation "disorderly" (which fits the military usage) in favour of "idle, loaf", because of the papyri where ἀτακτῆσῃ is almost synonymous with ἀργήσῃ. He prefers "loaf" to "idle" because he considers that it conveys better the sense of wilful neglect. The usage in P.Oxy 725 could however equally support the translation "disorderly", if the offences are listed as alternatives - which it would appear, since ἀσθενήσῃ falls between ἀργήσῃ and ἀτακτῆσῃ. This text lends no conclusive support to either translation. As we have observed above, idleness is a form of disorderly behaviour, where and when one is expected to work (eg. in the case of the apprentices or the Thessalonians). Milligan's distinction between actual wrongdoing and remissness is difficult to sustain, since περιεργαζομένους (3.11) implies not only omission to work but active substitution of a different activity (which is unspecified, cf. note 6); and omission to work is itself "actual wrongdoing" in Paul's eyes, especially as the ἄτακτοι were deliberately disobeying his command and example (3.6-10). Both idleness and disorderly behaviour are rebuked.

are very close in meaning. The text clearly refers to people who are not working, and are therefore idle in the sense of unemployed (or playing truant). This is in itself an instance of disorderly behaviour. V.11 shows that the ἄτακτοι substituted a different kind of activity for their proper work, which emphasises the disorderly aspect of their idleness. The text implies at least the kind of disorderliness involved in being idle; other kinds of disorder may also have prevailed, and may be alluded to in περιεργαζομένους, but the text is not specific enough to define the disorder involved. However, the ἄτακτοι may fairly be called either 'idle' or 'disorderly', since both are implied by the text.

2. Apocalyptic error leads to the problem of the ἄτακτοι

We may imagine three possible reactions of the Thessalonians to the apocalyptic situation, each affecting their emotions and behaviour.

a) A vivid awareness of how near (if not present) the End is might give rise to the conviction that work is no longer appropriate to the situation, and that Christians should rather concentrate on preparing themselves (and others, which could be the meaning of περιεργαζομένους) for the End. This kind of reaction has been observed among various apocalyptic sects who from time to time will 'down tools' to wait with bated breath, as it were, for the End to come². Hippolytus tells of a leader of the Syrian church who led

² Cf. Neil comm. p.87; N.Cohn, The Pursuit of the Millenium (Paladin, London, 1970).

his followers to meet Christ in the desert; the governor almost had them killed as brigands, but being persuaded by his Christian wife, he merely suppressed them³. Another disturbance occurred when a leader of the church in Pontus declared that the judgment would come within the year, telling his followers ὡς ὅτι ἐνέσθη κεν ἡ ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου. He so scared them (εἰς τοσοῦτον ἦν αὐτοῖς φόβος καὶ δειλίαν τοῦ ἀδελφοῦς) that they left their fields and almost all sold their possessions (ὥστε ἔλασεν αὐτῶν τὰς χώρας καὶ τοὺς ἀγρούς ἐσθήτους τὰ τε κτήματα αὐτῶν οἱ ἀλείους κατελώλεσαν). When the year passed and nothing happened, they were all disabused and returned to their work.

b) The false apocalyptic teaching might lead not to strong conviction but to doubt, anxiety, nervous tension. The impending dissolution of the world and perhaps especially the judgment before the Lord played on their nerves, and the apparent contradiction with what Paul had told them before would cause distress and confusion. This emotional reaction might result in a neglect of work, not because work was seen as irrelevant but because the Thessalonians were under too much mental strain to concentrate on everyday affairs: they were demoralized. Thus Neil speaks of "profitless fluttering and overwrought nerves ... unbalanced ... quite unable to carry out their daily duties". Further on, however, Neil seems to contradict himself, implying a different attitude: they were "not only unwilling to work for themselves, but were quite prepared to live off the work

³Hippolytus: commentary on Daniel, 4.18f, 19.4f.

of others, and not content with that to meddle in their affairs at the same time"⁴. This is an unscrupulous, grasping, officious attitude, quite different from genuine distress and anxiety.

c) The emotional reaction might take a different course, to produce excitement rather than anxiety: looking forward in eager anticipation, rather than anxious dread. Again, work would not be abandoned on principle, but their state of mind would not be conducive to the steady pursuit of secular responsibility. This is typical eschatological excitement which produces both laziness and overactivity: abandonment of work, and an excess of energy to be worked off elsewhere. Frame takes this line: the feverish excitement about the parousia undermined their tranquility and resulted in idleness and meddling (*κερνευομενους* v.11, which Frame understands as meddling in church affairs) which itself led to poverty, a demand for support, and more meddling - this time in church finances. Frame holds that this state of affairs had prevailed since before Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians and is alluded to in 1 Thess 4.10-13, 5.12-14: it caused their lack of *φιλαδελφία* and of respect for the *κοιτωντας εν υμιν* and of peace; the financial demands were causing friction within the church⁵. This theory relies heavily on the interpretation of *κερνευομενους* in 2 Thess 3.11 as interfering in church affairs. Frame concludes this on

⁴ Neil comm. p.192.

⁵ frame comm. ad loc.

the grounds that there is no mention of Gentiles in the context, so public affairs are not in mind. But this is very thin evidence: the language of 3.11 is vague and general, and we cannot be sure exactly what kind of activity Paul is alluding to (if indeed he knew exactly what the ἄτακτοι were getting up to). The point stands, however, that the ἄτακτοι were demanding community support (3.7-10) and this may be part of what is meant by περιεργαζομένους⁶.

In Findlay's view, the ἄτακτοι were excited in an unwholesome way. "Having thrown up their proper work, the mischief-makers went about ventilating the latest sensational rumours (about the Day) and thus disturbing the quiet of the church and interrupting their diligent brethren"⁷. This is again an unscrupulous version of the reaction⁸: the enjoyment of rumours and sensation is quite different from eager excitement.

⁶ περιεργάζομαι is used in various contexts, eg.: Herodotus 3,46 τῷ φυλάκῳ περιεργάσθαι; Plato Apology 3.19B ἑλικράτης ἀδικεῖ καὶ περιεργάζεται; Polybius 18,51,2 οὐδὲ γὰρ οὗτος περιεργάζεσθαι τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἰταλίαν ἄλλως οὐδὲν; Inscriptiones Graecae III 1,74,14f ὅς ἂν δὲ πολυπραγμονήσῃ τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ περιεργάσῃται ἁμαρτίαν ἐφελέτω Μηνὶ Τυράννῳ, ἣν οὐ μὴ δύναται ἐξελάσασθαι. The sense seems to be any unnecessary or improper concerns - intellectual (Plato), political (Polybius, Herodotus), or religious (I.G.). We can reach no conclusion on linguistic grounds about whether the meddling of the ἄτακτοι was in church affairs, or other men's private affairs or public affairs.

⁷ Findlay comm. ad loc.

⁸ Cf. Neil, lb.

Does the text give any clue as to which of these possibilities may be the most appropriate if the ἄτακτος problem was caused by the apocalyptic error?

a) 2 Thess 2.2 mentions an intellectual and emotional reaction to the error: they were shaken from their sanity and common sense, and excited. This suggests (b) or (c) above, anxiety or excitement; although we must remember that Paul may have been describing generally what he supposed their reaction to be.

b) If the busybodies (3.11) were engaged in sorting other people out, interfering rather than tactfully minding their own business, this implies self-confidence and conviction, and supports (a) above. They could equally be neurotics, frenziedly trying to alert others to the urgency and impending danger, or the over-excited simply running round in circles.

c) Paul's tone is severe in ch.3: he commands that the ἄτακτοι are to resume work and the rest are to disassociate with them until they do so. This suggests (a) or possibly (c): Paul felt that strict measures were necessary, and we would expect him to be more sensitive and gentle if the ἄτακτοι were in genuine distress. Having removed their need of anxiety in ch.2, there would be no need to press the point as ch.3 does.

d) It is odd that Paul does not mention the apocalyptic error again in ch.3 - not even to point out that there was now no reason not to resume a normal working life. This leads on to the second main possibility.

3. The ἀτακτοῦ problem was not caused by the apocalyptic error

Since there is no explicit connection made in the text between the problems of ch. 2 and 3, some scholars conclude that they were not causally connected. The ἀτακτοῦ problem is then traced to such origins as a philosophy popular in Thessalonica, or a local social problem.

1 Thessalonians contains an exhortation to work (4.11) and this is sometimes held to demonstrate that the problem predated the apocalyptic error of 2 Thessalonians. By the time 2 Thessalonians was written it had been exacerbated (possibly under the influence of the error) and required separate lengthy treatment. This is a possible reconstruction, but not proven; since we know from 2 Thessalonians that Paul did earn his living whilst in Thessalonica, he may in 1 Thess 4.11 be simply reminding them of the moral he drew from it at the time. On the other hand, his original example may have been due to an already prevalent reluctance to work amongst the Christians, or the Thessalonians in general.

R.M. Evans does connect the two problems, but not causally: he suggests that the ἀτακτοῦ used the heightened apocalyptic expectation as a pious excuse for their behaviour. The tendency towards idleness existed before the apocalyptic situation arose, and it may be traced to pagan influence in Thessalonica: a characteristic Hellenistic attitude was detachment from the world, and this was compounded with Stoicism. These philosophies when abused or taken advantage

of may degenerate into irresponsibility and idleness⁹.

A.J. Malherbe, A.J. Festugière and others¹⁰ attribute the problem of idleness to Epicureanism. This philosophy cultivated ~~disassociation~~ disassociation, from the world, detachment and simplicity of lifestyle. "It is to avoid being worried that a man restricts himself to the simplest mode of life, gives up the comforts of wealth, and lives apart from the world, politics, and affairs"¹¹. However, such tendencies are not irresponsible in themselves; no evidence of refusal to work is produced, and a 'busybody' attitude would be quite inimical to an Epicurean. Malherbe suggests a more plausible theory that Paul may have wanted to preclude the possibility of the Thessalonians' being seen as an Epicurean community - "He may have detected tendencies in them that he felt were incongruent with the gospel and would lead to such criticism of the church as was levelled at the Epicureans"¹².

R.H. Hock¹³ traces the Thessalonian problem to the long-standing debate in the Greek world over whether a philosopher should be self-supporting. Paul modelled himself on the Cynic ideal of the working philosopher whose attitude was dictated by gentleness rather than harsh demands for financial support¹⁴. Hence Paul's example in Thessalonica

⁹ R.M.Evans, "Eschatology and Ethics: a study of Thessalonica and Paul's letters to the Thessalonians", (Ph.D. thesis, Basel, 1967), p.78, 173f.

¹⁰ A.J.Malherbe, Social Aspects of Early Christianity (Louisiana State U.P., Baton Rouge and London, 1977); A.J.Festugiere, Epicurus and his gods (Blackwell, Oxford, 1955); N.W.De Witt, St. Paul and Epicurus, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1954); Cf. R.Jungkuntz, "Fathers, heretics and Epicureans", JEH 17 (1966), p.3-10.

¹¹ Festugière, op.cit., p.57.

¹² Malherbe, op.cit., p.27.

¹³ R.H.Hock, "The Working Apostle: an examination of Paul's means of livelihood", (Ph.D.thesis, Yale, 1974).

¹⁴ Hock, op.cit., p.78.

combined working with preaching. Hock denies any connection between 1 Thess 4.11f and the eschatological teaching that follows: the nearness of the End is irrelevant to this issue¹⁵. He holds that 2 Thess 3 is non-Pauline, partly on the grounds that Paul's ethical exhortation has lost its theological dimension: no longer is self-support motivated by brotherly love, as in 1 Thess 4.9-12¹⁶. Hock seems to have overlooked Paul's mention of the love of God in v.5; his use of "brethren" in v.6,13; and his express instruction not to discipline each other as enemies but as brothers (v.15). Hock's study does not decisively answer our question about the connection between the ἀτιμακτοὶ and the apocalyptic error. The ἀτιμακτοὶ may have been frauds, not genuine philosophers, and may have used the apocalyptic error as a further excuse for idleness. It is important to observe that Paul's exhortations to work became suddenly much more lengthy and vehement in the epistle where he also addresses the apocalyptic error. Paul's example and exhortations may indeed have been based on his ideal of the proper life of the philosopher - the question of work may have been raised originally when the Thessalonians were surprised that he did not demand support, and queried this; but we need not infer that the Thessalonians thought of themselves as philosophers with a right to support, any

¹⁵ Hock, op.cit., p.101ff.

¹⁶ Hock, op.cit., p.152.

more than that they were apostles (also with a right to support). If Paul's original exhortation at Thessalonica was delivered in answer to their questioning, the problem of idleness may not have occurred in Thessalonica at that stage: it may only have arisen later as a result of the apocalyptic error, and the fact that Paul can appeal to his earlier instruction would then be incidental.

C. Spicq approaches the ἄτακτος problem from a different angle from ours, but seems to assume that it was not caused by the apocalyptic error. He adduces the extra-biblical usage of ἀτακῶν emphasising disorder, disobedience, rather than idleness¹⁷, to argue that the ἄτακτοι in Thessalonica

¹⁷ C. Spicq, "Les Thessaloniens "inquiets" étaient-ils des paresseux?", Stud Th 10 (1956), p.1-13:
 In law: ἀτακτησις destroys the well-ordered: Plato Laws 6, 780d; Aristotle Polit. 1319 b15. Spicq defines disorder as "ne pas se conformer aux prescriptions de la divinité, de la nature ou de la raison" (p.3) cf. Xenophon Oec. 7.31.
 In military usage: ἄτακτος means refractory, insubordinate: Demosthenes III Olynth. 11; or undisciplined: Lysias C. Alcibiades 14.18, Thucydides 8.10; or it may be used of an army in disorder: Isocrates Archid. 6, 80, Xenophon Econ. 8.4.
 Inscriptions: ἀτακῶν means to raise revolt, to break rules: Dittenberger Syl. 1, 305, 80.
 Papyri: these also support the meaning to revolt, cause disturbance:
 P. Petr. 3, 5, 4; P. Fay 337, 16; P. Osl 3, 159, 9. The formula εἰν τῷ ἀτακῶν is used to introduce the appropriate course of action when the conditions of a contract have been broken:
 P. Zen 4, 59596, 18; P. Oxf. 10, 23, cf. P. Oxy 275, 25.

were on the fringes of the community rebelling against community rules and practice, unprincipled and undisciplined. Their offence is therefore not abandoning secular work but being a nuisance to the Christian community. The text cannot however support this interpretation: there is repeated emphasis on working (ἐργάζομαι : 3.8,10,11,12, cf. 1 Thess 4.11) and earning money (3.8,10,12); and Paul cites his practice of earning his own living as an example to the ἀτακτοὶ. Whatever else the ἀτακτοὶ were or were not doing, they were certainly neglecting their secular jobs.

P. Day reverses the generally accepted order of prominence in 2 Thessalonians to make ch.2 part of the argument of ch.3. He sees the ἀτακτοὶ as Christian ministers who are demanding community support to avoid doing a secular job. The writer argues that they should do as Paul did¹⁸ - work and ministry - and ch.2 is almost an incidental point aimed at the supporting community: "'Do you people realize that we may have to support this man indefinitely?'"¹⁹. This is an eccentric theory. Ch.2 is very far from an eschatological back-up argument to ch.3 (and oddly placed) and there is no evidence that the ἀτακτοὶ were Christian ministers. The argument against them is not that ministry is not work: the apostolic privilege of support is mentioned without disapproval and the point is how much more the ἀτακτοὶ should be prepared to work than Paul who had earned community support. If the ἀτακτοὶ problem existed before 1 Thessalonians was written, 1 Thess 5.12-14 poses problems for the interpretation of the ἀτακτοὶ as ministers. This passage urges respect for the spiritual leaders, then instructs the

18 P. Day "The practical purpose of 2 Thessalonians" ATR 45 (1963), p.203-6. Day thinks 2 Thessalonians is non-Pauline.

19 Day, op.cit., p.205.

whole community to admonish the idle. If the spiritual leaders themselves were idle, Paul would address them directly: the community cannot respect and admonish them simultaneously. If the idlers were self-styled ministers, motivated by laziness and greed, Paul would not urge respect for them: he would be more likely to denounce them as false and wrongly motivated. Equally, if the ἄτακτοι are teaching the error of 2 Thess 2, one would expect Paul to link the two, or at least to point out that their unchristlike behaviour itself throws suspicion on their teaching.

The ἄτακτοι were therefore neither teachers of the error, nor genuine leaders of the community of whom Paul approved. They probably were not self-styled ministers. It is possible that they were a mixed group, including some who set themselves up as spiritual leaders, but there is no conclusive proof for this.

B. Kaye has argued forcibly against causally connecting the apocalyptic and ἄτακτοι problems. He suggests that the ἄτακτοι problem may have "local, and perhaps social roots"²⁰, but concentrates on disputing the view that the problem was caused by Paul's eschatological teaching in 1 Thess 4,5. This is slightly different from our approach so far: we have considered the possible connections between the apocalyptic error alluded to in 2 Thess 2.2 and the ἄτακτοι, without equating this error with 1 Thess 4-5 or tracing it back to that letter. Kaye argues that the eschatological teaching

²⁰ B.N.Kaye, "Eschatology and Ethics in 1 and 2 Thessalonians", NovT 17, p.47-57: p.57.

of 1 Thess 4-5 has positive ethical implications: that it would produce greater responsibility and diligence, not idleness - "behaviour consistent with the purposes of God"²¹. The more imminent the parousia was believed to be, the more these behavioural obligations would be heightened. Paul did not teach a dualism between now and the eschatological future, but an inaugurated eschatology in which conversion and faith had ethical aspects and there was continuity between life now and the future consummation. Kaye's second main point is that 2 Thess 2 has no specific ethical application and there is no connecting sequence of thought through to 3.6. This point may be disputed: there is admittedly no specific ethical application in 2.1-12, but there is a general ethical theme which is picked up and expanded later. The main characteristic of the Man of Sin is his lawlessness, and those whom he deceives are said to take pleasure in unrighteousness. In v.5 the Thessalonians are rebuked for not remembering what Paul had previously taught them. The description of them as elect and sanctified (v.13) contrasts with, and corresponds to the previous description of unbelievers (v.10-12) who are heading for falsehood and unrighteousness. In v.14 the Thessalonians are exhorted to hold to the traditions they are taught; this is a general exhortation and probably includes ethical traditions as well as eschatological ones. They are being sanctified (v.13)

²¹ Kaye, op.cit., p.52.

and to this end should firmly adhere to the traditions (v.15) for which they will have God's help and strength (v.17 - good works and words are mentioned). 3.4 again picks up the theme of obedience to Paul's teaching, and prepares for v.6 where Paul expresses a direct command. Thus 2.13-3.5 is a transition period between the two main topics and links them with the theme of holding to and obeying the traditions received in the past - and in this letter. Paul reinforces a doctrinal tradition (2.1-12) then an ethical one (3.6-13). This does not necessarily imply that the ethical point was causally linked to the doctrinal one, but reduces the dichotomy generally seen between the two chapters.

4. Conclusion

No conclusive argument has been found for or against the non-apocalyptic causation of the ἁτακτοῦ problem; none of the variations suggested for the apocalyptic causation is conclusive. The scales seem equally balanced, and this leads us to suspect that no single explanation for the motivation of the ἁτακτοῦ will satisfactorily account for all the evidence. It may be that we simply lack information, or the search for a single motivation may be misguided. We cannot be certain about the apocalyptic error itself, and to postulate detailed reactions to it is to step further into the unknown. In any case, people react differently to a situation, and if there was confusion about the apocalyptic question it seems highly likely that there were varying behavioural reactions. Some may have latched onto the apocalyptic issue as a justification; others may have become over-anxious or over-excited; or the ἁτακτοῦ may have been a

separate problem altogether. It seems probable that they were a mixed group, with and without scruples, both long-standing and recent burdens on the community.

Conclusion

The conclusions reached in our study have been indicated at the end of each major section. It remains to observe here that our work on 2 Thessalonians has a number of far-reaching implications both for Pauline study and for our own understanding and use of the epistle. For example, at several points we have noted diversities within the community, from its composition (being a mixture of Jew and Gentile) to the causes and results of its problems. The reactions to the problem of the apocalyptic error, and the reasons for the ἀτακτοῦ problem in particular were found to be diverse. This is an important corrective to a tendency in scholarship to oversimplify: to look for one issue in a situation, with a single cause and a single result. The situation is likely to be more complicated than that.

Apocalyptic has been found to play an important rôle in Paul's instruction and correction of the Thessalonians. There is no need to shy away from apocalyptic: Paul uses it in the service of the gospel and he uses it with characteristic freedom. The presence of apocalyptic in 2 Thessalonians is remarkable not because it is unpauline, but because it demonstrates how Paul would take up and use a particular aspect of theology to meet the needs of the occasion. The content of 2 Thess 2.1-12 is unique in Paul's extant writings simply because (as far as we know) the situation did not arise again. There is a principle here for the church's contemporary use of apocalyptic, and indeed

of Scripture as a whole: it is necessary first to understand the situation as far as possible in order to suit the response to the situation, using whichever Biblical teaching can best meet the need.

The more clearly we see that 2 Thessalonians is written for a particular and unique situation, the more evident it is that Paul's epistles are context-bound. It is essential to maintain an overall view of Paul's theology: each passage and each epistle may be unrepresentative of the whole, and no part should be taken in isolation or overemphasised, and although it is sometimes necessary to look at a passage in isolation, this should always be done in the light of the whole, or we may reach false conclusions. No single passage or epistle can be taken as a complete and definitive statement of Paul's theology. It is important also to realize that a passage taken in isolation may appear to be unpauline in theology: but when its context and the writer's intention are fully appreciated, this may not be so.

Excursus: The Truth of Apocalyptic

Introduction

Does our interpretation of 2 Thess 2.1-12 have to remain valid today? The answer a scholar gives to this question considerably affects his interpretation of the text: it is a presupposition which influences his subjective judgment of alternatives. Complete objectivity is impossible (and not necessarily desirable) but where subjectivity enters in, it should at least be acknowledged. In this thesis it has been presupposed that Paul's teaching in 2 Thess 2 is still valid: it has not been disproved by historical events or further theological developments. As this is a major presupposition it warrants a special discussion.

1. Varied NT pictures of the Antichrist

2 Thess 2 is one of several pictures of the Antichrist (under various names) in the NT, others being in the Synoptic Apocalypse, Revelation and Johannine Epistles. They differ widely, and each may be variously interpreted, the chief options being: individual or plural, political or religious, present or future. In comparing Johannine Epistles with 2 Thess 2, Schnackenburg points out that "die Schilderung und Charakterisierung dieses eschatologischen Phänomens, dessen Tatsachlichkeit zum Überlieferungsgut gehört, bleibt im NT und noch lange darüber hinaus unscharf und schwankend"¹. In post-NT times the figure became more

¹ R. Schnackenburg, Die Johannesbriefe, (Freiburg, 1963²), p.144.

predominantly individual (eg. Ascen Is, Didachè) but collective interpretations continue right to the present day. There is no unilinear development of the concept to be observed.

If the NT contained one systematized description of the Antichrist, it would be easier to ask whether it holds true today, but this is not the case. Why did the representations vary? Are they different personal ideas, different aspects of the same thing, fundamental disagreements, or different situational applications?

2. The Synoptic Apocalypse

Even within the three Synoptic Apocalypses there are divergencies, and one of these is that Luke appears to envisage more of a temporal separation between the destruction of Jerusalem and parousia than Matthew and Mark.

Mk13.24: ἀλλὰ ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν ἔρεύνῃ...

Mt 24.29: εὐθέως δὲ μετὰ τὴν θλίψιν τῶν ἡμερῶν ἔρεύνῃ...

Lk 21.25: καὶ ἔσονται σημεῖα...

Cosmic signs of the parousia are linked to the fall of Jerusalem and tribulation by Mark and Matthew as "in those days"; Mark specifies "after" and Matthew "immediately after". Luke simply states non-committally "there will be signs ...", placing them after the fall of Jerusalem but with no indication of the temporal relationship. By contrast, all are agreed that cosmic signs introduce the parousia (καὶ τότε : Mk 13.26, Mt 24.30, Lk 21.27).

One may argue at this point that Luke is writing after

the fall of Jerusalem and interpreting his sources in the light of events: the parousia had not followed the destruction immediately, therefore it would be later. Thus, for example, Dunn: despite the apparent failure of the apocalyptic hope of Jesus (as recorded by Mark and Matthew), "Luke does not abandon the apocalyptic discourse" but reinterprets it².

On the other hand, a considerable body of scholarship would now prefer to date all the Synoptic Apocalypses before the fall of Jerusalem, or at least to assert that the pre-70 sources were not altered or reinterpreted after the event. The chief ground for this view is that the Synoptic depiction of the War and destruction does not tally with what actually happened³. Instead, the depiction

² J.D.G.Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the NT. An enquiry into the character of earliest Christianity (SCM, London, 1977), p.329.

³ Cf. J.A.T.Robinson, Redating the NT (SCM, London, 1976), p.13-30.
 B.Reicke, "Synoptic Prophecies", Supplement to NovT 33 (1972), p.121-34.
 C.H.Dodd, "Fall of Jerusalem and Abomination of Desolation", JRS 37 (1947), p.47-54.
S.G.F.Brandon, Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian church, (SPCK, London, 19572).
 Eusebius H.E. 3.5.3.
 The time and destination of the Christians flight from the city is especially disputed. Eusebius states that they fled to Pella, not to the Judaeian mountains as instructed in the Synoptic Apocalypse.

is drawn from traditional language of invasion, war and destruction, and previous experience of desecration of the temple (1 Maccabees 1.54, 2.28, Dan 9.27 LXX, 11.31, 12.11). If this view is correct, it may suggest either i) already at that stage there could be variations in opinion about the temporal relationship between the fall of Jerusalem and the parousia; or ii) the far-reaching conclusions we are tempted to draw from the presence or absence of a $\epsilon\upsilon\theta\acute{\epsilon}\omega\varsigma$ or a $\tau\omicron\tau\epsilon$ are exaggerated or misguided. At any rate, this theory provides support for 2 Thess 2 as an early perspective although it does not connect the End temporally with the fall of Jerusalem.

There are two possible conclusions from all this.

i) Valid reinterpretation of apocalyptic is possible, in which case the different NT depictions of the Antichrist are not to be harmonized but seen as each appropriate in their own context and situation. Each may be a groping towards the meaning of present and future events, rather than a detailed prediction expecting literal fulfilment. This leaves us with a hermeneutical problem: how should we reinterpret apocalyptic today? ii) Alternatively we could deduce that the NT displays an ambivalent attitude towards temporal relationships between signs (especially the destruction of Jerusalem) and the End; that the NT does not reinterpret, but retains the original prophecies with their traditional language, even if they were not altogether accurate when compared with its fulfilment; and that there is a hint of a not-so-imminent parousia within the very earliest apocalyptic tradition of Christianity, which tallies with the teaching of 2 Thess 2.

3. Criterion of validity

"An eschatology is not to be judged by a simple rule of agreement with the facts, but rather by its fitness under the circumstances to quicken faith in God, to stir the conscience, and put men's will under the dominance of ideal motives, to give a living sense of God and eternity"⁴. Is this a valid priority? In bald terms, if the apocalyptic passage fulfils its function in the situation for which it was written, does it matter whether its predictions about the future are right or wrong? What is the function of the predictions as such? "Das eigentliche Problem liegt aber nicht darin, ob eine Dimension vorhanden ist, sondern welche Stellenwert und welche Funktion ihr zukommt"⁵: not the existence of predictions is problematical but their function and 'cash value'. Dunn sees the function of predictions as pastoral, not informational: signs "were not given to enable the reader to compute the day and hour of the Son of Man's coming: they were listed rather to encourage the reader who was already in the midst of these tribulations, to assure him that his sufferings were part of the messianic woes, that the End could not be too far distant"⁶.

In the case of Revelation, for instance, if it was written for a church suffering under Roman tyranny to arouse

⁴ F.C.Porter, The Message of the Apocalyptical Writers, (New York, 1905), p.73.

⁵ J.Baumgarten, Paulus und die Apokalyptik (Neukirchener Verlag, Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1975), p.240.

⁶ Dunn, op.cit., p.329.

her to endurance, does it matter whether the seer was right that the destruction of the present world power would be the end of history?⁷ If it served its purpose in supporting the church, was it not immaterial that history went on? Those people did not have to live through another time of tribulation, and the central import of their final vindication remains true. Ours - whoever we are - is a different story and we need either a different apocalypse or a hermeneutic which enables us to interpret the old one flexibly and hear again its message of encouragement.

The situation is different with 2 Thessalonians, however. The apocalyptic is not to support them (unless the severity of persecution was causing their overheated expectation, and this is dubious: there is nothing about persecution in the description of the Man of Sin, despite this being a prominent characteristic elsewhere) but to reveal an error

⁷ Not all agree, however, that this is the seer's expectation. M. Rissi (Was ist und was geschehen soll danach (Zwingli Verlag, Zürich/Stuttgart, 1965)) disputes that the first beast of Revelation is Nero: the healing of the mortal wound (13.3) corresponds with neither form of the Neronic legend. Nero was believed either to have died and risen, or to have fled to the Parthians to return from there. Rissi holds that 13.3 is best explained as an imitation of Christ's death and resurrection, and the beast is an unidentified Antichrist figure. It is difficult to see, however, how this improves the correspondence: the healing of a mortal wound is no more nor less like Christ's death and resurrection than Nero's.

of teaching and to tell them not "you are living in the last days" but "you are not so near the last days as you seem to think". This seems to be an opposite approach to that of Revelation: to people who are not at the despair stage but can cope, Paul says "this is not the last stage of history - it has to get much worse before the end, so pull yourselves together and get on with the job in hand". The Thessalonians are in a state, but not because of persecution: it is an emotional and intellectual disturbance that needs a little cold water and common sense. As with Revelation, it is the effect that matters, calming them down and reminding them of their saner moments. But this does not imply that Paul unscrupulously produces doctrines for the occasion: it is a matter of pastoral tact and sensitivity to perceive which aspect of truth needs to be re-emphasised. Paul seems to say at different times that the parousia is imminent or distant (eg. 2 Thess 2, cf. 1 Thess 4.15). This is not contradictory; the only certainty about the date of the parousia is that it is unknown. Hence the need for both nearness and distance to be considered. The church must be prepared for either, and that involves living as if it will come today, but also living with the possibility that it might be far distant.

4. The effect of erroneous teaching by Paul

It has often been claimed that it was crucial to the development of the early church and its theology that the parousia failed to happen as soon as expected. There are,

however, dissenting views. D.E. Aune⁸ argues that the near-expectation of the parousia was a far less crucial part of early Christian theology than is often assumed; it was certainly expected, and soon, but without any specific dating so that at no point could there have been a crisis caused by its non-appearance. In fact the imminent expectation continued, rising to prominence when the socio-cultural situation of persecution occurred. A major factor preventing crisis was the equally strong interest in the past and present as opposed to the future. "If a religious movement is based on eschatological expectation but had also a strong faith in the present, past or extra-historical situation, the weakening of acute eschatological expectation can find its more or less complete substitute in strengthening the idea of present salvation of its believers"⁹. Baumgarten argues along similar lines to Aune, that since Paul's eschatology was not built on his near-expectation of the parousia, it does not stand or fall on the vindication of that expectation: "die so genannte Nah-Erwartung ist nur sehr schwach belegt und kaum konstitutiv ... Die paulinische Eschatologie ist ... weder von der Termin-Frage abhängig noch durch den Akzentuierung der Nähe von Parusie, Auferweckung und Gericht konsitiutiert"¹⁰.

⁸ D.E.Aune, "The significance of the delay of the parousia for early Christianity", Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation. Studies in honour of M.C.Tenney ed. G.F.Hawthorne (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975), p.87-109.

⁹ D.Flusser, "Salvation present and future", Types of Redemption ed. R.J.Zwi Werblowski and C.Jonco Bleeker, (Supplement to Numen 18 (1970)), p.46-61:p.61.

¹⁰ Baumgarten, op.cit., p.226.

If the non-fulfilment of the parousia expectation did not substantially affect Christian theology, neither need the non-fulfilment of the signs of the parousia. In other words, if Paul believed the Man of Sin to be a figure of his own generation or the next (whether identified or not) whose revelation would immediately herald the parousia of Christ, and this did not occur, his authority would not be undermined and his churches would not be unduly disturbed.

But is this credible in the Thessalonian situation? They were deeply disturbed by the idea that the Day might be present - if Paul turned out to be wrong after all, would they not be in a worse state? Their only chance of calm seemed to be to hang on word for word to what he told them would happen and refuse to budge despite teaching to the contrary. But this contrary teaching brought the parousia nearer instead of moving it away as non-fulfilment would; also, if Paul had not identified the Man of Sin and the $\kappa\alpha\tau\epsilon\lambda\chi\omega\nu$ with historical figures whom they could observe, there would be no crisis point of unfulfilment: they would simply carry on waiting, and in a calmer state than when Paul was writing. If he taught a contemporary interpretation, then i) this would excite them more: the most effective course of action would be to place the End in the future, well away from the Thessalonians; ii) if events proved Paul wrong, the Thessalonians would be disturbed: they could only keep calm if there were no crisis of non-fulfilment, no ability to date the Day.

5. Importance of the multiplicity of the Antichrist concept

W. Stählin makes the point that the very difficulty in

defining the Antichrist is vitally important. Unity, oneness, is a mark of genuineness - there is only one Christ but there are many antichrists. Furthermore, as soon as an Antichrist has been identified it will change, or another arise¹¹ because alongside open enmity to Christ the Antichrist is characterized by deceit and subtle perversion of the truth¹² and is a constant and therefore necessarily continually changing threat to the church. "Die verschiedenen Bilder und Beschreibungen der antichristlichen Macht kennzeichnen die wechselnden Masken, das unheimlich ungreifbare der Formen, in denen sie erscheint"¹³. Stählin is totally against a 'frozen' historical identification: he believes the church should always be looking for the Antichrist and attempting concrete identification of the mythical figure¹⁴. According to Rigaux, this is the intention of the NT writers: "the teachings of the Johannine epistles and of the Apocalypse are on guard against any unity of doctrine whatsoever, and thereby leave themselves open to a development of their implications, an operation which should not be disdained"¹⁵. This is an exaggerated statement, however: it is anachronistic to speak of the NT writers being on guard against unity of doctrine, as if they had all the experience of church history behind them. We may

¹¹ W. Stählin, "Die Gestalt des Antichrist und des Katechon", Festschrift J. Lortz (Baden-Baden, 1958) II, p.1-12: p.3.

¹² Stählin, op.cit., p.5.

¹³ Stählin, op.cit., p.3.

¹⁴ Stählin, op.cit., p.8.

¹⁵ B. Rigaux, Letters of St. Paul (Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1968), p.130f.

deduce from the diversity of doctrine within the NT that unity is not necessary or desirable, but this is different from attributing an intention to the writers.

If the importance of apocalyptic was its effect on those for whom it was written, then is not its importance for us likewise its effect? For Stählin, its effect on us should be to rouse us to the possibility of finding the Antichrist amongst us. But this is a limited view: it is valid, but is drawn only from the Johannine antichrists, who are present within the community in a subtle way. The other Antichrist pictures are different in character and were written for different purposes. For example, the Antichrist of 2 Thess 2 and the effect of calming feverish, rash ideas, and that of Revelation was meant to rouse the church to vitality and energetic endurance. The desired effect depends on the needs of the situation, and the same holds true today. We do not always need to look for the antichrists in our midst: sometimes we need to hear that he will appear at any moment; sometimes we need to be told that the Antichrist is not here yet and will not be for a while. We should not however reduce the Antichrist concept to the effect it may have on the church at a certain time. The teaching, or manner of speaking about the Antichrist varies according to circumstances and needs; there is a kind of technique involved, but the Antichrist concept is not only a technique. If there were no final reality, no recognisable and definitive fulfilment of the expectation, then the warnings would have no effect at all. If once we suspect that they are a mere technique, then

the Antichrist is reduced to the level of a bogey-man invoked to scare naughty children.

Conclusion

The issue of whether apocalyptic expectations were right or wrong is a highly complex one. For the purpose of this thesis, however, we have established that it would have been seriously detrimental to the Thessalonians, were Paul proved wrong. Since Paul was deeply concerned for his communities, we may assume that he firmly believed himself to be right. In the absence of conclusive evidence to the contrary, we should proceed on the assumption that his teaching remains reliable.

Excursus: the hypothesis of W. Wrede on the authenticity
of 2 Thessalonians

1. Introduction

This excursus is not meant as a full-scale discussion of the authorship and dating of 2 Thessalonians,¹ but as a comment on the hypothesis that 2 Thessalonians is an imitation of 1 Thessalonians. It draws heavily on the work of W. Wrede², who though not the earliest proponent of inauthenticity - he was preceded by J.E.C. Schmidt (1801), De Wette, Kern (1839), Baur (1845) and others - has exerted a most profound influence on later scholars³, and illustrates the criteria used to decide whether or not an epistle is a

¹ For such a discussion, see commentaries, especially Rigaux; and cf. W.G.Kümmel Einleitung in das Neue Testament (Quelle und Meyer, Heidelberg, 1973), p.226-232. Referring to the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians, Rigaux writes that "as long as the doctrinal and literary nature and status of this epistle has not been determined, more insoluble problems arise from failing to ascribe the letter to its supposedly real author than by attributing it to him. The resultant impression is that whatever can be said about the matter seems to have been said already" (Letters of St. Paul (Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1968), p.101).

² W.Wrede, Die Echtheit des zweiten Thessalonicherbriefes T.U. 24 (1903).

³ Cf. J.Graafen, "Das Hauptargument gegen die Echtheit bildet das literarische Abhängigkeitsverhältnis der beiden Thessalonicherbriefe, und zwar in der Form, wie es bei Wrede erkannt und ausgesprochen worden ist" (Die Echtheit des zweiten Briefes an die Thessalonicher (Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen XIV 5, München, 1930) p.12).

pseudonymous imitation. It is these criteria in particular which will be discussed.

2. Summary of Wrede's hypothesis

Wrede's reconstruction of the origin of 2 Thessalonians runs as follows: somewhere the idea grew that the Day was now coming. A few people confused the community (not necessarily the church in Thessalonica) and panic resulted. Prophecies and revelations took place, and Paul was appealed to by the use of 1 Thess 5. Someone who was not deceived decided to remedy the situation by writing a 'Pauline' letter. There is no reason to doubt his integrity - it was an honest attempt to understand Paul rightly. Since 1 Thess 5 was being referred to, he imitated 1 Thessalonians, as if Paul himself were explaining to the Thessalonians what he meant there⁴.

Criteria of the imitation hypothesis

a) There are extensive parallels between 1 and 2 Thessalonians in vocabulary, style, structure and concepts. In many cases the details are so strikingly close, or identical, that the author must have had 1 Thessalonians before him or known it by heart, and intended to write a similar sequel. This is not credible in the case of Paul: there is no reason why he should keep a copy of 1 Thessalonians, nor why he should so 'slavishly' repeat himself. The letter must therefore be a deliberate imitation⁵.

⁴ Wrede, op.cit., p.67f.

⁵ Details of the parallels may be found in extensive tables in Wrede (p.4-12, 24-28., and Rigaux p.133f.).

b) There are also noticeable differences between 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

i) 2 Thess 2.1-12 is unique, and must therefore be the author's reason for writing. The author has surrounded it with a Pauline context, and here expounds his own mind⁶. Not even in 1 Thess 5.1 did Paul have the contents of 2 Thess 2.1-12 in mind. It may be remarked here that Wrede gives no reason for assuming that "times and seasons" did not refer to the contents of 2 Thess 2.1-12. Paul does not explain the phrase because he has already taught the doctrine - as he has already taught the contents of 2 Thess 2.1-12 (v.5); they may very well refer to the same area of teaching.

ii) The overall style is different. The style especially of 2 Thess 1.5-10 and 2.1-12 is no more Pauline than 1 Peter⁷. "Die Sprache des Briefes so viel Ähnlichkeit mit der uns bekannten paulinischen Ausdrucksweise zeigt, aber auch so viel Abweichung von ihr, wie es sich für einen Autor schickt, der sich eng an eine paulinische Vorlage anschliesst und mehr als einen paulinischen Brief gekannt hat"⁸.

c) The author has a certain self-consciousness and eagerness to authenticate himself. In 3.6,14 he emphasises his apostolic authority, and Wrede comments, "der Pseudapostel einen 'apostolischen' Ton anschlagen zu sollen meint, der wirkliche Apostel nicht"⁹. 3.17 has been influenced by

⁶ Wrede, op.cit., p.40.

⁷ Wrede, op.cit., p.74.

⁸ Wrede, op.cit., p.75.

⁹ Wrede, op.cit., p.76.

1 Cor 16.21, Gal 6.11 and Col 4.18, for the writer had a collection of Pauline letters. On the other hand, the reference to the temple in 2.4 is simply anachronistic: it is not a device to make the letter sound more like an authentic pre-AD 70 document, but a characteristic of apocalyptic which often retains details after modification is necessary¹⁰.

d) The ethics of imitation present no problem to Wrede. The letter had the pious intent to expound the true meaning of Paul's teaching, and in those days the practice of pseudonymity was more acceptable.

3. Criticism

a) Both similarities and differences between 1 and 2 Thessalonians are used in favour of inauthenticity. The reason for this is that similarities must be due to the imitator using a Pauline model, whereas differences demonstrate not authenticity but a careless imitator. Stated so baldly, the methodology sounds absurd; but this reasoning really seems to be behind much of Wrede's (and others) argumentation¹¹. It becomes obvious that exactly the same evidence can be used to support authenticity: when 2 Thessalonians is similar to 1 Thessalonians, this shows the former's Pauline origin; when it differs, this proves its authenticity again, for while Paul was free to vary his style, an imitator would have to keep close to Pauline

¹⁰ Wrede, op.cit., p.105f.

¹¹ Eg. Wrede, op.cit., p.75 quoted above.

precedent for fear of betraying himself. In fact, a similar line of thought may be seen in the work of A. Deissmann, who presupposes that all the letters attributed to Paul are genuine, and whose criterion for genuineness is that "each letter portrays him as the same character, each time in a new light and giving a new impression ... it is no unalterable cold marble statue of 'Paulinism' that we see each time"¹².

Frame comments on the similarities and differences without apparently seeing the implications for the imitation argument: "in fact, apart from the formal agreements in the main epistolary outline, the striking thing is not the slavish dependence of the author of II on I, but the freedom with which he employs reminiscences from I and incorporates them in original ways into new settings"¹³. Rigaux, however, sees the implications very clearly and ridicules the hypothesis. "Pourquoi n'employer l Th que par des citations de détails, chercher dans ceux-ci l'appui de l'authenticité du nouvel écrit, copier d'une part et s'éloigner dans la partie essentielle du message de la lettre copiée et enfin pourquoi se borner à cette lettre en un temps où les autres circulaient dans l'église. Il faudrait admettre que ce faiseur d'apocryphes ne disposait que de l Th, qu'il l'a lue et relue, s'est assimilé les formules au point qu'elles reviennent spontanément sous sa plume, et qu'il a conservé toute liberté d'exprimer en d'autres mots sa propre pensée"¹⁴.

¹² A. Deissmann, Paul. A study in social and religious history (trans. W.E. Wilson, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1926), p. 18.

¹³ Frame comm. p. 47.

¹⁴ Rigaux comm. p. 145.

D. Guthrie, commenting on Baur's treatment of Colossians and Ephesians, which follows the same lines as Wrede's on Thessalonians, points out that "the pseudo-author could do what Paul could not do, i.e. produce two similar letters and get away with it"¹⁵.

The structure of 2 Thessalonians follows that of 1 Thessalonians in some respects¹⁶, although the structure of 1 Thessalonians differs in some points from that of the other Pauline letters (eg. in having two thanksgiving periods) which the author, according to Wrede, possessed. It is hard to see the motive for partly following the structure of an unusually structured Pauline letter, instead of following a more typical Pauline structure. "If there is a general Pauline epistolary structure why did he not choose to use it? If there is not a general structure (and Galatians has no thanksgiving period) then the similarity of 2 Thessalonians and 1 Thessalonians is not as significant as Wrede supposed"¹⁷.

b) Wrede holds that the author of 2 Thessalonians displays a self-consciousness which he explains as deliberate role-playing: he is trying to write like an apostle. It is assumed quite explicitly that Paul did not point out his authority, nor scarcely act upon it. Thus 3.17 can only be

¹⁵ D.Guthrie, "The development of the idea of canonical pseudepigraphy in NT criticism", (Authorship and Integrity of the NT, Theological Collections 4, SPCK, London, 1965), p.20.

¹⁶ Not in all respects, eg. there are two thanksgivings in each, but in 2 Thessalonians the main topic of the letter precedes the second, while in 1 Thessalonians it follows the second (3.9, 4.13ff).

¹⁷ Best comm. p.53.

explained, in Wrede's view, as an imitator giving the letter the Pauline hallmark - not as Paul wishing to exclude the possibility of misrepresentation by a false letter because of his suspicion in 2.2; and this despite the fact that Paul did sometimes sign his letters¹⁸. The decision on whether 3.17 is Pauline habit or a clever imitation seems to depend largely on one's presuppositions. The slight extra emphasis on the signature may be explained as due either to Paul's fear of a forgery (2.2) or to over-imitation.

Similarly in the case of 3.6,14, the assumption is that if the author sounds like an apostle, he must be a fraud - implying that real apostles never bothered to assert apostolic authority or privilege (cf. Gal 1.1, 1 Cor 9.1ff, 5.3-5, 4.1-5, 2 Cor 10.8, 12.12!). With the mention of the temple, however, the author has apparently missed an opportunity to assert his authority: this is not a device to situate the letter before AD 70¹⁹. Wrede seems to have a remarkable insight into the psychology of the imitator, and credits him with the most devious subtleties.

c) Wrede holds that the author possessed a collection of Pauline letters, since he imitated 1 Thessalonians, and that 2.2, 3.17 were intended to differentiate his own effort from other floating pseudo-Pauline letters. But if the Pauline letters were already collected, 2 Thessalonians would not be accepted; and if the writer had distinguished

¹⁸ Cf. 1 Cor 16.21, Gal 6.11, Col 4.18.

¹⁹ Wrede, op.cit., p.105.

between forgeries and genuine Pauline letters to make his collection, in writing 2 Thessalonians he was using a means of which he disapproved. It is not enough to give him the benefit of the doubt as genuinely thinking he understood Paul. What kind of respect for apostolic authority would write in an apostle's name things which are not found in any other letter and are not even deducible from them (ie. 2.1-12, which being unique in Paul, was the forger's motive for writing)? Findlay bluntly rejects the idea of an innocent forger: "the epistle is no innocent pseudepigraph. It proceeds either from 'Paul, Silvanus and Timotheus' or from someone who wished to be taken for those authors, and who attempts to cover his deception by denouncing it!"²⁰. The only grounds for defending the author are that pseudonymity was a common practice at that time. However, there is no definite evidence of this kind of imitation in Christian circles. "Until we can discover an instance where close adherence to a known master's style has been aimed at in a definitely spurious composition it must be regarded as doubtful whether any imitator would or would not either strive for or unconsciously achieve the degree of stylistic similarity which exists between Ephesians and the Pauline homologoumena". In the case of the later Christian pseudepigrapha, "they may have made a few superficial attempts to write 'in character' but they had as models of

²⁰ Findlay comm. p.xlvii.

style no writings of the man they impersonated"²¹.

D. Guthrie is even more crushing: "there is no evidence in Christian literature for the idea of a conventional literary device, by which an author as a matter of literary custom and with the full approbation of his circle of readers publishes his own production in another's name"²² - there was always an ulterior motive for pseudonymity. When the canon was closed, only the writers within it had authority, and pseudonymity had to be used to commend extra-canonical doctrine or unorthodox practice. "Can it be conceived that orthodox Christians would have used a method currently being used by gnostic writers and that this method was sanctioned by the whole church?"²³.

These are arguments against innocent imitation, not against flagrant disregard of Christian principles, which must always remain a possibility - though the problem of acceptance by the church would then be even more acute.

4. Conclusion

In a hypothesis such as Wrede's, it is supposed both that the imitator was possessed of twentieth century literary critical methods and used them to simulate authenticity, sometimes to the extent that the sheer calculation involved invited suspicion; and also that he made the grossest mistakes and crudest joins which betray his actual incapacity to disguise his own hand - but only

²¹ Eg. the speeches in Acts, for which the author did not have Paul's and Peter's letters. H.J.Cadbury, "The dilemma of Ephesians", NTS 5 (1958-9), p.91-102: p.95f.

²² Guthrie, op.cit., p.38.

²³ Guthrie, op.cit., p.38f.

to sophisticated modern critics. The recipients either lacked the writer's skill in criticism and were taken in; or they were skilled enough to appreciate the Pauline elements inserted for their benefit, without perceiving the disparate elements which are now obvious to us, despite our radically different culture and total lack of personal acquaintance with Paul himself.

Before allegations of imitation can be made, we should discover how conscious first century writers were of their style, vocabulary and structure, how recognisable a writer's style would be, and how a pseudonymous writer would go about lending his work authenticity. There are no simple answers to these questions.

Excursus: why does Paul quote or mention prayers in his letters?

This discussion is not concerned with epistolary prayer as a literary feature or with comparative study of contemporary epistolary style¹, but with the particular prayers of 2 Thessalonians in their context. What were Paul's specific and personal reasons for informing the Thessalonians at a particular point that he was praying for a particular thing? Would it not have been adequate to assure them that he was praying for them, without being more specific? This question is most acute when the prayer is for a spiritual benefit, the answering and fulfilment of which is less clear-cut, less observable, than prayer for a material benefit. In the latter case, report of such a prayer would clearly strengthen hope, or, if the prayer were already answered, it would result in praise and increased faith in God. The motives for reporting prayer for spiritual benefits are however rather more complex. The list below of six motives is not exclusive, and the motives are subtly interconnected, so that all or several may apply to one prayer report. We shall then see which motives may be traced in the prayers of 2 Thessalonians.

¹ The work of P. Schubert (The Form and Function of Pauline Thanksgivings (Brill, Leiden, 1977)) is therefore irrelevant here. Despite the title of his book, Schubert says a great deal about form and very little about function. He states that the thanksgivings have an introductory function (p.24) and that they focus around addressant and addressee (p.37), by which he presumably means that they are the writer's personal thanks for the people to whom he is writing - but this seems to be the sum total of his conclusions on function.

1) The prayer is reported to communicate the fact that the readers need the benefit prayed for. This acts as an alternative to, or reinforcement of direct exhortation.

Rom 15.5f is a prayer for harmony, reinforcing the instructions about accommodating both 'strong' and 'weak' in the community without causing offence or distress; 1 Thess 3.11-13 gently points out the need or still more increasing love, although as Paul says later on, they already love each other (4.9, where a direct exhortation for more love is added).

2) The writer is trying to make the recipients act to fulfil the prayer. This is not a devious method, a kind of spiritual blackmail: it acts as a directive and encouragement. Paul always sees divine and human action as very closely related, and both are necessary simultaneously for his converts to reach the goal of glory which he sees before them (cf. Phil 2.12f). Hence in 1 Thessalonians after a long list of short instructions on various matters Paul writes the prayer of 5.23, which looks forward to complete sanctification by God. The preceding instructions are the practical means by which the Thessalonians can participate in this work of God within them.

3) The writer is sometimes himself helping to fulfil the prayer by teaching the recipients something in the prayer report which they need to learn. In the thanksgiving of Ephesians, a prayer is mentioned that the recipients may know the greatness of God's power, and the writer proceeds to explain the significance of the resurrection and exaltation of Christ as a manifestation of how great that power is (Eph 1.19-23).

4) Many prayers direct the readers towards how they should be growing and maturing. This is done in two ways: by provoking self-criticism and (in twentieth-century jargon) by enlarging their vision (cf. Col 1.10-12, Phil 1.9-11, Eph 1.17ff). This motive is found in prayers following high praise of the church: it aims to prevent complacency, and to provide scope for further development if the church has exhausted its own goals. Self-criticism is provoked indirectly: eg. in Phil 1.11 the prayer that they may be filled with the fruits of righteousness may cause the Philippians to ask themselves "how full of those fruits are we? Where are we lacking?".

5) By emphasizing prayer to God for spiritual benefits, the writer shows that the source of spiritual life is God, and expresses his own faith that God is working in the converts. This is a form of encouragement for those who might quail at their own weakness or lack of progress in the light of the exalted goal for which they are striving (cf. Phil 1.9-11 and especially 1 Thess 5.23f).

6) Finally, prayer reports often have a general function of reminder of truths and principles already known. Rom 15.14f states this as the purpose of writing the whole letter (cf. 2 Peter 1.12f - and Phil 3.1?) and the same applies to prayers within the letters.

The prayers of 2 Thessalonians

Paul mentions his prayers for the Thessalonians at 1.11f, 2.16f, 3.5 and 3.16. Some of these are 'wish-prayers'²

² G.P.Wiles' term in Paul's Intercessory Prayers, (CUP 1974) passim.

but these are not vague expressions of preference, as in the English "I hope you recover soon": they imply actual prayer on Paul's part. For this reason, Wiles is not altogether correct in distinguishing between prayer reports and wish-prayers: the latter are also reports of real prayer.

1.11f

(2) Because the Thessalonians' resolves³ and acts of faith have God's power behind them, they are encouraged to continue in such resolve and activity (cf. 3.13, an exhortation lest they should grow weary of well-doing).

(4) V.12 points to the reality of the spiritual realm which is a constant truth despite the daily pressure of opposition, and which also forms a future goal. This is an aim to clear-sightedness and a reminder (6) of truths which tend to be submerged beneath the grind of coping with the present.

(5) The Thessalonians must now lower their aims, despite the discouragement of their difficult situation, because they are supported by divine power.

2.16f

(3) This prayer first recalls the love and comfort of God before praying that he may comfort them: the recollection of what God has done in redemption is itself a comfort for the present, and a guarantee of further comfort.

³ For this interpretation of εὐδοκία, cf. Best and Rigaux comms. ad loc.

(5) The preceding verse exhorts the Christians to stand firm in their teaching, and the prayer looks to God for confirmation of doctrine and practice (στηρίξαι).

(6) This prayer also forms a remarkably concise reminder of the basic gospel. 2 Thessalonians is often criticized for lacking any reference to Christ's redemptive work - yet surely these aorist participles must refer to the love of God in Christ graciously giving present and future salvation (δοῦναι ἀπαλλαγὴν αἰωνίαν καὶ ἐλεῖν...).

3.5

(2) Paul prays that the Thessalonians may be directed towards the resources of love and steadfastness in God and Christ, implying that these resources should be drawn upon.

(5) The prayer makes it clear that Paul's confidence is not in the Christians alone (v.4): the means of doing all that he commands are available in God.

3.16

(1) and (2) Despite the need for community discipline, Paul is anxious that they should not forget the need for peace (cf. Rom 15.5). The Thessalonians are in need of peace on several counts: their situation of affliction from without and their internal confusion and disorder.

(6) Paul is probably thinking of peace of mind and external relations as well as internal relations. Peace in the first sense is especially vital under affliction, and external pressure will be reduced by peaceable relations with outsiders. Hence he reminds them that God is a God of peace.

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