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Between Exegesis and Theology



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Romans 5:1-11: An Exegesis

Régis BURNET

This article presents a detailed exegetical commentary on the pericope Rm 5:1-11. The author begins by situating this passage within its literary and theological context in the Epistle to the Romans. Then, it examines the various difficulties encountered, whether textual, philological, exegetical, or literary, providing an in-depth analysis of each issue. The author proceeds by offering a comprehensive and synthetic reading of the passage, taking calculated interpretative risks. Among these interpretations are an innovative ethical reading of Rm 5:1 and a distinctive approach to Rm 5:2-3, which contrasts with the majority of contemporary readings. This approach is marked by a particular sensitivity to the socio-historical and socio-cultural context of the time.

1. Rom 5:1-11 in context

Romans 5:1-11 is embedded in Paul's rhetorical argument developed throughout Romans. In order to understand what is at stake in this pericope, it is essential to situate it within this wider framework.

Paul himself reveals the context of the letter at the end of his text (Rom 15:22-33). He is about to travel to Spain and expresses his desire to stopover in the community of Romans, whom he does not know personally, and to receive their help. The letter thus functions both as an announcement of a visit and as a presentation of the "Gospel" that the Apostle professes.

This gospel is defined in the very first verses:

> *[16]Οὐ γὰρ ἐπαισχύνομαι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, δύναμις γὰρ θεοῦ ἐστιν εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἕλληνι. [17]δικαιοσύνη γὰρ θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ ἀποκαλύπτεται ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν, καθὼς γέγραπται· ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.*
>
> *16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the*

> *righteousness of God is revealed because of faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith." Rom 1.16–17.*

The purpose of the speech – in rhetorical terms it is called a *propositio* – is clearly stated here: Paul preaches a gospel that expresses the power of God and reveals divine justice (δικαιοσύνη). To substantiate this definition of the term εὐαγγέλιον, gospel, Paul proceeds with a four-point demonstration (a *probatio*):

- 1:18-4:25: the revelation of divine justice is universal, or as Jewett puts it, is "overturning claims of cultural superiority."[1] Both Greeks and Jews have sinned and both Greeks and Jews need God's help. This help is expressed by the concept of grace, which describes the universality of divine help.
- 5–8: This justice is carried out by Christ, whose action is described.
- 9–11: This justice (and thus the triumph of grace) transforms the status of Gentiles and Jews.
- 12–15: This justice must flourish (by anticipation) in relationships and in life together.

If this structure, which most commentators accept mutatis mutandis, is correct, we can see that Rom 5:1-11 occupies a transitional position between the first and second parts of the Epistle. It corresponds perfectly to the definition of *transitio* given by the Rhetoric to Herennius: "Transition is the name given to the figure which briefly recalls what has been said, and likewise briefly sets forth what is to follow next[2]." In fact, there are two steps in the passage under review:

- Rom 5:1-5: the recapitulation of what has been said before: man is justified by God through faith. Paul encourages the community to endure the time of tribulation in which it lives, because it gives rise to hope.
- Romans 5:6-11: the announcement of what follows: this salvation is through Christ.

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[1] Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary*, « Hermeneia », Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007, p. 148.

[2] *Transitio vocatur, quae quum ostendit breviter, quid dictum sit, proponit item brevi, quid consequatur*, PS. CICERO, *Ad Herennium de ratione dicendi* 4:26, text and transl. *Ad C. Herennium de Ratione Dicendi (Rhetorica Ad Herennium)*, « Loeb Classical Library 403 », Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1954, p. 316-319.

The subsequent chapters prove that Romans 5:1-11 is a *transitio*. Paul advocates his affirmation that salvation comes from Christ by a lengthy *probatio* that runs until chapter 8. It begins in Romans 5:12-21 with a comparison (a *synkrisis*[3]) with Adam in three stages: vv. 12–14 recall Adam's sin; vv. 15–17 contrast the effects of Adam's sin and the salvation provided by Christ; and vv. 18–21, which form the actual *synkrisis*, contrast Adam and Jesus through the structure ὥσπερ ... καὶ οὕτως (just as. . . so).

2. Notes

A. Textual Notes

The main textual difficulty of the passage is found in the first verse. The subjunctive ἔχωμεν is attested by uncials *Sinaiticus* (א*), *Alexandrinus* (A), *Vaticanus* (B*), *Ephræmi rescriptus* (C), *Claromontanus* (D) and by minuscules 33 1175 1739 (Category I), 81 1962 (Category II), and 61c 69 181 436 614 621 630 915 1243 1398 1678 1735 1838 1874 1912 1942 2197 2516 (Category III). It is the lesson of the Byzantine text. It is also reflected by the Latin translation (*Itala* and *Vulgata*), as well as the Coptic, Armenian and Ethiopian one. It is supported by Marcion, Tertullian, Origen (latin translation), Chrysostom, Theodore and Theodoret, Ambrosiaster. The indicative ἔχομεν ("we have") is supported by the corrections of *Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus* (together with F G P Ψ 0220) and by a far smaller number of minuscules 1739 (Category I), 256 1506 1881 2127 2464 (Category II), 6 104 263 365 424 c 459 1241 1319 1573 1852 2200; it is also present in some manuscripts of *Itala* and *Vulgata*.

The distinction between the two modes is significant. If it is a subjunctive, then it must have a jussive value and therefore expresses an exhortation. According to Moulton and Milligan's grammar, the subjunctive substitutes for the imperative and should be translated as "Let us have."[4] The indicative mood is used to simply observe a fact and should be translated as "we have." The confusion between the two is easily explained: due to the close

[3] Christopher FORBES, « Paul and Rhetorical Comparison », *in* J. Paul SAMPLEY (ed.), *Paul in the Greco-Roman World : A Handbook*, vol. 1, London, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016², p. 134-171.

[4] James Hope MOULTON & Nigel TURNER, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, vol. 1, Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1906, p. 177. Confirmed by Max ZERWICK & Mary GROSVENOR, *A Grammatical Analysis of the Greek New Testament*, Rome, Biblical Institute Press, 1974), p. 469.

pronunciation of omicron (ο) and omega (ω), a misunderstanding occurred, likely caused by an early scribe's inability to distinguish between the two.[5]

Despite the overwhelming textual support for the subjunctive and a long reading tradition dating back to the most important Greek and Latin Church Fathers, most commentators after 1920 chose to read the verb in the indicative.[6] As far as we know, Hans Lietzmann was the first to do so. He made this declaration with great aplomb: "ἔχομεν is to be read; the request implied by ἔχωμεν to 'keep peace' with God is completely meaningless in this context."[7] Nowhere is the lack of meaning justified. Therefore, it is necessary to reconstruct the logic. The rejection of ἔχωμεν seems to stem more from a systematic vision of Pauline theology than from the movement of the text. Richard Longenecker points out that the transitional nature of the passage can perfectly explain the presence of an exhortation, which continues in the following sentences.[8] The reason for dismissal must be based on an implicit understanding of justification by faith, holding it to be efficacious and definitive: peace would therefore not be a fervently desired goal, but a reality fully granted at the same time as justification.[9] This choice probably

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5 Bruce M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, London, United Bible Societies, 1994[4], p. 452.

6 The rupture seems to be the 1920s. The subjunctive is supported by William SANDAY & Arthur C. HEADLAM, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, « International Critical and Commentary », Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1895, p. 120; Marie-Joseph LAGRANGE, *Epître aux Romains*, « Études bibliques », Paris, Gabalda, 1916, p. 101; Charles H. DODD, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, « Moffatt New Testament Commentary », London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1932, p. 19. The indicative is supported by Hans LIETZMANN, *An die Römer*, « Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 8 », Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1928[3], p. 58; Charles Kingsley BARRETT, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, « Black's New Testament Commentaries », London, A & C Black, 1957, p. 102; Charles Ernest BURLAND CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, « International Critical Commentary », Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1975, p. 257; Ernst KÄSEMANN, *Commentary on Romans*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1980, p. 133; Ulrich WILCKENS, *Der Brief an Die Römer*, « Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar Zum Neuen Testament 6 », Zürich – Neukirchen-Vluyn, Benziger – Neukirchener Verlag, 1978, p. 288-289; Douglas J. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans*, « New International Commentary on the New Testament », Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1996, p. 20.

7 *Ἔχομεν zu lesen ist; die in ἔχωμεν liegende Aufforderung, mit Gott 'Frieden zu halten' ist in diesem Zusammenhang vollig sinnlos*. LIETZMANN, *Römer*, p. 58.

8 Richard N. LONGENECKER, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2016, p. 555.

9 This rationale is deducible from Franz Jehan LEENHARDT, *L'Épître de saint Paul aux Romains*, « Commentaire du Nouveau Testament II.6 », Genève, Labor et Fides, 1995[3], p. 132. See also the argument by Cranfield : "a man who has been justified

unconsciously reflects the debates of the modern period between the advocates of sufficient grace and those of effective grace.

The other variants appear to be comparatively minor. In verse 2, some manuscripts omit the phrase "by faith", but a majority retain it. Although some scholars suggest that the deletion was due to scribal clumsiness, it is more likely that it was made to improve the elegance of the sentence. Some copyists may have considered τῇ *πίστει* in 5:2 to be redundant after ἐκ *πίστεως* in 5:1. In verse 6, the reading ἔτι γὰρ … ἔτι, "for when (we were) still (powerless)," is widely advocated by uncials and minuscules. However, some textual witnesses omit one of the two instances of ἔτι to avoid repetition. In verse 7, the adverb "μόλις" meaning "scarcely" is attested by the textual tradition. A few witnesses support the alternative adverb μόγις ("scarcely"). Both adverbs are practically synonymous.

B. Text and Translation

We chose to use the NRSV translation, slightly revised to fit our proposition of reading.

[1] Δικαιωθέντες οὖν ἐκ *πίστεως* εἰρήνην ἔχωμεν *πρὸς* τὸν θεὸν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ [2] δι᾽ οὗ καὶ τὴν *προσαγωγὴν* ἐσχήκαμεν [τῇ *πίστει*] εἰς τὴν χάριν ταύτην ἐν ᾗ ἑστήκαμεν καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐπ᾽ ἐλπίδι τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ. [3] οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμεθα ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν, εἰδότες ὅτι ἡ θλῖψις ὑπομονὴν κατεργάζεται, [4] ἡ δὲ ὑπομονὴ δοκιμήν, ἡ δὲ δοκιμὴ ἐλπίδα. [5] ἡ δὲ ἐλπὶς οὐ καταισχύνει, ὅτι ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ ἐκκέχυται ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ἡμῶν διὰ *πνεύματος* ἁγίου τοῦ δοθέντος ἡμῖν. [6] Ἔτι γὰρ Χριστὸς ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν ἔτι κατὰ καιρὸν ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν ἀπέθανεν. [7] μόλις γὰρ ὑπὲρ δικαίου τις ἀποθανεῖται· ὑπὲρ γὰρ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ τάχα τις καὶ τολμᾷ ἀποθανεῖν· [8] συνίστησιν δὲ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀγάπην εἰς ἡμᾶς ὁ θεός, ὅτι ἔτι ἁμαρτωλῶν ὄντων ἡμῶν Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν. [9] πολλῷ οὖν μᾶλλον δικαιωθέντες νῦν ἐν τῷ αἵματι αὐτοῦ σωθησόμεθα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς ὀργῆς. [10] εἰ γὰρ ἐχθροὶ ὄντες κατηλλάγημεν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ θανάτου τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ, πολλῷ μᾶλλον καταλλαγέντες σωθησόμεθα ἐν τῇ ζωῇ αὐτοῦ· [11] οὐ μόνον δέ, ἀλλὰ καὶ καυχώμενοι ἐν τῷ θεῷ διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δι᾽ οὗ νῦν τὴν καταλλαγὴν ἐλάβομεν.

may thereafter freely choose whether or not he will be at peace with God." CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, p. 102.

Therefore, since we are justified because of faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, [2] through whom we have obtained access by faith to this grace in which we stand; and let us boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. [3] And not only that, but let us also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, [4] and endurance produces tried character, and tried character produces hope, [5] and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

[6] For while we were still weak, at that time, Christ died for the ungodly. [7] Indeed, hardly will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. [8] But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. [9] Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. [11] But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

C. Vocabulary Notes

1–2. —V. 1–2 recapitulate the argument of the first part of the epistle: no one can stand before God without grace. The phrase **"justified because of faith" (ἐκ πίστεως)** refers to Habakkuk 2:4. Paul summarizes 3:21–4:25. The meaning of this expression is complex due to the various interpretations it has received over the centuries. The primary interpretation is legal: to be justified is to be acquitted and receive justice from an authority. At the beginning of the 20th century, Cremer noted that God's justice is understood within the framework of the Covenant. It designates God's fidelity to his commitments to the people. God manifests his justice by doing what he had promised. [10] Käsemann argues that the arrival of the Messiah has initiated the eschatological process, and that the context is essentially apocalyptic. In contrast to Rudolf Bultmann's individual and existential understanding of justice, Käsemann notes that this term "speaks of the God who brings the fallen world back into the

[10] August Hermann CREMER, *Die Paulinische Rechtfertigungslehre in Zusammenhange Ihrer Geschichtlichen Voraussetzungen*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann, 1900[2]; James D. G. DUNN, *Romans 1–8*, vol. 38A, Dallas TX, Word, 1988, p. 40-41.

sphere of his rightful sovereignty."[11] So the ethical dimension is clear: the concept of justice brings the faithful to submit to the rule of Christ. | **Peace (εἰρήνην):** the word is multifaceted in the Pauline vocabulary. It connotes not only the absence of conflict,[12] but entails aspects of the Jewish term *shalom*, which embraces nuances of "wholeness," "fullness of health" (including not only physical but also spiritual and mental health) and "general well-being."[13] Therefore, it denotes not subjective feelings of peace, but an objective state.[14] The concept is above all relational: what is at stake in the whole process is the restoration of relations between God and humanity. Peace as salvation of the Christian is an expression of cosmic perfection.[15] The link with the imperial propaganda of Nero's time is obvious; the *Princeps* is declared righteous when he establishes Roman peace. For Paul, Jesus is exactly what the emperor claims to be: the delight of mankind, the reconciler and ruler of the world.[16] | **Through our Lord.** Throughout chapter 5, Paul insists on the mediation of Christ, the reconciler and agent of God's plan of salvation. It implies the present influence of the risen Christ on the life of the Christian.[17] | **Obtained access.** The term προσαγωγὴ comes from political vocabulary; it refers to the entrance of kings and dignitaries in an official place.[18] It is used by Lev 4:14^{LXX} to describe the admission into the sanctuary, cf. also Num 8:9-10. Ἐσχήκαμεν is an intensive perfect that highlights continuing availability:[19] the access granted is permanent. | **Let us boast (καυχώμεθα).** Καυχώμεθα can be read as either indicative or subjunctive. In view

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11 Ernst KÄSEMANN, 'Gottesgerechtigkeit bei Paulus', *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 58, 1961, p. 367-378.

12 MOO, *Romans*, p. 299.

13 Joseph A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, « Anchor Yale Bible 33 », New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 2008, p. 395; LONGENECKER, *Romans*, p. 556.

14 CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, p. 258.

15 Otto MICHEL, *Der Brief an die Römer*, « Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 4.14 », Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966, p. 177; JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 349.

16 Dieter GEORGI, 'God Turned Upside Down — Romans: Missionary Theology and Roman Political Theology', *in* Richard A. HORSLEY (ed.), *Paul and Empire : Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, Harrisburg PA, Trinity Press International, 1997, p. 148-157; Ben WITHERINGTON & Darlene HYATT, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2004, p. 134.

17 FITZMYER, *Romans*, p. 396.

18 CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, p. 259; LONGENECKER, *Romans*, p. 558; JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 349-350.

19 DUNN, *Romans 1–8*, 38A, p. 248; Daniel B. WALLACE, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2001^{9}, p. 576.

of the textual clues, we opt for the exhortative subjunctive, here rendered by the imperative-valued periphrastic "let us". In socio-rhetorical exegesis, which has placed great emphasis on the verb καυχάομαι, the passage has received a very important relief.[20] To our contemporary world, ancient society manifests behaviours that seem completely incomprehensible to us, such as evergetism, the worship of the emperor, patron-client relationships. For Bruce Malina[21], the Mediterranean world is not based on individualism, but on dyadic relationships in which one is not defined by oneself (which is the characteristic of modern individualism), but by comparison. A person's existence is defined by the master he or she serves, as Käsemann put it before Malina[22]. Two concepts are crucial: honour and shame. Glory is the means of social existence. This glory is constructed in many ways: generosity, military actions, speeches, etc. Religion is also part of this system. The glory of a god "spills over" onto his followers. Christianity is no exception,[23] nor does Paul, since in 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 he had already claimed to glorify in his own weakness in order to glorify better in God. It is likely that the same logic is at work here: to boast in God's glory is a way of transcending all human glorification, for God is no one's property; to boast in this transcendent hope is to abandon all efforts to claim higher honours. | **The glory of God (ἡ δόξη τοῦ θεοῦ)** is the phrase used to translate the expressions יהוה כבוד or אל כבוד (the Glory of God or the Glory of the Lord, cf. Psa. 19:1; Prov. 25:2; Ex. 24:16, etc.) and means the presence of God in splendour.[24] The experience of being in the presence of the glory of God becomes a **hope (ἐλπίς)** in Psa. 102:15-16; Isa. 24:23; Rev. 24–27 and Second Temple Judaism. For Paul, the basis of hope is always eschatological: it is a certain

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20 B. WITHERINGTON & D. HYATT, *Romans*, p. 135 ; R. JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 350-352.

21 Bruce J. MALINA, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology: Practical Models for Biblical Interpretation*, Atlanta GA, John Knox Press, 1986; Bruce J. MALINA, *The New Testament World : Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, Atlanta GA, John Knox Press, 1981, p. 51-70.

22 KÄSEMANN, *Romans*, p. 133.

23 Jerome H. NEYREY, *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew*, Louisville KY, Westminster John Knox Press, 1998; Wolfgang STEGEMANN, Bruce J. MALINA, & Gerd THEISSEN, *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, Minneapolis MN, Fortress Press, 2002; Elsa TAMEZ, *Struggles for Power in Early Christianity: A Study of the First Letter to Timothy*, Maryknoll NY, Orbis Books, 2007; E. Randolph RICHARDS & Richard JAMES, *Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes: Patronage, Honor, and Shame in the Biblical World*, Downers Grove IL, IVP Academic, 2020.

24 Gerhard VON RAD, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1, Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1962, p. 239-241.

expectation based on justification.[25] Hope, however, does not just look to the future, but to the present too. It is the perception in the present of the real presence and power of God.[26]

3–5. —Sufferings (θλίψεσιν). Knowing what suffering Paul is referring to is not easy. Is it his personal suffering as an apostle, a persecution that affected the community in Rome, or is it the suffering common to the whole Church, a time of eschatological tribulation between the old age of Adam and the new age of Christ?[27] The idea that suffering can have a pedagogical virtue is one of the leitmotifs of the Stoics, see for example SENECA, *De Providentia* 2:5-6.[28] | **Knowing (εἰδότες)** is also found in Rom. 6:9; 13:11; 1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Cor. 4:14; 5:6,11; Eph. 6:8,9; this knowledge implies a claim to truth accessible only through faith.[29] | **Endurance (ὑπομονὴ).** In Greco-Roman ethics, ὑπομονὴ is the virtue of manly resistance to adversity, a requirement for soldiers or citizens. With Laches, in a dialogue focusing on courage, Socrates discusses the bravery of a soldier who is "willing to persevere and endure" (ἐλέθοντα ὑπομένειν δὲ καὶ καρτερεῖν, *Laches* 193a) despite adverse circumstances. Plato also envisions endurance as an intellectual virtue (*Theætetus* 177b).[30] | **Tried character (δοκιμή)** is a hapax (there is no occurrence of it earlier than Paul[31]), which probably comes from δέχομαι (I receive, I accept, but also I try, I test). The metaphor may come from metalworking: it refers to gold and silver coming out of the crucible.[32] But it may also come from political life: the testing of qualifications by military or public life performances.[33] Character is the ability to withstand the trial, the test. Since this is the same vocabulary used in 2 Corinthians 13, the connection with Paul's statements about the apostolic life being tested by hardship is obvious. | **Disappoint (καταισχύνει)**: this is obviously the opposite of καυχάομαι. In a culture of honour and shame, believing in a false

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25 Arland J. HULTGREN, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Commentary*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 2011, p. 205.

26 Luke Timothy JOHNSON, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Macon GA, Smyth & Helwys, 2001, p. 85.

27 DUNN, *Romans 1–8*, 38A, p. 250.

28 WITHERINGTON & HYATT, *Romans*, p. 136.

29 MICHEL, *Römer*, p. 178.

30 André-Jean FESTUGIÈRE, 'Hypomonē dans la tradition grecque', *Recherches de science religieuse* 21, 1931, p. 477-486.

31 CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, p. 261.

32 Simon LÉGASSE, *L'Épître de Paul aux Romains*, « Lectio divina Commentaires 10 », Paris, Cerf, 2002, p. 342.

33 JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 354.

god is the ultimate form of humiliation (see Ps 22:5 and 25:3).[34] | **God's Love (ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ θεοῦ).** Most modern commentators understand this to mean God's love for us, whereas the ancient interpreters, following Augustine, understand it to mean our love for him.[35]

6–7. —Died for ungodly (ὑπὲρ ἀσεβῶν). There are many parallels in the New Testament to the statement that Christ died for the ungodly; see especially Mark 14:23; John 10:11; 11:50; Rom. 8:32; 14:15; 1 Cor. 9:24; 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:15, 21; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:2, 25; 1 Thess. 5:10; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; Heb. 2:9; 10:12; 1 Pet. 2:21; 3:18; 1 John 3:16[36] | **At that time (κατὰ καιρὸν).** In Mk 1:15 or Gal 4:4 the phrase evokes the time chosen by God in his sovereign freedom when Christ completed his work,[37] but it is perhaps unwise to "load" this expression theologically. The grammar here is imprecise and one wonders what the expression is about. (a) to ὄντων ἡμῶν ἀσθενῶν, then it must be translated "in the time when we were weak"; (b) to ἀπέθανεν, and it must be translated "in the appointed time." To this grammatical difficulty is added a semantic one: should we link weakness and wickedness, going so far as to say that the wicked are the people in the time of weakness? This is what Jewett and Moo suggest.[38] | **Hardly (μόλις)** is a hapax in Paul. Is it a saying, a proverb? The adverb belongs to an elegant style and seems to contradict what Paul says earlier about the fact that no one is righteous. Perhaps Paul is echoing a Hellenistic discussion to clarify under what circumstances dying for another is a good deed. This debate appears both in the Judaism of the time (*Testament of Asher* 2:3) and in philosophy (PHILOSOTRATUS, *Life of Appolonius of Thyana* 7:12; ARRIAN, *Discourses of Epictetus* 2:7).[39] The Herculaneum Scroll 1044 contains a biography of the Epicurean Philonides of whom it is said: "For the most beloved of his relatives or friends, he would readily stake his neck."[40] | **Good person (τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ).** Should there be a distinction between the good and the just? It seems that Paul abandons theological categories in favour of a general

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[34] WITHERINGTON & HYATT, *Romans*, p. 136.

[35] FITZMYER, *Romans*, p. 398. See AUGUSTINE, *De Spiritu et Littera* 32,56.

[36] BARRETT, *Romans*, p. 106.

[37] CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, p. 264.

[38] JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 358; MOO, *Romans*, p. 306.

[39] MICHEL, *Römer*, p. 181.

[40] Adolf DEISSMANN, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World*, New and completely rev., London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1927, p. 118.

truth.[41] Indeed, there is evidence here of Greek cultural concepts, including the ideal of the good man, namely the beneficent evergete.[42] The rhetorical strategy is to allow a kind of polyphony of voices from the culture to be heard, in order to build up an *a fortiori* argument.[43]

8–9. —Sinners (ἁμαρτωλοί): before rushing to the verse to construct a general theory of Original Sin, it may be worth remembering that the term refers to those whose behaviour demonstrates that they belong to a class of people who are "the opposite of the godly, the righteous and the pious"; sinners engage in "social oppression" and oppose God[44]. Perhaps it is enough to understand that, unlike the Greco-Roman culture where the hero dies for his country, Christ dies for sinners who do not deserve it.[45] | **Proves**. The verb συνίστημι is used here in a particular sense, a demonstration, almost in the sense of "bringing to light."[46] | **Christ died for us (Χριστὸς ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἀπέθανεν).** Is it a pre-existing confession of faith[47] or a Pauline slogan?[48] The expression is frequently found in the writings of the apostle: 1 Cor. 15:3; Rom. 14:15; 1Thess. 5:9-10; 1 Cor. 8:11; 2 Cor. 5:15. In any case, Paul is quoting a familiar formula and integrating it into his broader argument that Christ's death for sinners expresses the love of God that overcomes their shameful status; he thereby provides the basis for a new form of boasting. | **Much more surely then (πολλῷ οὖν μᾶλλον)** is the very expression of the *a fortiori* argument well known in both Semitic (*Qal wahomer*) and Greco-Roman rhetoric (*a minori ad majus*).[49] The statement must be understood in a sacrificial framework, following chap. 3: the blood of Christ provides a new

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41 Klaus HAACKER, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, « Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament 6 », Leipzig, Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019[5], p. 138.

42 JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 360.

43 JEWETT, p. 360.

44 Mikael WINNINGE, *Sinners and the Righteous: A Comparative Study of the Psalms of Solomon and Paul's Letters*, « Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series 26 », Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 1995, p. 235.

45 James R. HARRISON, *Paul's Language of Grace in Its Graeco-Roman Context*, « Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament 2.172 », Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2003, p. 225.

46 JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 360.

47 MICHEL, *Römer*, p. 181-182; Klaus WENGST, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, « Studien zum Neuen Testament 7 », Gütersloh, Mohn, 1972, p. 78-82.

48 DUNN, *Romans 1–8*, 38A, p. 257.

49 CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, p. 265; KÄSEMANN, *Romans*, p. 137.

system of atonement which is open "now" (νῦν; cf. 3:26) to Jews and Gentiles alike, by which all unworthiness is overcome. As in other Pauline passages where the blood of Christ is mentioned (1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25, 27), the barriers between honourable and disreputable groups are removed; Christ's death conveys righteousness as a gift that restores and equalises all[50]. | **Blood (αἷμα).** In this context, αἷμα is a traditional cipher for the death of Jesus Christ on the cross.[51] Nowhere does Paul associate the blood of Christ with the forgiveness of sins, as later theology might claim. If the general meaning of the *a fortiori* argument is clear, the precise consequence is more elusive. In what sense is it more important to be saved from the wrath of God than to be justified by the blood of Christ?

10. —Reconciled (κατηλλάγημεν). This military metaphor already appears in 2Macc. 1:5. It indicates the implementation of a diplomacy that allowed the restoration of a dialogue that the war had broken up.[52] Some exegetes make the connection with Paul's conversion, which he also expresses as a reconciliation[53]. Two points are crucial here[54]: (1) For Paul, God is always the subject of reconciliation, not *vice versa*. Reconciliation comes entirely from the divine initiative. (2) Throughout his proclamation, Paul insists that God's reconciliation of people and the world is based on the work and faithfulness of Jesus Christ, and never on what people might do in their attempts to please God by their own works or faithfulness.

3. Reading Proposal

For three chapters Paul has discussed the issues of guilt, judgement and salvation. He has just explained the process of justification. He can assume it.[55] Beginning with **therefore, since we are justified by faith**, he clearly indicates that he intends to draw the

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[50] JEWETT, *Romans*, p. 363.

[51] *Eine traditionelle Chiffre*. Heinrich SCHLIER, *Der Römerbrief*, « Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament 6 », Freiburg im B., Herder, 2002², p. 155.

[52] Cilliers BREYTENBACH, *Versöhnung: eine Studie zur paulinischen Soteriologie*, « Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament 60 », Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1989, p. 40-104. See a discussion on his work in HAACKER, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, p. 138-139.

[53] Seyoon KIM, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1982, p. 13-20 and p. 213-315.

[54] LONGENECKER, *Romans*, p. 569.

[55] LAGRANGE, *Romains*, p. 99; BARRETT, *Romans*, p. 101.

consequences of this justification.[56] To do this, as Schlier notes,[57] he brings together almost all the concepts of his theology δικαιοῦσθαι (δικαιοσύνη) - εἰρήνη (καταλλαγή) - χάρις - δόξα - πίστις - ἐλπίς - καυχᾶσθαι, and connects them grammatically and materially through the διὰ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ.

The nature of these consequences is debated by exegetes. Is it a simple statement? Or is it an exhortation? In the first case Paul continues with his theoretical statement, in the second case he considers the pragmatic consequences of his theoretical statement. We have explained in the textual note why we opt for the second possibility. Rhetorically speaking, Paul, as the utterer, speaks directly to his addressees, "you," i.e., the Romans. But with the affirmation "having been justified," this "we" is no longer virtual, it is addressed to every reader who is concerned by the statement.[58] Moreover, Paul indicates that he is basing his argument on his personal experience of justification and reconciliation, as evidenced by the consistent use of the first-person plural throughout the passage.[59]

The first consequence of justification by faith borrows its vocabulary from diplomacy: **let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access by faith to this grace in which we stand.** Sin could be described as a war against God; now a truce has come. God has taken the first step to sign the ceasefire, and it is up to men to step forward to make peace with Him. The verb "**obtain access**" describes the process of dignitaries approaching an authority, as would happen with plenipotentiaries signing a peace treaty. Grace is granted, it is described as a place to stand, and the doorway to it would be **faith**. While Paul often uses it to describe the sovereign and gratuitous way in which God acts on behalf of humanity, or the action of God accomplished through Christ, here he sees it more as a place into which God transfers the believer in order to transform him.[60] Grace and peace is a condition, the restoration of a relationship between people and God. The former no longer have God against them, but

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56 CRANFIELD, *Romans 1–8*, p. 257; LÉGASSE, *Romains*, p. 399.
57 SCHLIER, *Der Römerbrief*, p. 145.
58 Alain GIGNAC, *L'Épître aux Romains*, « Commentaire biblique: Nouveau Testament », Paris, Cerf, 2014, p. 211.
59 FITZMYER, *Romans*, p. 394.
60 MOO, *Romans*, p. 311.

for them, and do not suffer God's opposition, but experience God's enabling work.[61]

The second consequence seems at first sight to be a psychological one: pride. If this psychological dimension is not to be underestimated,[62] pride takes on a social meaning in the Mediterranean world. To be proud of someone means to acknowledge that you are ruled by him and to exist socially through him. And this is exactly what Paul says **let us boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.** Fame is a polysemous term. In characterising a person, the word expresses his social aura, his influence in the community: Christian pride comes from seeing God's social importance reflected in the congregation. But in characterising God, the word functions as an attribute. In a way, by sharing his glory, humanity shares a little of his divinity.

The reader is about to rejoice at this happy conclusion, but Paul, as usual, changes his tone, passing from euphoria to dysphoria: **And not only that, let us also boast in our sufferings**. The apostle returns to his paradoxical praise of suffering, already expressed in previous letters (1 Thess., 2 Cor. and especially Phil.), which participates in the general reversal of values expressed in 1 Cor. He proposes to make suffering a source of pride. The general meaning is always the same: hardships deter us from trusting only in ourselves and encourage us to trust only in God. It is possible that Paul is referring to a particular situation in the community of Rome, but what he says can easily be applied to the human situation, which is rarely perfect.

The source of this radical optimism about suffering certainly has Stoic roots, but in Paul it is colored by reflection on the Cross. At the height of human folly and cruelty, the power of God unfolds, giving suffering a new dimension.[63] To address the potentially outrageous nature of the statement, Paul explains **knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces tried character, and tried character produces hope**. Suffering produces a cascade (technically a anadiplosis[64] and not a sorite[65]) of virtues

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[61] Adolf SCHLATTER, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar Zum Römerbrief*, Stuttgart, Calwer Verlag, 1991[6], p. 175.
[62] BARRETT, *Romans*, p. 103.
[63] JOHNSON, *Romans*, p. 86.
[64] GIGNAC, *Romains*, p. 211.
[65] LÉGASSE, *Romains*, p. 341.

building a *climax*[66]: endurance, which is resistance to adversity, tried and true character, which is firmness of the heart,[67] and finally hope, which is the capacity to envisage in the present the benefits of a future situation. **Hope** is no longer the prospect of what might happen, but the prospect of what is already guaranteed.[68] In sum, the exultation in suffering confirms the grace received from God.[69] The gradation ends with a statement, which admittedly is not entirely clear: **and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.** What should we understand? Is it God's love for us or is it the love we have for God that has been poured into our hearts? And what is the relationship between God's love and the spirit? Is love a kind of token[70] not to despair that the Holy Spirit would make known to us? Is love a kind of agent, both making us aware of the presence of God and transforming us?[71] Perhaps Paul is simply trying to say that the recognition of God's love does not come from an intellectual demonstration, or a statement given by the cross, but from an inner conviction.[72] This explains Paul's connection between the Resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Holy Spirit: the two realities are mutually defining. We have the Holy Spirit because Jesus is raised; we know Jesus is raised because we have his Holy Spirit.[73]

As Thielman points out, this argument only makes sense if this love has an objective, verifiable, ascertainable reality.[74] It is an experience rather than an abstract notion. Over time, it becomes challenging to pinpoint precisely what Paul is referring to: is it charismatic manifestations or a type of joy that is visible and palpable within the persecuted community when it should be in despair? Or is it Paul's personal experience of a positive attitude towards his ministry?

When was love **given to us**? Does the past tense point to a specific moment (conversion, baptism)? Anyway, the gift of the

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66 LAGRANGE, *Romains*, p. 102.
67 LIETZMANN, *Römer*, p. 59; SCHLIER, *Der Römerbrief*, p. 148.
68 KÄSEMANN, *Romans*, p. 134.
69 MICHEL, *Römer*, p. 178.
70 LAGRANGE, *Romains*, p. 102.
71 BARRETT, *Romans*, p. 105.
72 MOO, *Romans*, p. 304.
73 JOHNSON, *Romans*, p. 87.
74 Frank THIELMAN, *Romans*, « Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament », Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan, 2020, p. 275.

Spirit, like justification, is a past event, but the absence of disappointment is for the present.[75]

The rest of the pericope does not resolve the difficulty, but takes on another task: to show the extent of God's love for humanity and the efficacy of the reconciliation he offers to mankind. The proof is mentioned for a first time: **For while we were still weak, at that time Christ died for the ungodly.** Many interpretations have tried to understand what it is about. What is the meaning of **ungodly**, should it be taken here as a synonym of **powerless**? Paul seems to rely on a pre-existent formula, maybe a kerygmatic formula. What is this **right time** that Paul is referring to here? Rather than trying to separate each term from the other, it seems that the argument should be taken as a whole. Paul visibly struggles with the language before us and only after several attempts comes to a clear expression of his thought,[76] or more exactly, the exact expression is the combination of all the attempts. In fact, after having stated a gnomic truth marked by an anacoluthon whose meaning seems to contrast human actions with God's actions. God's love for us is love for sinners.[77] —**Indeed, hardly will anyone die for a righteous person-though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die** –, Paul links several sentences in the *a minori ad majus* form. **But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. Much more surely then, now that we have been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.**

This structure contrasts a previous situation – a time of weakness, opposition to God, sin, enmity – all of which serve to further clarify what Paul has described in the preceding chapters as wrath, with a time of salvation, justification and reconciliation. Both terms are different metaphors describing the same fact: justification evokes the happy outcome of a trial that God as a judge would make to men for having infringed the law, while reconciliation indicates the end of the rebellion of humanity against God their king. [78] What makes the shift possible is an event: Christ's death "for us."[79] This

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[75] BARRETT, *Romans*, p. 105.
[76] LIETZMANN, *Römer*, p. 59.
[77] SCHLIER, *Der Römerbrief*, p. 154.
[78] BARRETT, *Romans*, p. 108.
[79] GIGNAC, *Romains*, p. 213.

prevents us from seeing justification as a mere discharge, but as a very real quality, acquired in the blood of Christ.[80] Paul adopts a theological tradition in which God's love is demonstrated through the cross of Jesus Christ. This love extends to humankind, despite their sin, and is marked by mercy.[81] Even if the deed was done in the past, its effects can be felt in the present, for it is in the present that the love of God is shown. This present reality, expressed by the repetition of νῦν "culminates all of God's earlier redemptive dealings with his people and brings about in a more personal, relational, and participatory manner what God wants his people presently to experience."[82]

Paul can thus conclude: **But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.** The community can therefore count on salvation, but it also awaits it by glorifying itself in God, because it is assured of already possessing it in the present (**now**). The source of this glorification is God, who took the first step (the decisive point is that it is not men who reconcile God, but that God reconciles himself with men[83]) and Christ, the agent of reconciliation, whose centrality has never ceased to be confirmed in the text.[84]

This shift from a courtroom metaphor to a diplomatic metaphor is very surprising. In rare instances, Greek speakers used terminology similar to Paul's metaphorically, referring to reconciliation between people and the gods or, in Jewish writings, to God. However, in these instances, the desire for reconciliation typically originated from humans, often through sacrifices, pleas of mediators, fervent prayers, or martyrdom, as an attempt to appease an angry deity.[85] Paul's use of reconciliation stands out as extraordinary, as he emphasizes that reconciliation occurs through God's initiative and expense, even when humans show no intention of ending their rebellion. While mediators play a role, they act on behalf of God, with Christ's death effecting reconciliation and Paul serving as an ambassador. Paul stresses the costly nature of God's initiative,

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80 LAGRANGE, *Romains*, p. 104.
81 MICHEL, *Römer*, p. 182.
82 LONGENECKER, *Romans*, p. 565.
83 MICHEL, *Römer*, p. 183.
84 Thomas R. SCHREINER, *Romans*, « Baker's Commentary on the New Testament », Grand Rapids MI, Baker Books, 2018², p. 259.
85 See for instance SOPHOCLES, *Ajax*, 744; JOSEPHUS, *Ant.* 6,143; DIONYSUS OF HALICARNASSUS, *Ant. Rom.* 8,50.

exemplified by the sacrifice of "his Son" Jesus, to reassure believers about their salvation from future judgment. This salvation, secured through Christ's life, ensures deliverance from God's wrath, providing believers with assurance for the future.[86] Believers find assurance in both the death and life of Christ, knowing that they are spared from God's wrath. The decision of God to forgo punishment, as evidenced by the costly death of his Son, ensures that believers will not face his wrath in the future.[87]

This section concludes Paul's meditation on the omnipotence of God, beginning in the first chapter. As Käsemann puts it with remarkable clarity: "In wrath this power reveals itself as destruction to rebels, in God's righteousness it creates salvation for rebels, in faithfulness it means that the Creator holds firmly to his will and work in salvation history. In love this power shows itself to be the solidarity which overcomes the opposition between Creator and creature, which upholds the miracle of the new existence, and which at the same time continually brings awareness of it."[88]

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[86] THIELMAN, *Romans*, p. 272-273.
[87] THIELMAN, p. 276.
[88] KÄSEMANN, *Romans*, p. 135.

Hermeneutics of hope (or: Mr. Paul, are you sure we won't be disappointed?)

Pedro VALINHO GOMES

In the difficult passage of Rm 5,3b-5, Paul proposes a peculiar chain of productions: suffering producing endurance producing hope. He seems to approach suffering not as a metaphysical problem, but as a theologically charged ethical one. It is not certain that the early Christian communities were less tempted to doubt the goodness of God in times of suffering than contemporary Christians. It is however possible that Paul is here claiming a theology of hope that is not limited to a projection of intentions into an indiscernible future, but one that is capable of recognizing God's future actively present here and now precisely because the community confronts suffering with the interpretation tools received from tradition. The future thus become not primarily a temporal determination, but the reference to a novelty offered in the gift of God, in Jesus Christ, which we receive through a testimony that is both memory and promise. Hope then becomes a political act, a rejection of the tyrannies of evidence and of the mono-interpretation of the world.

Hope does not disappoint,
for the love of God has been poured into our hearts.
Rom 5:5

1. Prophecy proposes a paradoxical reading of history. Take, for example, the calling of the prophet Jeremiah (Jr 1:1-12). When God asks him to report what he sees, Jeremiah mentions something strangely different from the scenario of despair and uncertainty in which the people found themselves. Jeremiah does not see, as he should, the ruins of the project of Israel, overpowered by a foreign reign and forced into exile. Instead, he sees an almond branch, a rather naïve vision that God even more strangely approves. Not only does the prophet see the improbable, but this improbable completely fills his vision and is taken as justified. The hermeneuts of the text have remarked that, like one of the few trees that blossoms during the winter when everything around it remains dormant, the almond

tree that the prophet eccentrically sees condenses to become a metaphor for hope. God's response to the prophet mysteriously links the vision to a performance of the divine word (v. 12), as if indicating that a new blooming of the people of God is in the becoming and that it is God's action. Discerning the almond tree blooming in the void of despair is the kind of imagination construing a world that is possible to inhabit.

This same poetics of hope advanced by the prophetic narrative seems to permeate Paul's Epistle to the Romans, and particularly its chapter 5. Paul had set out to demonstrate to the Christian community in Rome the pedagogy of God's law, propaedeutic in pointing the contours of sin, but in itself incapable of working human justification before God. It is God's justice, accepted in faith, that guarantees the performance of the covenant. We are therefore justified by faith, as we are bluntly told without further explanation at the beginning of the chapter. Still, being justified is not self-evident. One would expect that Christ's resurrection would radically transform the life of the world, but one has to admit that the community continues to suffer tribulations and to feel trapped by the dynamics of evil. How can we recognise that the Risen Christ is present in our time, that he has not only transformed the lives of his contemporaries, but that he is transforming ours, here and now, if our lives remain marked by the dynamics of sin? What's more, how can a community's hope be anchored in a salvific event and bare witness of that event if its efficiency is not obvious to everyone? This contradiction puts into crisis the actuality of the reconciling event that Jesus Christ reveals himself to be. Paul will therefore insist that the knowledge of justification, transmitted by the apostles to the community, allows one to hope that, despite the tribulations, or actually amid the tribulations, one will be saved. *Reconciled* by Jesus Christ, the Christian knows by faith that he is *justified*, and that he will be *saved* by his grace. In fact, these three moments are not to be understood as a succession of events in history, as if God's gift could be deconstructed in partial offerings: it is rather a single event, Jesus Christ himself, offering the human being the grace of the covenant's fulfilment. It is the integrity of the Christ event that allows the community to be situated in the present in hope. Paul's writing takes thus the form of a theological exhortation to hope, the crafting of a theological narrative enabling the community to see what is essential (even if it is not obvious) in their present reality. To see the almond

Table of Contents

Introduction - Cross theological readings. Exegetes and dogmaticians on Romans 5:1-11 3
Benoît Bourgine

Romans 5:1-11: An Exegesis 7
Régis Burnet

1. Rom 5:1-11 in context 7
2. Notes 9
   - A. Textual Notes 9
   - B. Text and Translation 11
   - C. Vocabulary Notes 12
3. Reading Proposal 18

Hermeneutics of hope (or: Mr. Paul, are you sure we won't be disappointed?) 25
Pedro Valinho Gomes

God's Demonstration.The Christian Proof of God's Love in Rm 5, 8. 43
Louis de Brouwer

1. Premises 46
2. The text dynamics: Romans 5:(5-)6-9 49
3. Theological proofs and reversal of the subject 53
4. Recapitulation and Contemporary Applications 58

The Already but Not Yet Kingdom? A Resurrection in Process. A Theological Comment on Romans 5:10 63
Daniel Alejandro Pérez Chamorro

1. Prolegomena 64
2. Romans 5:10 69
3. Resurrection: A Process Already Started but Not Yet Finished 73
4. Conclusion 76

Reconciliation and Salvation: a Two-stage Process? A Guyonian Response 79
Florence Draguet

1. Madame Guyon's commentaries on the Bible 81
2. Explanations of "reconciliation" and "salvation" in the letter to the Romans 85
   - A. Initial approach to the text 85
   - B. The commentary of Madame Guyon 89
   - C. Summary 98

***Christian Pride*: boasting as a condition of hope in Romans 5:1-11 ..... 101**
Benoît Bourgine

1. The meaning and function of "boasting" in Romans 5:1-11 103
   - A. The theme of hope in the second *probatio* (Rom 5:8) and the *transitio* (Rom 5:1-11) 103
   - B. Analysis of occurrences of "to boast" in Romans 5:1-11 105
   - C. The background of Pauline and biblical theology 108
2. The pride of hope 113
   - A. Theological significance 116
   - B. Anthropological significance 118
   - C. Ecclesiological significance 120

Exegesis and Theology – A Critical Review 125
Andreas Dettwiler

Table of Contents 137

Contributors to the Volume 139

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