

Albert Schweitzer's Understanding of Righteousness by Faith according to Paul's Letter to the Romans

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Among the countless contributions to Pauline theology during the 20th century there are only very few, which may be characterized as landmark studies. Albert Schweitzer's *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*¹ is surely among this small number. Here Schweitzer presents the clear-cut alternatives of his very own understanding of Paul's theology. Given the choice between justification and participation in Christ he argues, as is well known:

"The doctrine of righteousness by faith is therefore a subsidiary crater, which has formed within the rim of the main crater – the mystical doctrine of redemption through being-in-Christ."²

While Schweitzer in his own days did not receive much praise for his approach this has changed more recently. E. P. Sanders in yet another groundbreaking study refers to Schweitzer very early in his own interpretation of the apostle's thought in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.³ When asking for the center of Pauline theology he claims to follow Schweitzer and concludes:

"the catch-word 'righteousness by faith' must be given up as the clue to Paul's thought."⁴

Faced with such apodictic statements it would be instructive to review the last century of Pauline studies in light of Schweitzer's and Sanders' contributions as others have done before.⁵ But this task is well beyond the scope of this present study.⁶ Sanders himself only picks up Schweitzer's emphasis on eschatology and the latter's rejection of "righteousness by faith alone" as "the central theme in Paul's gospel"⁷ while he regards other aspects of

¹ A. Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1930, ²1954). Quoted in this article after the ET (1931): Idem, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (trans. W. Montgomery; with a new foreword by J. Pelikan, Baltimore, Md./London: Johns Hopkins University Press; in association with the Albert Schweitzer Institute for the Humanities, 1998).

² *Ibid.* 225.

³ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1977), 334f.

⁴ *Ibid.* 438.

⁵ See e.g. the excellent review of scholarship by S. Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, Mich./Cambridge U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 101-258, esp. 108-116 on Schweitzer and 159-163 on Sanders.

⁶ Cf. H. Hübner, *Pauli Theologiae Proprium*, *NTS* 26 (1980), 445-473.

⁷ Sanders, *Paul*, 434. He discusses Schweitzer's views on righteousness *ibid.* 438-441 and on eschatology *ibid.* 476-479.

Schweitzer's decisions as unacceptable.⁸ However, as Schweitzer claims to offer a systematic and consistent picture of Pauline thought⁹ such an eclectic evaluation is in danger of reducing the overall picture to the quoting of mere aphorisms.¹⁰

This paper shall thus attempt to review the larger picture of Schweitzer's understanding of Pauline theology. Thus one needs to take into account at least three different contexts: Firstly, Schweitzer is deeply rooted in his own time. For that reason, one needs to pay attention to his biography and the development of his thoughts. Secondly, his understanding of Paul cannot and must not be isolated from his wider theological convictions. If one wants to grasp his concept of Paul one needs to take into account his understanding of the sacraments and of Jesus. Thirdly, when gazing at Schweitzer's stern statements one can easily overlook his wider argument. Therefore, in order to evaluate Schweitzer's conclusions this paper shall in particular pay attention to his exegesis of Romans within the larger framework of his interpretation of Pauline theology.

1. Schweitzer in his own time

Albert Schweitzer was born in the Alsatian and in those days German town of Kaysersberg in 1875. His father, Ludwig Schweitzer, was a Lutheran pastor. A number of his ancestors on both sides were pastors and organists. So it is not much of a surprise that he became a very talented organist already quite early in life and that in 1893 he began to study theology in Strasbourg. And these are the two areas in which Schweitzer truly excelled. He became and remained a respected musician and musicologist, specialized on the works of Johann Sebastian Bach and not least one of the most influential contributors to the study of the historical Jesus and the theology of the apostle Paul in the 20th century. However, among the wider public he is probably better remembered as missionary doctor in Lambaréné and as winner of the Nobel Peace Prize.

⁸ *Ibid.* 434 mentions Schweitzer's "over-emphasis of the importance of predestination in Paul's thought, his view of baptism as *ex opere operato* and his theory of two resurrections."

⁹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 139: "And how totally wrong those are who refuse to admit that Paul was a logical thinker, and proclaim as the highest outcome of their wisdom the discovery that he has no system! For he is a logical thinker and his mysticism is a complete system. (...) [I]n his mysticism he proceeds with a logical consistency, which in its simplicity and clearness compels assent as a piece of thinking."

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. the usage of the quotation of "the doctrine of righteousness by faith (...) [as] a subsidiary crater" throughout the discussion of Pauline theology ever since Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 225.

A very brief review of his theological work in chronological order will help to reconstruct his development of thought. After Schweitzer had finished his first theological exam in 1898 he passed his doctoral exam in philosophy in Strasbourg a year later. His dissertation dealt with Kant's philosophy of religion and was published also in 1899.¹¹ A second theological exam and the licentiate degree¹² followed in the year 1900. For the latter Schweitzer wrote a dissertation on the Lord's Supper.¹³ As a second part to this he soon added a "sketch" (= *Skizze*) on the messianic secret and the life of Jesus and his suffering.¹⁴ This study served for his *Habilitation*. In 1901, by the age of 26, Schweitzer had already published three dissertations and became *Privatdozent* in the Protestant Theological Faculty in Strasbourg a year later. The first edition of his opus magnum *Von Reimarus zu Wrede* (ET: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*) was published in 1906.¹⁵ It grew out of the earlier "sketch" and his lectures on life-of-Jesus research during the summer semester 1905. Schweitzer himself dates the first draft of *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* to the year 1906.¹⁶ As an introduction to this study he reviewed the history of research in a similar fashion that he had already employed for *The Quest*. Due to illness and his work, among other projects, on the second edition of his book on Jesus he was not able to publish this historical survey on Pauline scholarship under the title *Die Geschichte der paulinischen Forschung* until 1911.¹⁷ By then Schweitzer was still optimistic that his *Mysticism of Paul* would "appear at an early date". However, due to various circumstances he was not able to finish the book until 1929. As he wrote the preface to this monograph aboard the Ogowe steamer on the way to his third travel to Lambaréné, he regarded it as a kind of conclusion of his previous work.¹⁸

¹¹ A. Schweitzer, *Die Religionsphilosophie Kants von der Kritik der reinen Vernunft bis zur Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Freiburg i.B. u.a.: J.C.B. Mohr [P. Siebeck], 1899).

¹² This degree of Lic. theol. is the equivalent of the theological doctorate (Dr. theol.) today.

¹³ A. Schweitzer, *Das Abendmahl im Zusammenhang mit dem Leben Jesu und der Geschichte des Urchristentums. Erstes Heft: Das Abendmahlsproblem auf Grund der wissenschaftlichen Forschung des 19. Jahrhunderts und der historischen Berichte* (Tübingen/Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1901).

¹⁴ A. Schweitzer, *Das Abendmahl im Zusammenhang mit dem Leben Jesu und der Geschichte des Urchristentums. Zweites Heft: Das Messianitäts- und Leidensgeheimnis: Eine Skizze des Lebens Jesu* (Tübingen/Leipzig: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1901).

¹⁵ A. Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede: Eine Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1906); ET: *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*. With a Preface by F. C. Burkitt (trans. W. Montgomery; London: A. & C. Black, 1911).

¹⁶ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, xxiii.

¹⁷ A. Schweitzer, *Die Geschichte der paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1911); ET: Idem, *Paul and his Interpreters: A Critical History* (London: A. & C. Black, 1911; quoted after: New York: Macmillan Company, 1951).

¹⁸ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, xxiv.

Of special interest for this paper are the factors, which shaped his unique understanding of early Christian and Pauline theology in particular. These are especially reflected in the more general emphasis on the topics of eschatology and mysticism in the late 19th and early 20th century.

In 1892 Johannes Weiss (1863-1914) published his most influential work *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*.¹⁹ According to Weiss Jesus' teaching was apocalyptic at heart. At first sight (especially the first edition of) this study does not reveal the importance of early Jewish apocalyptic for an understanding of Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom of God. However, Weiss refers to a number of early Jewish apocalyptic texts in order to illustrate Jesus' thoughts.²⁰ With reference to Jesus Weiss concludes:

“the dogmatic religious-ethical application of this idea [i.e. of an innerworldly development of the Kingdom of God in the mind of Jesus] in more recent theology, an application which has completely stripped away the original eschatological-apocalyptic meaning of the idea, is unjustified.”²¹

Thus (and in stern contrast to the liberal theology of his father-in-law Albrecht Ritschl²²) Weiss takes the early Jewish apocalyptic perspective to be the center of Jesus' teaching of the kingdom of God.

At about the same time a similar move happened with regard to Pauline studies. Here the work of Richard Kabisch (1868-1914) became instrumental for a new approach.²³ In line with the consistent employment of the history of religion Kabisch argues in favor of an eschatological understanding of Paul's theology and thus as dependent on the Jewish ideas of his time. To sum up: Both Jesus and Paul were now well on their way to be interpreted within the context of early Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. This does not mean that suddenly the whole of New Testament exegesis turned into this direction. Quite to the contrary: It was the heyday of the History of Religions School with its strong emphasis to take full account of the

¹⁹ J. Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892, ²1900); ET: *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (trans. and ed. R. H. Hiers/D. L. Holland, Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress, 1971).

²⁰ Weiss places a chapter “Alttestamentliche und jüdische Vorbilder des Reiches Gottes” (1-35) in front of the second edition, which is considerably enlarged. He also refers back to W. Baldensperger, *Das Selbstbewußtsein Jesu im Lichte der messianischen Hoffnungen seiner Zeit* (Strasbourg: J. H. E. Heitz [Heitz u. Mündel], 1888, ²1889).

²¹ Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation*, 79.

²² Cf. J. Weiss, *Die Idee des Reiches Gottes in der Theologie* (Giessen: J. Ricker, 1901); R. Schäfer, *Das Reich Gottes bei Albrecht Ritschl und Johannes Weiss*, *ZThK* 61 (1964), 68-88.

²³ R. Kabisch, *Die Eschatologie des Paulus in ihren Zusammenhängen mit dem Gesamtgriff des Paulinismus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1893); cf. the earlier studies, which argue in the same direction, e.g.: O. Everling, *Die paulinische Angelologie und Dämonologie. Ein biblisch-theologischer Versuch* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1888).

religious matrix of contemporary non-Jewish religions and philosophical systems.²⁴ Neither Weiss nor Kabisch received much praise at first. The time was simply not ripe for an understanding of Jesus' teaching within – and not simply in opposition to – ancient Judaism²⁵ and thus to acknowledge “apocalyptic as the mother of Christian theology”.²⁶ However, Schweitzer felt that Weiss did not go far enough.²⁷ He argued that all of Jesus teaching should be viewed in eschatological perspective and coined the phrase “thoroughgoing eschatology” (=konsequente Eschatologie).²⁸

Of equal importance for Schweitzer was his concept of Mysticism. In 1892 Adolf Deißmann had posed the question of *Christusmystik*. His study on the NT formula “in Christo Jesu”²⁹ served Schweitzer as a prime example to argue against and in contrast to emphasize his “sacramental mysticism of Paul.” Deißmann writes:

“I hold it to be untrue, that for Paul baptism is the way of attaining to Christ. There are passages which, taken in isolation, can be alleged in favor of this view, but there can be no doubt that it is more correct to say: Baptism does not operate but only seals the fellowship with Christ.”³⁰

Schweitzer could not disagree more. Already his teacher Heinrich Julius Holtzmann had probably introduced him to the basic alternatives regarding Paul's theology of redemption. But the former student felt that his teacher had watered down Paul's concept of being in Christ to an essentially ethical relation. For Schweitzer, however, ethics was not at the center of Christ-mysticism. Although many others would also talk about different kinds of Mysticism in the NT in those days³¹ Schweitzer defined the term quite differently in light of

²⁴ Cf. C. Clemen, *Religionsgeschichtliche Erklärung des Neuen Testaments. Die Abhängigkeit des ältesten Christentums von nichtjüdischen Religionen und philosophischen Systemen* (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1909).

²⁵ Cf. for a critique of Weiss: H. Gunkel, *ThLZ* 18 (1893), 43; W. Bousset, *Jesu Predigt in ihrem Gegensatz zum Judentum: Ein religionsgeschichtlicher Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892), 89, 130.

²⁶ E. Käsemann, On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic, in: idem, *New Testament Questions of Today* (Philadelphia, Pa., 1969), 108-137, here: 137; cf. idem; *The Beginnings of Christian Theology*, in: *ibid.*, 82-107, here: 102.

²⁷ Schweitzer, *Abendmahl II*, 27f. under the heading: “Das Geheimnis des Reiches Gottes im Lichte der prophetischen und jüdischen Zukunftserwartungen.”

²⁸ A. Schweitzer, *Quest* (1906), 330-397, chapter 19 bears the title: “Thoroughgoing Scepticism and Thoroughgoing Eschatology.”

²⁹ G. A. Deißmann, *Die neutestamentliche Formel “in Christo Jesu”* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert, 1892).

³⁰ A. Deißmann, *Paulus: Eine kultur- und religionsgeschichtliche Skizze* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1925), 115; quoted after Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 18.

³¹ See e.g. the reviews of the history of research in: A. Wikenhauser, *Die Christusmystik des hl. Paulus* (Biblische Zeitfragen 12/8-10; Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1928); J. Schneider, *Die Passionsmystik des Paulus: Ihr Wesen, ihr Hintergrund und ihre Nachwirkungen* (Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 15; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1929); F. Büchsel, “In Christus” bei Paulus, *ZNW* 42 (1949), 141-158; F. Neugebauer, *In Christus: ἐν Χριστῷ: Eine Untersuchung zum Paulinischen Glaubensbegriff* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1961), esp. 9-33; A.J.M. Wedderburn, *Some Observations*

his understanding of eschatology.³² Unlike a more common definition of mysticism Schweitzer argues that there is no such “God-mysticism” in Paul. He only refers to “Christ-mysticism” as a means of coming into relation with Christ.³³ For Schweitzer, the basic alternatives are either an eschatological being in Christ in terms of “Christ-mysticism” or a justification by faith. How does this fit in into Schweitzer’s own theological development?

2. Jesus, Paul and early Christian eschatology

As already mentioned Schweitzer himself dates the first draft of *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* to the year 1906.³⁴ Looking back many years later he reveals that originally he had planned to write a three-volume study on the Lord’s Supper.³⁵ The first part dealt with the previous history of research on this topic. This study lead Schweitzer to the conclusion that as the understanding of the Lord’s Supper by his predecessors was misguided and thus their understanding of the life of Jesus was equally wrong. Therefore, he calls for a new life of Jesus as the only way to solve the problem of the Lord’s Supper.³⁶

This topic is addressed in his second book on the Lord’s Supper, which ends with a short outline on the life of Jesus.³⁷ The next step in Schweitzer’s development was obvious: While he had only wanted to add a small supplement on the history of Jesus research to this short outline his modest plan grew into the seminal study on *The Quest of the historical Jesus*. However, the originally intended third volume on the Lord’s Supper only reached a stage that was presented as lectures.³⁸ The work on the first (1906) and even more on the second edition

on Paul’s use of the phrases ‘in Christ’ and ‘with Christ’, *JSNT* 25 (1985), 83-97; G. Sellin, *Die religionsgeschichtlichen Hintergründe der paulinischen “Christusmystik”*, *TQ* 176 (1996), 7-27, esp. 7f.;

³² Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 98

³³ *Ibid.* 3.

³⁴ *Ibid.* xxiii.

³⁵ A. Schweitzer, *Aus meinem Leben und Denken* (original ed. Leipzig: Felix Meiner 1931; quoted after the ed.: Hamburg: Richard Meiner, 1954), 30. As already mentioned only the first and the second part of this study were published in 1901. See note 13f.

³⁶ Schweitzer, *Abendmahl I*, 62: “Ein neues Leben Jesu: das ist der einzige Weg zur Lösung des Abendmahlsproblems.”

³⁷ Schweitzer, *Abendmahl II*, 98-109.

³⁸ A first chapter of this third volume on the Lord’s Supper was published more recently: A. Schweitzer, 6. Abendmahl: 3. Heft: 1. Das Abendmahl in der dogmengeschichtlichen Forschung von Baur bis Harnack. Die Dogmengeschichten und die durchgehenden Monographien (Geschrieben 4.-12.5.1903), in: idem, *Straßburger Vorlesungen* (ed. E. Gräßer/J. Zürcher; München: C. H. Beck, 1998), 469-503; two more manuscripts may have been intended to form parts of this planned publication: idem, 5. Der Übergang der historischen Feier in die Gemeindefeier: 1. Abschnitt: Rekapitulation (ohne Datum), in: *ibid.*, 460-468; idem, Die Taufe im Neuen Testament, in: *ibid.*, 44-151.

(1913) of *The Quest* did not allow Schweitzer to finish this three volume study on the Lord's Supper before he left for Africa in 1913.

Already in the first edition of *The Quest* Schweitzer summarizes previous Jesus research by pointing to three strict dichotomies:

“The first was laid down by Strauss: either purely historical or purely supernatural. The second had been worked out by the Tübingen school and Holtzmann: either Synoptic or Johannine. Now came the third: either eschatological or non-eschatological!”³⁹

For Schweitzer, of course, the third “either – or” is the most important and he opts in favor of “eschatological”, of course.⁴⁰ Already in his early publications on the life of Jesus Schweitzer interprets Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God in light of Jewish eschatology. As he moved on to study Paul he was strongly influenced by his basic convictions regarding the sacraments, eschatology, the Jewish context of early Christianity and his understanding of Mysticism.

“Thus Paul preaches Christ-mysticism on the ground of the eschatological concept of the predestined solidarity of the Elect with one another and with the Messiah, as Jesus had done before him, but with the difference, that Paul presents it in the form which it assumes as a consequence of the death and resurrection of Jesus.”⁴¹

While Jesus and Paul are thus bound together by eschatology the changed conditions after Easter require an adaptation. How does Schweitzer's overall system affect his understanding of Pauline theology and of the letter to the Romans?

3. Paul, Romans and Christ-Mysticism

As Schweitzer turns from Jesus to Paul he opposes “the tragic error by which an unauthentic or an incomplete Gospel of Paul perverts Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom of God from coming

³⁹ Schweitzer, *Quest* (ET 1911), 238 (cf. *Geschichte*, [1913], 254).

⁴⁰ Schweitzer, *Quest* (ET 1911), 238f. (cf. *Geschichte*, [1913], 254). In the same context Schweitzer also reveals his basic concept of argument, which is characterized by this kind of taking one of two alternatives without aiming for any kind of synthesis.

He writes: “Progress always consists in taking one or other of two alternatives, in abandoning the attempt to combine them. The pioneers of progress have therefore always to reckon with the law of mental inertia which manifests itself in the majority-who always go on believing that it is possible to combine that which can no longer be combined, and in fact claim it as a special merit that they, in contrast with the ‘one-sided’ writers, can do justice to the other side of the question. One must just let them be, till their time is over, and resign oneself not to see the end of it, since it is found by experience that the complete victory of one of two historical alternatives is a matter of two full theological generations.”

⁴¹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 113.

to his rights!”⁴² How does he first reconstruct a Pauline theology that, according to Schweitzer, does not stand in the way of the Gospel of Jesus and how does Romans fit into this larger picture?

a. Paul

The starting point of Schweitzer’s interpretation of Pauline theology is what he calls the apostle’s “Christ mysticism”. What does this term mean? Schweitzer defines:

“The fundamental thought of Paul’s mysticism runs thus: I am in Christ; in Him I know myself as a being who is raised above this sensuous, sinful, and transient world and already belongs to the transcendent; in Him I am assured of resurrection; in Him I am a Child of God.”⁴³

These lines are strongly reminiscent of a confession. For their author mysticism is not a theoretical concept but rather part of his day to day experience. The very first lines of his study support this impression:

“When we say that Paul is a mystic, what do we mean by mysticism? We are always in presence of mysticism when we find a human being looking upon the division between earthly and super-earthly, temporal and eternal, as transcended, and feeling himself, while still eternally amid the earthly and temporal, to belong to the super-earthly and eternal.”⁴⁴

Schweitzer’s interpretation does not obscure his own personal involvement with the topic. But is this really Paul’s “Christ mysticism” or is it merely Schweitzer projecting himself back into the apostle, into his biography and theology? From the very beginning of this review one needs to keep in mind how much Schweitzer got involved personally. This study does not seem to be a sober and theoretical account of Pauline theology but rather the confession of a modern day mystic who found as a like-minded genius the apostle Paul as “the patron-saint of thought in Christianity,”⁴⁵ “the first and greatest of all Christian thinkers.”⁴⁶

How does this theology of Schweitzer’s Paul work? First of all it is not only mystical but more precisely it is eschatological. At the heart of “Pauline Mysticism” lies the concept that through Jesus’ death and resurrection “the Elect share with one another and with Christ a

⁴² *Ibid.* 395.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 377.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 378.

corporeity.”⁴⁷ As a result they are “capable of acquiring the resurrection state of existence before the general resurrection of the dead takes place.”⁴⁸ This interpretation assumes an adaptation of the teaching of Jesus in light of the post-Easter situation. While Jesus had hoped for “the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom (...) immediately after His death”⁴⁹ Paul “recasts the doctrine of redemption in accordance with the facts.” By employing the “enigmatic concept” of the “body of Christ”⁵⁰ the apostle argues that the believers are in Christ, because they share in his dying and resurrection.

Where does Schweitzer find the background for this interpretation? Already in the preface of the study he states the alternatives: “we must now consider either a purely eschatological or a purely Hellenistic explanation of his [Paul’s] teaching.”⁵¹ For Schweitzer the answer is clear. He “assumes the complete agreement of the teaching of Paul with that of Jesus.”⁵² Already in his survey of the history research he had come to the conclusion:

“Whatever views and conceptions are brought up for comparison, the result is always the same – that Paulinism and Greek thought have nothing, absolutely nothing, in common”⁵³

Consequently, Schweitzer refers to the Jewish eschatology as the context of Pauline thought. From this apocalyptic world of thought he takes over the idea that in the messianic kingdom the believers will exist in unity with Christ.⁵⁴ After Easter, however, the perspective is different: How do the elect already now enter into this “being-in-Christ”? Here Schweitzer returns to insights he had gained in his very early work on the sacraments. In contrast to the Reformation’s *sola fide* and in line with an understanding of Baptism as *ex opere operato*⁵⁵ he argues:

“[I]nclusion in this favoured corporeity is not effected in the moment of believing, and not by faith as such. It is first with Baptism, that is, by the ceremonial act by which the

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 116.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 116.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 115.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 116.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* xxiv.

⁵² *Ibid.* xxiv.

⁵³ Schweitzer, *Paul*, 99. Cf. idem, *Mysticism*, 140: “Since all [Paul’s] conceptions and thoughts are rooted in eschatology, those who labour to explain him on the basis of Hellenism, are like a man who should bring water from a long distance in leaky watering-cans in order to water a garden lying beside a stream.”

⁵⁴ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 66f.

⁵⁵ Cf. Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 117: “The peculiarity of the Pauline mysticism is precisely that being-in-Christ is not a subjective experience brought about by a special effort of faith on the part of the believer, but something which happens, in him as in others, at baptism.” Cf. already idem, *Paul*, 225: “[W]hat happens is that in the moment when he receives baptism, the dying and rising again of Christ takes place in him without any cooperation, or exercise of will or thought, on his part. It is like a mechanical process which is set in motion by pressing a spring.”

believer enters the 'Community of God' and comes into fellowship, not only with Christ but also with the rest of the Elect, that this inclusion takes place."⁵⁶

Or even more trenchant: "Without baptism there is no being-in-Christ."⁵⁷ At this point Schweitzer reads his peculiar understanding of the sacraments, which is instrumental for his "Christ mysticism", into Pauline theology. What are the consequences of such a mystical, eschatological and sacramental understanding of Paul's theology for redemption? Schweitzer describes three different doctrines of redemption, which he calls mystical, eschatological and juridical.⁵⁸

At the beginning and at the very center of Schweitzer's understanding of the Pauline doctrine of redemption stands his concept of "Christ-mysticism".⁵⁹ This means that – not just in a metaphorical but in a real sense⁶⁰ – Christians have died and risen with Christ.⁶¹ For the elect baptism as being buried and as rising again "effects what the mysticism of being-in-Christ accepts as the effect of redemption."⁶² By their baptism the elect are incorporated in Christ; by "the Lord's Supper (...) [they are] brought into relation with the mysticism of the being-in-Christ."⁶³ Both baptism and the Lord's Supper are taken as initiation of believers into the new reality of the messianic kingdom.⁶⁴ Consequently, the law is no longer in force for them.⁶⁵

But what is this reality like that changed through Christ and by baptism? Schweitzer sees as the background for this the Jewish eschatological worldview, which is shared by Jesus and Paul. Angelic powers "established themselves between Him [i.e. God] and mankind."⁶⁶ The law was given through them and they tried "to make men subservient to themselves."⁶⁷ However, now with Christ's death and resurrection the power of the angels has been shaken. As a result the law has lost its force and "the Coming Redemption" has "already begun to come into operation."⁶⁸ Compared with Judaism Schweitzer sees the apostle as going into the

⁵⁶ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 116.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 117.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 25.205; Cf. Westerholm, *Perspectives*, 109.

⁵⁹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 22.

⁶⁰ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 15.

⁶¹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 3.

⁶² *Ibid.* 19.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 20.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 22: Schweitzer acknowledges the strangeness of this understanding of baptism and the Lord's Supper: "For us modern men it goes against the grain to have to recognise this realistic sacramentalism in Paul. But reverence for truth must be placed above this distaste. We must let his sayings mean what they say, and not what we should like them to mean."

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 192.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 55.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 64.

opposite direction: “Paul sacrificed the Law to eschatology; Judaism abandoned eschatology and retained the Law.”⁶⁹

To sum up, in terms of “Christ-mysticism” the elect are already part of the messianic world. “In Christi” they participate already in this eschatological reality, which frees them from the law.

Where does this leave Pauline theology and the familiar concept of righteousness through faith in terms of the juridical doctrine of redemption? As already noted Schweitzer pushes aside the doctrine of righteousness by faith. For him faith “in the abstract”⁷⁰, unlike baptism, does not have any effect. “[I]t [i.e. faith] becomes operative only through that being-in-Christ, beginning at baptism, to which it leads.”⁷¹ Thus, faith is reduced to a mere consequence of the being in Christ. It is not the starting point and not the center.

Therefore, for Schweitzer the doctrine of righteousness by faith is secondary to the eschatological Christ-mysticism. He denies any connection in Paul between righteousness by faith and “other blessings of redemption, the possession of the spirit, and the resurrection.”⁷² Schweitzer derives his interpretation of redemption according to Paul mainly from his exegesis of Galatians.⁷³ He is, however, well aware that it is not quite possible to ignore the prominence given to the doctrine of righteousness by faith in Romans.

b. Romans

When asking for the role of all three aforementioned types of redemption in Romans Schweitzer concedes:

“[T]he presentation in the Epistle to the Romans (Rom. ii. 11-iv. 24) of the doctrine of righteousness by faith deliberately refrains from referring both to the eschatological doctrine of redemption and to the mystical doctrine of the being-in-Christ.”⁷⁴

So one may ask what is the relation between righteousness by faith in Romans and Schweitzer’s concept of the eschatological and mystical doctrines of redemption?

First of all Schweitzer argues that righteousness by faith is something, which belongs to the future.⁷⁵ He defines: “[R]ighteousness means to acquire by keeping the commandments a

⁶⁹ *Ibid.* 192.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 206.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 206.

⁷² *Ibid.* 221.

⁷³ Cf. *Ibid.* 209 on Gal 3:1-4:6.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 212.

claim to be pronounced righteous at the coming Judgment, and consequently to become a partaker in the Messianic glory.”⁷⁶ But for Paul, of course, keeping the law or the commandments “is taken by faith in the redemptive power of the death of Jesus Christ.”⁷⁷ Thus believers attain this state of existence already as a consequence of their being in Christ in the present. Or as Schweitzer puts it: “This righteousness is really the first effect of the being-in-Christ.”⁷⁸ For believers their righteousness, their resurrection state and their possession of the Spirit follow direct from their being in Christ. But Schweitzer recognizes that in Romans Paul expresses himself in a different way. Here the apostle gives the impression that “the true righteousness was obtained by faith as such.”⁷⁹

At this very point of the argument Schweitzer cannot agree with Paul’s words. For Schweitzer and in light of his reconstruction of Pauline theology this is just impossible. Line after line he starts to argue against Paul: “That righteousness comes directly from faith cannot be meant by Paul in the strict sense, since it is in fact impossible.” And then again, Schweitzer formulates his own theological confession: “All the blessings of redemption which the believer possesses flow from the being-in-Christ, and from this only.” And if anybody should still believe in the effect of faith the answer follows immediately: “Faith, in the abstract, has no effective significance: it becomes operative only through that being-in-Christ, beginning at baptism, to which it leads.”⁸⁰ So the whole of Pauline theology is centered in the being in Christ. In this very center Schweitzer leaves no room for an effective role of faith, although he allows faith to lead to baptism and as a result into the state of being in Christ.

One may wonder: Is this still the same Schweitzer who argues earlier in his study so vehemently “that we must resign ourselves to allow the Pauline sayings to retain their plain meaning”?⁸¹ In his exegesis of Romans Schweitzer does not seem to be prepared to accept the “plain meaning” of what the apostle says. Here Schweitzer’s interpretation takes over and does not allow for any divergence. How does he cope with the “plain meaning” of Paul in Rom 3:28 and 4:5? Schweitzer presents at least four reasons why Paul “express[es] himself differently from what he actually means.”⁸²

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* 205.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* 205.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 205.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 205.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 206; Schweitzer quotes: Rom 3:28: “We judge, then, that a man is justified by faith without the works of the Law.” and 4:5: “But to him who works not, but puts his faith in Him who justifies the ungodly, to him his faith is reckoned as righteousness.”

⁸⁰ All quotations from *ibid.* 206.

⁸¹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 18

⁸² *Ibid.* 206.

The first reason is a linguistic consideration. “The complete expression ‘Righteousness, in consequence of faith, through the being-in-Christ’ is too awkward to be constantly employed in the course of an argument.”⁸³ Therefore, Paul uses the short form of “righteousness in Christ.”

According to Schweitzer, the second reason for Paul’s wording is a dialectical one. The expression “righteousness by faith” is simply used because it serves well as antithesis to “righteousness by the Law,”⁸⁴ although according to Schweitzer’s logic it is not correct.

The third reason is: for Paul using the term “righteousness by faith” in Rom 1:17⁸⁵ and 4:3⁸⁶ is required by the scriptures he quotes. In Gen 15:6 and Hab 2:4 the connection of righteousness and faith is obvious and Paul needs both quotations “to expound his doctrine of freedom from the Law.”⁸⁷

And finally the fourth reason is that Paul “in an apologetic interest” tries to avoid “everything which could be used as material for attacks against him.”⁸⁸ Paul’s interest is apologetic. Consequently, he has to be careful and says many good things about the law.⁸⁹ Already William Wrede called Paul’s doctrine of justification a polemical doctrine (= *Kampfeslehre*).⁹⁰ In a similar fashion Schweitzer points out that righteousness by faith “only appears where the controversy over the Law has to be dealt with, and – very significantly – even then only where a Scriptural argument is to be based on the as yet uncircumcised Abraham.”⁹¹

In any case Schweitzer has to concede that the Pauline argument in Romans is different from his own. However, Paul’s line of thought does not convince him. While Schweitzer’s own “quasi-physical redemption-doctrine of Paul’s mysticism (...) is a collective, cosmologically-conditioned event (...) [t]he doctrine of righteousness by faith is, on the contrary, individualistic and uncosmic.”⁹²

Here Schweitzer rightly criticizes any individualistic and non-eschatological interpretation of righteousness by faith. But does this critique really do justice to Paul’s argument? Both

⁸³ *Ibid.* 207.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 207.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* 208; cf. Hab 2:4 = Gal 3:11; Rom 1:17.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 208; cf. Gen 15:6 = Gal 3:6; Rom 4:3.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 208.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 213.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 213 refers to Rom 7:12,14,16,22.

⁹⁰ W. Wrede, *Paulus* (Religionsgeschichtliche Volksbücher 1,5.6; Halle a. S. : Gebauer-Schwetschke, 1904; Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], ²1907), 92: „Die Rechtfertigungslehre ist kein Zentralpunkt bei Paulus. Es ist dessen Kampfeslehre und nur aus seinem Lebenskampfe, seiner Auseinandersetzung mit dem Judentum und dem Judenchristentum verständlich und nur für diese gedacht.“

⁹¹ Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, 220.

⁹² *Ibid.* 219.

Krister Stendahl and Ernst Käsemann among others have demonstrated convincingly that the Pauline doctrine of justification cannot and must not be understood as dealing solely with the individual. To quote Käsemann:

“The Pauline doctrine of justification never took its bearings from the individual (...). It does not talk about the gift of God to the individual. If that were so, the cosmic horizons of Rom. 1.18-3.20; 5.12ff.; 8.18ff. and especially chs. 9-11, would be incomprehensible.”⁹³

Schweitzer’s critique of an individualistic and non-eschatological understanding of redemption is basically correct. However, he should have addressed it to a long and misleading tradition of interpreting Paul, certainly not to Paul and his letter to the Romans. Here Schweitzer fails.

It is again beyond this study to enter into the whole discussion regarding the law and the historical context of Romans. However, Schweitzer’s interpretation of Paul as a contribution to present day Pauline scholarship needs to be dealt with.

4. Schweitzer and present day Pauline theology

Pauline studies have in many ways highly profited from Albert Schweitzer’s interpretation of Pauline theology. His criticism of the History of Religions School with its unbalanced and often uncritical tendency to interpret the early Christian sources by means of Hellenistic and Gnostic texts only remains important. In both employing eschatology and the Jewish heritage of early Christianity as the contexts to interpret not only Jesus but also Paul Schweitzer was very much ahead of his own time.⁹⁴ N. T. Wright has rightly pointed out that “Schweitzer has thus introduced us to the various questions (...) which have dominated Pauline study in the present [i.e. 20th] century.”⁹⁵ Hence, there is good reason not only to take Schweitzer’s contributions to Jesus research but also his studies on Paul as a starting point to review the history of NT research within the 20th century.

⁹³ Käsemann, *Perspectives*, 74, where he discusses K. Stendahl, *The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West*, *HTR* 56 (1963) 199-215; repr. in: Idem, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (London: SCM, 1976), 76-96.

⁹⁴ Cf. E. Grässer, *Albert Schweitzer als Theologe* (BHT 60; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1979), 199.

⁹⁵ S. Neill/T. Wright, *The Interpretation of the New Testament: 1861-1986* (Oxford/New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press), 408.

As has been pointed out at the beginning of this paper E. P. Sanders is usually referred to as the most important exegete who refocused attention to the aspect of “participation”. His characterization of Paul’s pattern of religion as “participationist eschatology”⁹⁶ is probably as close as one can get to Schweitzer’s concept of Pauline “Christ-mysticism”. However, there seems to be at least one line of argument, which needs further consideration and development. Sanders criticizes, that “Schweitzer did not see the *internal connection* between the righteousness by faith terminology and the terminology about life in the Spirit, being in Christ and the like (terminology which here will be called ‘participationist’, which seems better than the controversial term ‘mystical’), a connection which exists in Paul’s own letters.”⁹⁷ However, there can be no doubt that there is a connection at least between the Spirit and faith (Gal 3:1-5). While it may be true that the concept of participation in Christ may open up a better way into the center of Pauline theology it would be foolish to play off the different aspects of Paul’s argument against one another.⁹⁸ Neither should one take “[t]he Pauline doctrine of justification (...) [as] a protection not only against nomism but also against enthusiasm and mysticism”⁹⁹ as Ernst Käsemann did. Nor should one simply regard Romans as an exception prompted by the historical circumstances. Schweitzer’s contribution on Romans is precisely so valuable because it shows – in contrast to his own intention – that there is no simple either/or of participation or justification. In a recent treatment of Schweitzer’s contribution on “participation in Christ” James Dunn rightly argues:

“Much the better way is to integrate the manifest features and emphases in Paul’s theology, or at least to attempt to demonstrate how Paul himself held them together, whether fully integrated or not.”¹⁰⁰

Schweitzer certainly provides us with an impressive system of Pauline theology. However, his difficulties to integrate Romans reveal the shortcomings of his argument. While there is no way to move back behind Schweitzer’s insights, there is definitely more to be said on the way to an integrated understanding of participation and justification in Paul’s theology.

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⁹⁶ Sanders, *Paul*, 549.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 440.

⁹⁸ J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich./Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 1998), 395.

⁹⁹ E. Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Fortress Press, 1971), 73; cf. *ibid.* 82: „faith must be rescued from the dimension of recurrent religious experience.“

¹⁰⁰ Dunn, *Theology of Paul*, 396.

