

From the Law to the Grace

The Epistles to the Galatians and Romans

Dom Paul Delatte, Abbot of the Abbey of St Peter of Solesmes (1848–1937) used to say about today's topic that the epistle to the Romans is already written and announced in a way in the epistle to the Galatians. One is the pattern; the other is the full explanation of the doctrine.

These two epistles are like sisters. All their moral and theological content is about the justification through the virtue of Faith. In their appearance as well, their looks similar, as they are both addressed to the Jews of these cities.

The main idea which will guide today's study is that Moses' Law is nothing in itself, if it's not link to Faith. It's not because of the Law we've been redeemed, but because of the promise made to Abraham, and his Faith in that promise. Both Law and Promise must lead to Jesus-Christ, who made himself cursed to save mankind.

1 The Epistle to the Galatians: the gospel of freedom

1.1 Date and reason for writing

We previously mentioned about the double visit St Paul paid to the province of Galatia,¹ large part of the actual country of Turkey. During his first missionary trip, he quickly visited them, but had to leave in hurry. The second time was more fruitful, but he had a lot to endure from the Jews, who never left him at peace, and even attacked him in a physical way.

During his third trip, St Paul heard that unfortunate divisions started to ruin the unity of the community in Galatia, and to prevent or repair the risk of schism threatening the Galatians, he wrote to them the epistle we're studying today.

St Paul is writing to Christians who are, for the most of them, former Jews, keeping the rules of Moses' Law. They were baptised but continued to follow the jewish uses. It resulted a clash with the former pagans who became Christians, but didn't want to follow these, as the Council of Jerusalem formally removed the obligation.

For these converts, only the fulfilment of Moses' Law would lead to salvation and holiness. St Paul was only offering a part of the Truth with his Gospel. They even didn't stop their critics to his preaching, but also to his origin, saying that he wasn't a real apostle, as he never

¹ Cf [St Paul his life, his missions \(2nd part\)](#), 22nd Oct. 2022.

followed Jesus with the other 12 Apostles: therefore he was to be considered as an impostor, a late convert, who could only bring a fade gospel, not the real word preached by the Lord.

Facing them again, St Paul answers with the letter to the Galatians, which can be read as a moved and warm call to the real Faith, demonstrating the falseness of such doctrine, which was denying the Redemption and the Salvation through the Sacrifice of the Cross.

As he did in the second epistle to the Corinthians, St Paul is justifying himself again, showing his Faith and burning love for the Redeemer. This faith in the mystery of the Cross is valuable for the salvation. As per consequence, it cannot be link, or subordinated to the particular law of these who were once the chosen people, now that the Grace of Redemption had been released for everyone.

Following what we just said, we can reasonably say that the Letter to the Galatians was written around year 57, after the 2nd Corinthians.

The authenticity is not to be questioned in any ways, and the recent modern critics on that matter cannot be taken for serious.

1.2 Doctrine

Facing those who were denying his apostolic authority, St Paul intends to demonstrate that his preaching is nothing else but the Gospel of Christ. At the very difference of other epistles we've previously been through, there is no initial thanksgiving, and the letter seem to start as a reproach letter:

“Paul, an apostle — sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead — and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!”²

We can divide the epistle into the following three parts:

- The Gospel being revealed to St Paul will offer peace to the internal conflicts opposing the Galatians. (I, 1 - II, 14)
- The true sons of Abraham are recognised as they believe and live with justification through Faith, Christian freedom and life in the Spirit. (III, 1 - IV, 31)
- Christian life is guided by the Holy Ghost (V, 1 - VI, 10) and conclusion (VI, 11-18), which summarize all the teaching of the letter.

² Gal., I, 1-9.

If we would like to summarize the content of the epistle, St Paul offered us the following verse, which says it all:

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”³

The Holy Cross is and remains the centre of the Faith: the world was redeemed through It, the Holy Ghost is given to us through It, the creation is reborn with It, It removed us from the slavery of the sin, and made us free with the Baptism.

1.2.1 The truth of the Gospel is liberating us⁴

Our title said that the epistle to the Galatians was the Gospel of freedom. The two aspects of gospel and freedom are completing each other, as the Gospel, received and preached by St Paul, offers us justification through the Faith in Jesus⁵, who died upon the Cross, vanishing any bonds of the sinful slavery, setting men free.⁶

1.2.2 Justification through the Faith

In a similar way St Paul will write to the Romans later, he explains here how Abraham deserved salvation because he believed. We may put into parallel chapter III from Galatians and chapter IV from the epistle to the Romans. St Paul clearly exposes that law was given as an help, a necessity to correct and amend, but the promise to Abraham was first:

“The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. Why, then, was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was given through angels and entrusted to a mediator. A mediator, however, implies more than one party; but God is one. Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.”⁷

He continues his explanation in chapter IV, with this well-known reading we have for the 4th Sunday in Lent, and may be hard to explain shortly, but gives us another opportunity to discover the deepness of the meditation of the Apostle upon all these historical facts that became prophecies and were fulfilled by Jesus-Christ, as we just read above:

“For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. His son by the slave woman was born

³ Gal., VI, 14.

⁴ Unfortunately, Lutherans, and more generally Protestants, used the Epistle to the Galatians as an argument to justify their freedom against the Church.

⁵ Gal., II, 6.

⁶ Gal., III, 28.

⁷ Gal, III, 16-21.

according to the flesh, but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a divine promise. These things are being taken figuratively: The women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. For it is written: "Be glad, barren woman, you who never bore a child; shout for joy and cry aloud, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." Now you, brothers and sisters, like Isaac, are children of promise. At that time the son born according to the flesh persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. But what does Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." Therefore, brothers and sisters, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman."⁸

The Reverend Abbot Dom Paul Delatte explained this excerpt in no better way I could do myself, in his commentary upon the epistles of St Paul, which was unfortunately never translated into English. However, it seems to me it was worth trying:

"When this affectionate and general exhortation is over, the Apostle returns to the group of defectors, those who, having escaped from the bondage of paganism, soon became bored with being free and, in love with the chains, allowed the yoke of the law to be imposed on them. You must know this law, he said to them; what does it teach you? In the law itself, those who read it well will find the proof of the abrogation of the law. You have read Genesis.⁹ It says of Abraham that he had two sons, one born of the slave Hagar, the other of the free woman Sarah. The son of the slave was born of the flesh, according to the common way; the other is the son of the promise: he was born miraculously from a barren mother and from a one-hundred-year-old father. These facts are historical; they are also allegorical and express realities that go beyond them. It is God's way of giving voice to events themselves. Hagar and Sarah are real people; they are at the same time, unknown to them, symbols of the two Testaments, the abbreviated design of two forms of supernatural dispensation. The first testament is born at Sinai, she gives birth to servitude: *partus sequitur venirem*. This is Hagar. The name Hagar means Mount Sinai in Arabic. This symbolically corresponds to the present Jerusalem, a slave like her sons.

We are in the middle of an allegory, but it is the allegory of Saint Paul and the Spirit of God. To explain that the person of Hagar symbolizes the old law and the Jerusalem of the time, it is neither forbidden, nor necessary to suppose that in the chain of Sinai there was a summit which bore the name of Hagar; or that the slave, called Egyptian¹⁰, was born in a part of Arabia over which the domination of Egypt was exercised. It is sufficient to justify the symbolism that she is Abraham's wife, that she is the slave, and that she gives birth to children who are slaves like her. - The connection between Jerusalem

⁸ Gal., IV, 22-31.

⁹ Gen., XVI, XXI.

¹⁰ Gen., XVI, 1.

and Mount Sinai is even more easily explained. Jerusalem was the religious capital of a testament that had originated at Sinai: it was there that God had made a covenant with his people; Sinai was God's dwelling place, and it was from there that the theophanies set out to carry out works of justice in the world.¹¹ There is, therefore, a Jerusalem of time and of earth; she was born in Arabia, on Sinai, she is a slave and subject to a law, she gives birth to sons who are slaves like her.

But there is another Jerusalem, the Jerusalem above, the heavenly Jerusalem, as the Epistle to the Hebrews says, the new Jerusalem, as Saint John says: this one is the free wife, the wife of God, the mother of Christians. Like Sarah, she was barren for a long time, but after centuries of barrenness, it is to her, the mother of Isaac and of perfect joy, that the prophet Isaiah addresses himself: "Rejoice, barren woman who did not bear children; break forth into shouts of joy, women who was barren yesterday: today the favour of God has returned to you, and your sons are more numerous than the sons of your rival."¹² And these sons without number, these sons born of the promise like Isaac, these sons free like their mother, they are you my brothers! Why should you fall from your freedom and your greatness?

The biblical allegory continues even further, and draws in Ishmael and Isaac the present relationship between Mosaicism and Christianity, which is younger. As in the past¹³ the son according to the flesh molested the son of the promise, so today Mosaicism persecutes Christianity. But this effort has no future; the Scripture has already determined the fate of both: "Out with the slave and his son: it is not fitting that the son of the slave should be called to share the inheritance of Abraham with the son of the free wife."¹⁴

The conclusion of the Apostle brings together the last verse of chapter IV and the first of chapter V: My brothers, we are the sons not of the slave, but of the free wife: let us keep intact the liberty which Christ has given us and let us not return to the yoke of ancient servitude.

We think it useful to pause for a moment to consider this affirmation of Christian freedom, the scope of which many tried to exaggerate. A divine provision had established that Christianity, previously prepared, should one day be grafted on to Judaism, and would thus benefit, from its birth, from all the religious work which had preceded it. At the same time, Mosaicism defended itself against the newcomer, disputing its rights and demanding that it either merge with it or be distinguished from it. Christianity could not merge with it, on pain of perishing in its cradle; it could only distinguish itself by emphasizing the profound difference which separated it from the old testament. Only this characteristic, essential difference could define its physiognomy. This difference, according to Saint Paul, is freedom. But we must define in what this freedom consists.

¹¹ Isai., LXIII; Hab., III.

¹² Isai., LIV, 1.

¹³ Gen., XXI, 9.

¹⁴ Gen., XXI, 10.

Even in its most general notion, freedom implies two elements: first of all, a liberation; then an action of which this liberation is the condition and the means. One is not free in order to be free, but to act freely; and according to the profound doctrine of the School, one is free to act according to the intelligence. Originally, we do not have freedom; but on the condition that we use the freedom we do have, we lead our lives towards perfect freedom, towards the fullness of freedom. A laborious and resolute discipline removes us from that confused set of tendencies, habits, and disordered dispositions which solicit our will and our action, and cause them to deviate from the lines of intelligence; our will and our action are free when they are no longer held in check by the demands and importunities of the lower powers. To be freed from lowly servitudes to the point of wanting and acting according to the intelligence is freedom; now, to be freed from all inferior solicitations to the point of wanting and acting according to the mind of God is Christian freedom. It is therefore the case that freedom is simply docility to the Spirit of God, and we can see very clearly the whole doctrine which will lead to this admirable formula: *Qui Spiritu Dei aguntur, ii sunt filii Dei.*¹⁵ What makes us free as children of God is precisely our interior docility to the thought, the will, the influence of God.”¹⁶

We can conclude this part saying that the Law is unable to offer justification since the Redemption. However, the Law offered it before. Since the Cross, its role as tutor has ended: the Christian is now free, and no longer a slave. Coming back to the Law would mean reinstate slavery, but Jesus-Christ freed us.

1.2.3 Flesh and Spirit

As per St Paul's custom, we have here one of his favorite antitheses, the same we will find in the epistle to the Romans.¹⁷ Flesh is battling with spirit¹⁸, and produces fruits against the virtues which flourish with the Spirit. The Christian needs to mortify his flesh and walk under the motion of the Spirit.

“The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness,¹⁹ orgies, and the like. [...] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.”

¹⁵ Rom., VIII, 14.

¹⁶ Dom Paul Delatte, *Les Épitres de Saint Paul, replacés dans le milieu historique des Actes des Apôtres*, Vol 1, Épitre aux Galates, Ch. IV, La Liberté chrétienne. Translation with www.deepl.com, reviewed by Canon Matthew Weaver.

¹⁷ Rom., VII – VIII.

¹⁸ Gal., V.

¹⁹ Gal., V, 19-20; 22-23.

1.2.4 The Messiah and the Cross

Receiving the Gospel with Baptism and Faith, crucifying his flesh by a continuous union with Christ and His Passion, the Christian is living through a New Life, which request a total fidelity to it.

The Messiah is Christ, who fulfilled and confirmed all prophecies about Him. He's the promised Redeemer. We can link the teaching about the Cross in the epistle to the Galatians with the 1st Corinthians. This is to be announced, even if it causes scandal,

“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”²⁰

“May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”²¹

“Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desire.”²²

1.3 How the epistle to the Galatians remains actual

Today, Christians are not really attracted in the fulfilment of Moses' Law and could think that this epistle hasn't a real interest for them, except upon an historical point of view about rivalry between Christians and Jews at that time.

For real, the teaching of the Apostle remains present and applicable to us, particularly against those who may be tempted, or are rejecting the mystery and theology of the Cross. This epistle truly deserved its nickname as the Gospel of freedom, this freedom brought to mankind with the Sacrifice of the Cross.

The one who chooses to follow Christ frees himself from the slavery of Satan, sin, world and flesh. The epistle warns us also about the possible temptation of presumption, thinking that we could save us alone, without any help. St Paul's letter invites us to a real mature and free life with God. This freedom is to be lived in Charity. The epistle to the Galatians is not only the Gospel of freedom, but also the epistle about Christian perfection, which leads to eternal life: we are all called to become saints.

²⁰ Gal., II, 19-20.

²¹ Gal., VI, 14.

²² Gal., V, 24.

2 The Epistle to the Romans: the Gospel of justification

2.1 Introduction

“The Letter to the Galatians was the decisive stroke of a master mind; never before had Paul spoken with such clearness, never so completely disowned the tenets of Mosaism. Henceforth no more Sabbaths, no more Jewish fasts and legal Observances, no more Circumcision²³, but freedom for all in Christ Jesus²⁴. All was over with the Law and its work of tutelage: childhood once past, the tutor receives his dismissal²⁵. All that man looked for in vain from the old Law, — washing away of sins, redemption, sanctification, — all this he could find only in Jesus, and to obtain it no formal practices, no legal acts, are required of him ; he must simply believe in Him, be united with Him, and abandon himself to that divine power which works in us to will and to do²⁶. Such was the master thought which was absorbing the Apostle's mind even more and more completely, — it was the special Revelation which he was commissioned to make known to the whole wide world.

He had begun to grasp its tremendous significance from the hour of his conversion; for Jesus, when pointing out to him the vast domain of Heathendom as the allotted field of his Apostolate, had added, " Through the Faith which they shall have in Me they shall receive remission of their sins and their share in the everlasting life."²⁷

As the celestial Revelations had granted him in ever increasing numbers, and as Paul's soul expanded to receive God's gifts, in like manner did this the foundation of Christian Doctrine continue to appear to him in clearer, brighter light; it stood forth before his mind in noonday radiance at the time he wrote his Epistle to the Galatians. In that Faith which saves and justifies us he saw at last all that we see therein, — not a mere assent of the reason, but Faith animated by Charity, the free gift of one's heart and will and soul, wholly and entirely, to the Christ. Therein he was given to discern also God's operations in us, how He does not confine Himself merely to absolving or forgetting or concealing the sin within us without destroying it, but that in this as always He acts as the Almighty Creator, renewing the soul of the believer, blotting out his sins, regenerating him, making him a sharer in His own spirit, His holiness, His righteousness."²⁸

²³ Gal., IV, 9-10.

²⁴ Ibid., IV, 31.

²⁵ Ibid., III, 24-25.

²⁶ Ibid., II, 16-20; Philip., II, 13.

²⁷ Acts, XXVI, 18.

²⁸ Fr. Constant Fouard, St Paul, his missions, Chp. XIX, St Paul writes to the Romans.

When St Paul wrote to the Romans, he never visited Rome before, but Faith was already living there. Let's never forget that the roman legions went from Rome throughout the world and came back to the eternal city.

As we just saw with the epistle to the Galatians, St Paul studied and went deeper into the mystery of Salvation, with the triple preparation of the natural law, the promise to Abraham and the Law, given to Moses upon Mount Sinai. There were saints according to the natural law: Noah, Melchizedek or Abel. With Abraham, a new generation of saint was born, and helped even more with the Law.

St Paul presents a résumé of the history of Salvation, which unfortunately wasn't that successful, as they were only prophetic figures of the Redeemer Who made everything perfect with Himself. St Paul demonstrates the obvious superiority of God's Grace against the Law, saying in the meantime that God didn't forget anyone, and that Salvation was offered to all. This was the real novelty brought with Jesus, as Pope Benedict XVI said in his encyclical letter *Deus Caritas est*:

“Though up to now we have been speaking mainly of the Old Testament, nevertheless the profound compenetration of the two Testaments as the one Scripture of the Christian faith has already become evident. The real novelty of the New Testament lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts—an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity. This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the “stray sheep”, a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ²⁹, we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: “God is love”³⁰. It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.”³¹

In this epistle to the Romans, after realising and preaching the supremacy of the Faith and the Grace above the Law, St Paul will ask about the destiny of the people, once chosen, who are called to be part of the church, because “God's gifts and his call are irrevocable.”³² Their denial hastened the conversion of the Gentiles, but also prophesized their come back, on day.

²⁹ Jn., XIX, 37.

³⁰ I Jn., IV, 8.

³¹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas est*, 25th December 2005, nb 12.

³² Rom., XI, 29.

2.2 Date and reason for writing

St Paul fought many times against the Jews who wanted to impose the Law to the newly converts. In Thessalonica, Corinth, he preached about the Grace and Salvation by the Faith. He wrote to the Galatians to remove this heresy condemned by the Council of Jerusalem, and as it seemed that the communities were at peace upon that question, he wanted to prevent the same issue for the future, not only inside a local church as he did until then, but in several churches. What was the best solution, but to write to the capital city of the empire, Rome?

This encyclical letter, as we could say about it, would prepare the audience for a possible battle in the future against the same issues. St Paul wrote one of his longest epistle, exposing the full Christian doctrine about the Faith, justification and grace, in relation with the history of Salvation. As we said previously, the epistle to the Romans was a sort of extension of the letter to the Galatians, in a more complete way.

The letter was most probably written around year 58, but he came and visited the eternal city only after year 60, when he arrived from Caesarea, as a prisoner, during the last trip which concludes the Acts of the Apostles.

The authenticity was never seriously challenged, even if some recent critics said that the last chapters were possibly from another letter, which was lost afterwards. But as we said last time, we must receive from the Holy Church the text as one unique letter.

2.3 Doctrine

We can see a structure in four parts in the epistle:

- Justification and Faith (I-IV)³³
- Antithesis life vs. death (V-VIII), but also flesh vs. spirit or Law vs. grace.
- The question of Israel (IX-XI)³⁴
- How the Christian should behave and live within the world (XII-XIV)

2.3.1 Sinful mankind has been saved by the Redeemer, Son of God

From the beginning of the epistle, St Paul depicts a terrible vision, where both pagans and jews were condemned. But in opposition, he also presents the gift of the Grace, offered by Jesus who desires to save them, as He loves them. We may take the words of the Apostle himself to make a summary of that doctrine:

“He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”³⁵

In the most famous chapter V, centre of this epistle, St Paul marks the terrible consequences of the original sin:

³³ Luther and Calvin made several comments upon that part, but unfortunately neglected the need of the good works.

³⁴ Calvin found there his despairing doctrine about predestination and hell.

³⁵ Rom., IV, 25.

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone’s account where there is no law. Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.”³⁶

Following the teaching of the Apostle, the Church doesn’t hesitate to sing during Easter Vigil: *O certe necessarium Adæ peccatum, quod Christi morte delétum est! O felix culpa, quæ talem ac tantum méruit habére Redemptórem!*³⁷

Christ’s death completely destroyed sin. Until the last day, Satan will always try to tempt men, and drag them to Hell, but Christ’s victory remains total and definite. Adam’s fault placed everyone under the reign of death, sin and devil. Christ’s obedience opened a new life in the kingdom of grace for all men of good will.

2.3.2 Justification by the Faith

It is the main theme of the whole epistle. St Paul already said many things about it in the epistle to the Galatians, but he mentioned it about forty times in the epistle to the Romans. The justification by the Faith, accompanied with the good works, was offered to mankind by Jesus, second Adam, following a decree of merciful grace. The original sin was repaired with the death and resurrection of Christ. This salvation is offered to anyone, pagans and jews, under the condition of the virtue of Faith: God is offering an efficient justification, and not only a veil upon our sins, as Luther was saying. The newly baptised is reborn with Christ, and is living from the life of the Holy Ghost. As we were restored in the friendship with God, we have now the insurance, through the virtue of Hope, to obtain the final reward, while we live with the gift of Charity. Peace, joy and hope are the main blessings received from this justification.

- Peace: the man is no longer opponent to God, but reconciled with Him, thanks to the Holy Blood. Peace gives Grace. The Christians is not only at peace with God, but with the Baptism, he truly became His son.
- Joy: it comes along with peace³⁸. Hope isn’t fictional, but real. We are saved with Hope.

Following the beatitudes, tribulations and pains are part of our life, and are evidence of the truth of our redemption. We need them to be offered occasion to persevere and continuously hope about our salvation.

But the contemplation of the union of the Father and the Son, especially through the wilful sacrifice by obedience and love, which is the evidence of the common love they share, is and must be the summit of Christian joy.

- Hope is the third blessing, as the sinful past has now gone, and we’ve been given the promised of a glorious future. Real hope can’t be wrong³⁹, as it’s funded upon the Promise made by God, who sent the Holy Ghost to comfort us.

³⁶ Rom., V, 12-14. This excerpt was used to enforce the belief in the original sin affecting all men since Adam, during the Council of Trent.

³⁷ Easter Vigil, *Exultet*, “O truly needful sin of Adam, which was blotted out by the death of Christ! O happy fault, that merited to possess such and so great a Redeemer!”

³⁸ Rom., V, 1-11.

³⁹ Rom., V, 5.

2.3.3 About Holiness

As the gift of Christ is widely offered to anyone, no matters where he's coming from, access to holiness is given to all, and not only saved for a restricted amount of people. Following baptism, this new life place you far away from your ancient sinful life, but also opened it to a holier one. With St Paul, holiness is not only avoiding sins, but a complete change of mind. Being united with the Trinity made you living and participating with divine intimacy. Therefore, there is a real requirement to avoid scandal, to entertain a prayer life with the Holy Ghost:

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”⁴⁰

2.3.4 Predestination⁴¹

This is one of the most important doctrinal points of this epistle. It was often misunderstood during the last centuries, especially by Protestants and Jansenists.

Everyone will receive the sufficient graces for his personal salvation. Mankind is guilty in front of God, but Grace is freely given to men, as a gift, not as something being due. But would it mean that grace may be refused to someone? No. St Paul is neither a Protestant, nor a Jansenist. God’s choices are upon temporal reality, which are privileges that may be given to some and not to others. This does never touch the universal call to holiness offered to anyone, individually.

2.3.5 The Mystery of Israel⁴²

St Paul removes God of the equation, at the very beginning. All along the story of Israel, God remained faithful and fair to them. The promises that were made to Israel were fulfilled. Here again St Paul exposes the filiation of Isaac we studied earlier with the epistle to the Galatians.

We also need to remember one important thing: God chose Israel, but didn’t give to them the possibility to decide who will benefit of the fulfillment of the promise at the end: He is and remain the Sovereign Master.

We can fell from anywhere, even from the steps of the throne of God, like Satan; from the company of the Lord, like Judas. We are only secure if we remain vigilant in humility and respect.⁴³

⁴⁰ Rom., VIII, 12-17.

⁴¹ Rom., VIII.

⁴² Rom., XI, X, XI.

⁴³ Dom Delatte.

God never failed Israel. He's full of mercy, and this is why He offered salvation to anyone He wishes. But He leaves them free to refuse it. Instead of thinking and saying God changed his mind about the chosen people, we would better say that human freedom unfortunately rejected salvation which was at hand, and in a similar way God did with Pharaoh against Moses, so did it with these who didn't want Him:

“And as they liked not to have God in their knowledge, God delivered them up to a reprobate sense, to do those things which are not convenient.”⁴⁴

“But according to thy hardness and impenitent heart, thou treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God.”⁴⁵

St Paul shows us the real issues with Israel, who was privileged with so many blessings and special care from God. In Chapter XI, He explains with the figure of the olive tree⁴⁶ how Israel received, but for the fulfillment of the promise, another branch was attached to the tree. If the olive tree was so unfaithful to the original grace, what a fruit for the branch which was attached upon! However, the gifts of God are without repentance.⁴⁷ Therefore we ought to hope and pray they will come back, as Israel remains beloved in God's Heart, because of the Faith of their Fathers.

“O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgments, and how unsearchable his ways!”⁴⁸

2.3.6 The Church

The Holy Church is the son of the promise, and what we just said about Israel applies to the Church. She is the heir, the son of God in Spirit, that we may oppose to Israel, son of the flesh. The Faith of the Church will respond to the incredulity of Israel. But the Church will be perfectly completed with the coming back of Israel.⁴⁹

The Church is composed with the elected of God, those He called⁵⁰ with an eschatological aspect.⁵¹ The head in the new Adam⁵², and her members are the baptized people who live according to the Spirit and does good work, being united in the same mystical body.⁵³

⁴⁴ Rom., I, 28.

⁴⁵ Rom., II, 5.

⁴⁶ Rom., XI, 17-24.

⁴⁷ Rom., XI, 29;

⁴⁸ Rom., XI, 33.

⁴⁹ Rom., XI, 11; 25-33.

⁵⁰ Rom., I, 6; VIII, 28.

⁵¹ Rom., VIII, 28-32.

⁵² Rom., V, 12sq.

⁵³ Rom., XII, 4-5.

3 Conclusion

The two epistles to the Galatians and Romans exposed forever the doctrine about justification and faith. Although they are written in a polemical style, St Paul developed his theology about the Redemption and the universal call to Salvation and holiness.

Against Luther, who misunderstood St Paul, we need to affirm with the Apostle the requirement of Faith and Charity being practiced with good works to merit the supreme reward. Faith without Charity is the great nonsense of the protestant heresy, as Charity will remain forever in heaven. There is no opposition between Faith, Justice, and Love and Mercy. On the contrary, Faith and Justice are the greatest evidence of the merciful love of God for His children.

“Indeed this Redemption is the ultimate and definitive revelation of the holiness of God, who is the absolute fullness of perfection: fullness of justice and of love, since justice is based on love, flows from it and tends towards it. In the passion and death of Christ - in the fact that the Father did not spare His own Son, but “for our sake made him sin”⁵⁴ - absolute justice is expressed, for Christ undergoes the passion and cross because of the sins of humanity. This constitutes even a “superabundance” of justice, for the sins of man are “compensated for” by the sacrifice of the Man-God. Nevertheless, this justice, which is properly justice “to God's measure,” springs completely from love: from the love of the Father and of the Son, and completely bears fruit in love. Precisely for this reason the divine justice revealed in the cross of Christ is “to God's measure,” because it springs from love and is accomplished in love, producing fruits of salvation. The divine dimension of redemption is put into effect not only by bringing justice to bear upon sin, but also by restoring to love that creative power in man thanks also which he once more has access to the fullness of life and holiness that come from God. In this way, redemption involves the revelation of mercy in its fullness.”⁵⁵

⁵⁴ II Cor., V, 21.

⁵⁵ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 30th November 1980, nb. 7.