

d) *The "Groaning" of the Spirit (8:26-28)*
and *God's Eternal Plan (8:29-30)*

26. In the same way the Spirit comes to our aid in our weakness. For we do not know what it is right to pray for.

But the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for utterance. 27. And the Searcher of hearts knows what is the intention of the Spirit: that he intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will for them. 28. We know that all things work together for the (ultimate) good of those who love God, those called according to his purpose.

29. Because those whom he chose beforehand, he also preordained that they should become sharers in the image of his Son, so that he might become the firstborn among many brothers (and sisters). 30. And those whom he preordained, these he also called, and those whom he called, these he also justified, and those whom he justified, these he has also glorified.

INTERPRETATION

As a third ground for hope Paul points to a mysterious "groaning" on the part of the Spirit (vv 26-27). A more generalized statement in v 28 then functions as a bridge into a consideration of the inexorable unfolding of God's eternal plan for the elect (vv 29-30).

The "Groaning" of the Spirit (vv 26-27). To judge by the expression used at the start (*hōsautōs de kai*), Paul appears to set the "groaning" of the Spirit in parallel to the other two "groanings" ("creation" [vv 19-22]; "ourselves" [vv 23-25]). Clearly, though, it is of a rather different order. Whereas both "creation" and "we ourselves" groan out of a longing to be set free from present restriction, the activity of the Spirit amounts to a "coming to the aid of our weakness" (*synantilambanetai tē astheneiā hēmōn*). "Our weakness" could refer to a general sense of vulnerability in the conditions of the present age. More likely, however, what Paul has in mind is "weakness" stemming from inability to see or visualize the goal to which we are being led—as outlined in the little excursus on "hope" that has just preceded (vv 24-25). We cannot see, or even imagine, this goal. Hence we do not know what to pray for (*to . . . ti proseuxōmetha*; see Note) and we do not know what is the appropriate prayer to make (*kathō dei*). In the face of "our" incapacity in this respect, the Spirit offers appropriate intercession for us in the shape of "groans too deep for utterance" (*stenagmoi alalētoi*).

What precisely is being referred to here is not immediately clear. The following explanation (v 27) to the effect that the "Searcher of hearts"

knows what is the "intention of the Spirit" suggests that the intercession is something that takes place within human beings. The "groans" would then be *alalētoi* or "inexpressible" because uttered (by the Spirit) at a depth "below" ordinary human consciousness, to which God, as "Searcher of hearts," alone has access. Just a few sentences further on (v 34) Paul refers in very similar terms to the intercessory prayer offered at God's right hand by Christ Jesus as risen Lord. This, together with the fact that Paul makes little distinction between the Spirit and the continuing impact of the risen Christ upon the lives of believers, suggests that the "subconscious" intercessory prayer of the Spirit is not rigidly separate from the prayer of Christ himself. Because believers are "in Christ" (in the technical Pauline sense; see Interpretation of 6:3 above; also 8:1) and have Christ "in" them (v 10) there wells up from within them his continual prayer to God.

Paul explains (v 27) why this groaning intercession, however imperceptible it may be, is a further index for hope. Because the Spirit, unlike "ourselves" (cf. vv 24-25), truly knows what is God's intention for believers, the entreaty he makes is appropriate and therefore efficacious. We can be sure that the "Searcher of hearts" will recognize such prayer and not fail to respond.

Summing Up (v 28). A final comment (v 28) draws together the various phases of the argument for hope. Paul appeals to an axiom of the Jewish tradition expressing the sense that, under God's providence on behalf of the elect (literally, "those who love God"; see Note), "all things" conspire together (for the translation, see Note) to bring about "good" (*agathon*). "All things" could refer to or at least include the non-human created world ("creation" [vv 19-22]) and the Spirit (vv 26-27). But Paul is more likely to have in mind the sufferings of the present time (v 18) that form the context for hope. Other things being equal, these would normally be considered "evil." But for those whose lives are enveloped in God's love even these things work for "good"—the "good" in this case being salvation, the full realization of God's eternal plan in their regard.

The unfolding of God's plan for the elect (vv 29-30). Those for whom "all things work together for good" are described at the end of the axiom making up v 28 as those "called according to (God's) purpose" (*tois kata prothesin klētois ousin*). This description moves the argument into its final stage, bringing into explicit consideration the eternal plan of God (*prothesis*). Those for whom the Spirit prays according to the mind of God are those whose total existence is enveloped and carried forward within an eternal, unfolding design. It is the inexorable unfolding of this plan—already under way—which provides the most fundamental and basic grounds for hope.

Paul presents the unfolding of the *prothesis* in a step-by-step sequence ("sorites"), reminiscent of 5:3-4:

" . . . those whom
he **chose beforehand**,
he also **preordained**
that they should become sharers in the image of his Son,
so that he might become the firstborn among many brothers (and sisters).
And those whom he **preordained**,
these he also **called**,
and those whom he **called**,
these he also **justified**,
and those whom he **justified**,
these he has also **glorified**."

In this pattern of five verbs in the past tense each refers to a key stage of the divine activity, the second, third, fourth and fifth picking up the one immediately before in such a way as to suggest the inexorable progress of the whole process towards the planned goal. At one point, after the second verb, Paul interrupts the sequence, in order to spell out in christological terms the actual content of the divine "predetermination" in our regard.

The process has begun in the eternity of God with the divine election. "Know beforehand" (*proegnō*) has its biblical sense of "choose beforehand" (cf. Jer 1:5). Paul is applying to all believers the idea of "election" so central to the self-understanding of Israel as People of God. Behind the existence of all who are "in Christ"—Gentiles as well as Jews—stands the eternal "choice" of God.

Behind them also stands the plan or design God has formed (*proōrisen*) in their regard. Breaking into the ordered pattern, Paul "defines" this "predetermination" in christological terms (on the issue of "Predestination," see Note). The language is carefully chosen and must be given its full weight. To be "sharers in the image of his Son" (*symmorphous tēs eikōnos autou*) does not mean simply becoming "like" Christ in a general kind of way. *Symmorphos* conveys the sense of "participation in way of being" (see Note) and *eikōn* that of a likeness revealing and making present an inner reality. Thus the total phrase refers to a participation in the way of being that reveals Christ's true identity as "Son of God." In the light of the credal "definition" of the gospel given at the beginning of the letter (1:3-4), this can only be the glorious way of being that is his as risen Lord. In his risen glory Christ "models" the fullness of humanity that was God's eternal design for human beings from the start. The essential commentary is given in 1 Corinthians 15: defending the resurrection of the body, Paul asserts (v 49) that, as we have borne the image

(*eikōn*) of the earthly one (Adam), we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one (Christ). We have borne the image of Adam in our existence in the present body, marked down for mortality because of sin (Rom 8:10); we shall bear the image of the heavenly, when our bodies share the glorious way of being proper to him as risen Lord. This will mean full arrival at the goal of God's intent for human beings.

The outcome will be, Paul adds in a final comment (v 29b), that "he (the Son of God) will become the Firstborn among many brothers (and sisters)." The stress falls upon the "many" (*pollois*). Christ is already "Firstborn" (*prōtotokos*—for the messianic implications, see Note). He will be shown to be "Firstborn among many brothers (and sisters)" when others also attain the risen glory presently seen in him alone. The same risen status that has displayed his true identity as "Son of God" (Rom 1:4) will reveal a similar status belonging to believers. This will be the "revelation of the sons (and daughters) of God" longed for by "creation" (v 19), the attainment in the full public sense of the privilege of divine filiation (*huiōthesia*) pertaining to God's eschatological people (v 23; cf. 9:4).

With the content of the divine design for human beings now clear, Paul resumes (v 30) the "chain" sequence outlining its inexorable realization. The first step setting the whole process in motion has been God's "calling" (*ekalesen*). The Jewish tradition presupposed by Paul closely associated "calling" with God's creation ("calling into being") of a people for himself (cf., e.g., Hos 11:1). In the light of this, the "call" that has gone out as the first stage in the realization of God's plan refers to the summons contained in the gospel. By means of the gospel God has "called" into being a People of God, made up of Jews and Gentiles (cf. 9:24; 1 Cor 1:26), destined to display God's original design for human beings.

This new people of God has already been "justified" (*edikaiōsen*). In the Jewish apocalyptic tradition justification refers more strictly to the verdict of acceptance to be awarded by God at the final judgment (see Interpretation of 2:13). While retaining this eschatological thrust, Paul has made clear in the early part of the letter (chapters 1-4; esp. 5:1-2; cf. 1 Cor 6:11) that believers have, by God's grace mediated through the Christ event (3:21-26), already received eschatological justification. In Christ, God has reached out into the morass of human sinfulness that had frustrated the original design of the Creator, to create out of Jews and Gentiles a just and sanctified people, destined to inherit the ancient promises. In this sense "justification," like "calling," can be spoken of as something already in process.

More surprising, however, is the setting in the past of the final term of the process: "glorification" (*edoxasen*). "Glory" normally designates the eschatological destiny of the just—their final arrival at the state of "likeness to God" intended by the Creator from the start (see Note on 3:23).

Here, however, in view of the close association of "glorification" with "justification" (cf. esp. 3:23-24), Paul can write "has glorified" on the basis of a hidden glorification already under way. Such a process appears to be in view in 2 Cor 3:18, where he writes of believers being "transformed" by the Spirit into the same "image" (*eikōn* = the risen glory of Christ) "from one degree of glory to another." What Paul would have in mind, then, is a process that has already begun, but which, like the status of being "children of God" (v 16), is still a hidden thing, to be publicly revealed (cf. v 18) when believers share, in resurrection, the glory already shown in Christ.

Summing up, we may note how the christological note upon which this entire section (8:18-30) draws to a close catches up the "christological proviso" appearing in v 17. It is as those who have "suffered with" Christ that believers will be glorified with him and so enter fully into his inheritance. Paul has deployed his argument for hope by setting the sufferings necessarily attached to existence in the present "overlap" time within the context of the unfolding design of God for human beings—the term of which has already been glimpsed in the glory of the risen Lord. The resurrection is not, then, an "exception" or an "irruption" into the normal course of human affairs. It is the symbol and pledge of a humanity reaching its proper goal, where the "sin" story of human life told in Adam is overtaken and consumed by the "grace" story told in Christ.

NOTES

26. *In the same way*: By stressing the similarity of the "groaning" attributed to the Spirit, this phrase confirms the positive nature of the earlier "groanings" (v 22; v 23).

the Spirit comes to our aid in our weakness: The sense of the double compound verb *synantilambanesthai* is that of lifting another's burden by sharing responsibility for the task in hand; cf. Luke 10:40 (of Martha's request that her sister be made to help her).

For we do not know what it is right to pray for: The formulation in Greek (*to . . . ti proseuōmetha*) shows that the problem is not *how* to pray (in which case Paul would have written *pōs*) but what (*ti*) to pray for. The translation also takes phrase *kathō dei* in parallel with the *kata theon* of the following verse, rather than with the verb *ouk oidamen*, which would introduce a sense of blame foreign to the context. For the general idea, cf. 1 Cor 2:6-12, where, with reference to eschatological destiny ("what God has prepared for those who love him"), the Spirit imparts knowledge of "what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived."

the Spirit himself intercedes for us: Behind this idea would seem to lie a widespread Jewish tradition in which angels or notable human figures of the past

(patriarchs, prophets, etc.) make intercession for the people before the throne of God; cf. Job 33:23-26; Tob 12:15; 1 Enoch 9:3; 15:2; 99:3; 104:1; T. Levi 3:5-6; 5:6; T. Dan 6:2; on this see the studies of E. A. Obeng cited in Reference. Early Christian attribution of this role to the Spirit probably flows from the close association of the Spirit and the risen Christ, whom Paul pictures exercising a similar function in v 34.

with groans too deep for utterance: Some consider Paul to be alluding here to charismatic prayer within the community—specifically prayer involving the gift of tongues (so esp. Käsemann). This interpretation has the advantage of having Paul point to a readily observable phenomenon of Christian life. But the gift of tongues involves praise rather than intercessory prayer, as here. Moreover, the "groans" involved in tongues are audibly expressed, albeit in strange language, and are to that extent unintelligible, whereas the adjective Paul uses, *alalētos*, refers not so much to something unintelligible as inexpressible.

27. *the Searcher of hearts*: The phrase encapsulates a characteristic attribute of God in the biblical and post-biblical tradition: 1 Sam 16:7; 1 Kgs 8:39; Pss 7:9; 17:3; 26:2; 44:21; 139:1-2, 23; frequently in Proverbs and Jeremiah; Wis 1:6; Sir 42:18; Bib. Ant. 50:4.

knows what is the intention of the Spirit: On "intention" (*phronēma*), see Interpretation and Notes on 8:5-6.

that he intercedes: The translation takes the opening *hoti* in a declarative, rather than a causal sense ("because he intercedes"); the declarative sense accords best with the *ti* before *phronēma*.

for the saints: On "the saints" as a standard designation for the members of God's (eschatological) people in the biblical tradition, see Note on 1:7.

in accordance with God's will for them: For the use of the phrase *kata theon* in a similar sense, see also 2 Cor 7:9-11.

28. *We know that all things work together for the (ultimate) good . . .*: On the use of *oidamen* to express what Paul believes to be an accepted truth, see Note on 2:2. The full Greek sentence allows for at least three possibilities as regards its subject: "God"; "the Spirit"; "all things" (as in the translation above). 1. The first possibility, taking "God" as subject, is supported by an impressive textual tradition (P⁴⁶ A B), which actually includes *ho theos* after the verb *synergei*—though the extra phrase almost certainly represents an early attempt to clear up the confusion of subject. With God as subject (with or without *ho theos*), the verb *synergei* can be understood intransitively ("God cooperates in every way"—taking *ta panta* adverbially) or transitively ("God works all things together . . ."—though such a transitive usage of the verb is unattested elsewhere). Taking God as subject, in either of these ways, sits a little awkwardly after the reference to God in the phrase "those who love God." It accords well, however, with the following context, where God is clearly the agent in the whole sequence. 2. By the same token, taking the Spirit as implicit subject means a smooth flow from the preceding context but makes for a rather stark change of subject (to God) in the following sentence—though, again, this is

perhaps already implicit in the word *prothesis* introduced in the final phrase. 3. The third possibility, taking the neuter plural "all things" as subject (as in the Latin Vulgate), gives by far the smoothest rendering of the Greek. It does rather suddenly introduce a thought new to the immediate context but this is less problematic on the basis that it is a summarizing and bridging statement.

those who love God: This description of the beneficiaries of the process should not be understood in the sense that human love directed to God somehow conditions the workings of divine grace. The phrase is simply a conventional way of referring to the members of God's people in the biblical and post-biblical tradition, cf. Deut 7:9; Ps 145:20 (LXX 144:20); Tob 13:12 (BA), 14; Sir 1:10; 2:15, 16; Pss. Sol. 4:25; 10:3; 14:1; 4QpPs 37 3:4-5.

those called: See Note on v 30 below.

according to his purpose: For Paul's use of *prothesis* to designate God's eternal purpose, see also 9:11; this sense is picked up in Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; cf. also Philo, Mos. 2.61.

29. *he chose beforehand*: Literally, "knew beforehand." The verb *progignōskein* here, as in 11:2 (possibly also 1 Pet 1:20), reflects a biblical idiom where "fore-knowledge" connotes "choice" and "election" as well; cf. Gen 18:19; Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5 (Hebrew); Amos 3:2; also 1QH 9:29-30.

he also preordained: The verb *proorizein* is not simply a synonym for *progignōskein* but adds the sense that God has formed a plan in respect of those who have been chosen; cf. 1 Cor 2:7 and the development of this Pauline usage in Eph 1:5, 11. The language of "election" and "preordination" here does not imply a doctrine of predestination in the classical sense of a divine fixing of individual human lives in a set direction towards salvation or damnation. Paul does not have individuals principally in mind but is applying the biblical privilege of election communally to the Christian community made up of Jews and Gentiles. The perspective is positive and inclusive, rather than exclusive, indicating God's will to bring all to the fullness of humanity. Whether or not some individuals fail to be included is not at issue.

sharers in the image of his Son: The sense of the Greek adjective *symmorphos* as indicating participation in way of being is enhanced by its use in the present passage with the genitive (*eikōnos*), which gives the adjective virtually substantival force; cf. also the use of *symmorphos* in Phil 3:21 with reference to Christ's power to make the "body of our lowliness" (that is, our present mortal body) conform to the way of being belonging to the "body of his glory." If the complete phrase is not to become tautologous, the second genitive (*tou huiou autou*) must be epexegetic, giving the sense "the image which his Son is." In 2 Cor 4:4 Paul speaks of the risen Christ as the "image (*eikōn*) of God" and a few lines earlier of believers being "transformed into that same image" (3:18). These parallels strongly support the suggestion that implicit in the present description of God's plan for human beings is the sense of Christ, as risen Lord and "Last Adam" (1 Cor 15:45), displaying and "modeling" for the new humanity the original design of the Creator according to which human beings "image" God before the rest of creation (Gen 1:26-28;

Ps 8:5-8)—the role in which the "First" Adam failed. Some interpreters (see esp. Käsemann) find in the *symmorphous* phrase a strong note of conformity to Christ in his sufferings. Conformity to the total "career" of Christ—suffering as well as glory—is certainly implicit in the overall Pauline view (cf. esp. v 17c). But Paul is spelling out here the *goal* of the divine *prothesis*—the end God has in view for us (cf. *eis agathon* in v 28), rather than the stages on the way.

firstborn: *Prōtotokos* probably has a messianic sense derived from its use as an epithet for the Davidic king in LXX Ps 88:28 (89:27); cf. Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5 (where there is clear allusion to Ps 89:27).

30. *called*: For the sense of God's "calling" as an act of "creation" in Paul, see esp. Rom 4:17 (where the God in whom Abraham believed is described as a God "who gives life to the dead and calls into being the things that do not exist"); 9:25-26; 1 Cor 1:26-28 (where it is also a question of "calling into being" a new Christian community). Philo's terminology in *Spec.* 4.187 comes remarkably close to Paul's in this respect. For the frequent association of "calling" and "divine filiation" in the biblical and Jewish tradition, cf. Hos 1:10 (MT, LXX 2:1); Sir 36:17; *Jub.* 1:25; *Bib. Ant.* 18:6; 4 Ezra 6:58; 4QDibHam 3:4-5; see further Byrne, 'Sons of God' 120.

justified: On "justification" in Paul, see Interpretation of 2:13 and 3:24.

has also glorified: The only previous usage of the verb *doxazein* in the letter has been in connection to the refusal of human beings to "glorify" God as Creator in 1:21. Here, in ironic reversal, God accords to human beings the glorification they had refused their Creator (cf. Dunn, 1.485).

FOR REFERENCE AND FURTHER STUDY

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