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Romans 9-11: Individual or Corporate Election

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Abstract

This paper employed reconfiguration which is an aspect of intertexture hermeneutical method to explore the above-mentioned text. Reconfiguration, which is the situation where a writer uses an existing text in such a way that something new is carved out of it, was the main tool that was used specifically to interpret Romans 9-11.

This work studied the present text in relation with other texts from the Septuagint quoted by Paul in the text itself (i.e. Romans 9-11) to identify theological parallels in them with regard to individual election as well as corporate election. This threw light on the meaning of the present text from which conclusions were drawn and application was made.

Introduction

It is generally agreed that Paul interpreted and re-interpreted the scriptures and they provided a frame for his letters. According to

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Richard Hays, sometimes Paul interprets scriptures in such a way that his readings extend the meaning of scripture in new directions making it relevant to the situation of his day. He notes further that Paul situates his discourse with symbols and images from the scripture especially from the Septuagint and interprets them in the light of Christian revelation.³

Intertexture of text takes place when a writer interprets or uses existing materials such as words, symbols, images, personalities, events and ideas in his writings. He may or may not indicate that the material he has used exists somewhere. It may range from quoting entire information in a new text to the use of few words or ideas of an existing material. Vernon Robbins calls this oral-scribal intertexture. (Robbins: 1996a: 40)⁴ This is because the material used may be in oral or written form. Oral-scribal intertexture consists of Recitation, Recontextualization, Reconfiguration, narrative amplification and thematic elaboration.⁵

According to Robbins Reconfiguration has to do with recounting a previous situation in a new way ‘in such a way that the new event may replace the old one and make the old situation a preparation for the new one. Recitation and recontextualization may be part of reconfiguration of a past tradition’ (Robbins: 1996b: 107).⁶ The writer may rearrange the existing event to suit a purpose. Reconfiguration will therefore be analysed briefly in their application to Romans 9-11. The theme that would be explored in this work is that of individual or corporate election in relation to the text.

³ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, (London: Yale University Press, 1989).

⁴ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts. A Guide To Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International, 1996).

⁵ Vernon K. Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts. A Guide To Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Pennsylvania: Trinity Press International: 1996), ‘ Here according to Robbins Recitation involves the transmission of existing material written or spoken in the exact words or somewhat similar words from the ones received from tradition. Recontextualization presents words from another text indirectly, giving no hint that those words actually exist somewhere else in a written text.

⁶ Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (London and New York: Routledge: 1996).

A. Romans 9:1-3: Paul's Introduction of His Presentation

The first part of this work is the introductory verses that is, 9: 1-3. These set out Paul's thesis. It actually sets the tone as to what Paul wants to put across in the rest of chapters 9-11 of Romans.

Commenting on the text before us in the 1970's Christer Stendahl argued that 'the real centre of gravity in Romans is found in chapters 9-11'.⁷ This is because these chapters describe the views of Paul concerning the destiny of Jews and Gentiles within God's divine framework. However, the question before us is the concept of individual or corporate election in Paul's letter to the Romans chapters 9-11.

In Romans Chapter 9, Paul begins his discussion on election with a phrase Ἰαμην λέγω⁸ (I am telling the truth) in the first part of v.1. This serves to signal the start of a new subsection. Here Paul uses the first person to make a solemn declaration to demonstrate a direct communicative contact with his audience (i.e. all Christians in Rome 1:7 who are predominantly Gentiles). Such an address is intended to secure the good will and attention of his audience and prepare them for the message he is going to give, usually a critical message. The rest of verse 1 and verses 2-3 were meant to have similar effect on the recipients of this letter. According to Dunn, in these verses, 'we have an expression of passionate concern for and intensely felt commitment to the future good of his fellow Jews'⁹ Dunn further states that 'the αὐτοῖς ἐγώ increases the pathos, especially coming so soon after the glowing assurance of 8:38-39; Paul expresses a willingness to be personally isolated from the security of the community of God's love for the sake of his brothers.'¹⁰ Here Paul is declaring his self-identity with the Jews as well as expressing strong preference for corporate election for the Jews. To do this he even talks persuasively of his unflinching support for it by his willingness to let go his own individual election (9:3).

⁷ Stendahl Krister, *Paul Among The Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress: 1976).

⁸ Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, *The Greek New Testament* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart, 1983).

⁹ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38b: Romans 9-16*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998).

¹⁰ Ibid.

When Paul seemed to have secured the attention of his audience, he speaks to them concerning the Israelites using various symbols, images, metaphors, personalities and words that are related to the Israelites by saying that ‘being the descendants of Jacob, ...to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises, to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah...’(9:4-5 New Revised Version). This statement immediately puts the image of the Scriptures into jeopardy since his listeners were mainly Gentiles who have experienced contradictions in the fulfillment of some of the expectations of the Israelites. For instance, when Paul talks of ‘covenants’ is he talking of Old Testament covenants like the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants or the Old and New covenants in Exodus and Jeremiah? Also when he talks of ‘adoption’ it would sound strange to his hearers since the word is not commonly used to refer to the Israelites. Perhaps Paul has in mind the usage in connection with a metaphor for God’s dealings with Israel in Exodus 4:22 but is still not clear from the text. ‘Gentile readers might again raise their eyebrows at Paul’s attribution of “the glory” to his kinsmen without qualification. He had after all indicted all as lacking the glory of God (3:2, and characterized the Christian hope in terms of glory (5:2; 8:18, 21).¹¹ The question is, so how did Paul handle the situation?

B. Reconfiguration in Romans 9:4-11:32

For the sake of clarity, this part is divided into three sections. These are, Romans 9:4-29, Romans 9:30-10:21 and Romans 11:1-32. This is the main exegetical part of the work. There is reconfiguration in each of the sections that follow.

1. Romans 9:4-29: Election

In order to salvage the image of the word of God, Paul’s first move to deal with the mis-understanding of the relationship between expectation and experience was by appealing to the tradition of ‘election’ (9:6-13) (Cobb & Lull: 2005: 139).

Here Paul did not quote directly from any Septuagint passage but instead, he made statements that summarize the stories about

¹¹ Ibid.

Abraham in several chapters of Genesis. This is a mixture of recitation which summarizes a span of text that includes various episodes and reconfiguration which uses an old text in such a way that it becomes new. The statements as Paul have here, are weaved out of many areas and put into one quotation. Paul has made something new out of several texts that already exist. Even though he may not have changed the substantial meaning of the old texts, he has put them together in a way that serves his purpose and extends the meaning to suit a present situation. This is a rhetorical device that manipulates existing text to one's advantage. It gives a hint that the audience is very familiar with the Septuagint passage and thus gives an Old Testament foundation to his argument.

Paul uses the stories of God's promises to Abraham in Gen 15:4–6 and 17:15–21. He reconfigured them to respond to the questions concerning the election of the Israelites. He indicated that a distinction could be made between the children of Abraham who were 'the elect' and those who are not. He argued that some are 'children born of the flesh' (tekna th" sarko,"¹² but others are 'children born of the promise' (alla; ta; tekna th" epaggelia").¹³ The adversative particle *alla* (but or indeed) which sets up a further antithesis is a preposition which is to put emphasis on the fact that the contrast in 'the children of the flesh' and those 'of the promise' is not just on the differences in their social status but on the manner of their birth. This is further clarified by his statement that 'God loves Jacob and hates Essau before they are born, before they have done either good or evil. No one can resist God's will' (Cosgrove: 1996: 271).

Some scholars state that this 'meant that, for the promise to be fulfilled, it was not necessary that all ethnic Israelites be saved' (Cobb & Lull: 2005: 139). This implies that there is a selection of some from the elected nation Israel; and this is left to the discretion of God. So whether it is dis-selection or non-selection it all comes from God, and the metaphor of the potter is used to describe God as the one who has the clay in his hands and can mould it the way God likes

¹² Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, and Allen Wikgren, *The Greek New Testament* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart, 1983).

¹³ *Ibid.*

(9:20). Furthermore, Paul identifies believing Israel with the remnant (9:27) and he quotes Isaiah 10: 22-23 to support his claim.

Paul's views concerning dis-selected Israelites is expressed in 9:22-23. Here where he refers to them as 'vessels of wrath made for destruction in order to make known the riches of his (God's) glory on the vessels of mercy'. In talking about the vessels of mercy, Paul extended it to cover the Gentiles in 9:24. Here we have the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's election process.

Here Paul quoted two passages from Hosea to support his argument. These are:

I will call the 'not my people' my people And the 'not loved' loved; And it shall be in the place where it was said of them, You are not my people, There they shall be called sons of the living God¹⁴ (Hosea 2: 1 and 2: 10 in Romans 9:25).

Richard Hays' comments on this statement with regard to the intertextual reading of Romans 9-11 is worth considering here. Hays uses John Hollander's theory of intertextual 'echoes'.¹⁵ Hays states that 'echoes of other works can lie in the unstated or suppressed points of resonance between two texts'.¹⁶ Commenting on the text in continuing Hays' line of thought, Cosgrove observes that 'It looks as if Paul is denying the literal sense of (the Septuagintal versions of) Hos. 2:1 and 2:25 which refer not to Gentiles but Jews' (Cosgrove: 1996: 275). Hence, the informed reader or 'the knowing reader hears the literal sense of the Hosea texts as an echo of a scripture sense that Paul will honor in Romans 11, holding it in 'reserve' by 'suppressing' it until a later point in the argument (Meeks 1990, Hays 1989).¹⁷ This is the point where we see Paul doing his reconfiguration of the text to suit his purpose. He does this by employing what is called 'rhetorical suppression' by Meeks who according to Cosgrove, reading between the lines and in agreement with Hays, 'plausibly construed a part of the undercurrent of Paul's argumentation...that God will yet be gracious

¹⁴ I have used Dunn's translation in J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (WBC 38B; Dallas: Word, 1988), 569.

¹⁵ John Hollander, *Figure of an Echo: A Mode of Allusion in Milton and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

¹⁶ Richard Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 46.

¹⁷ Wayne, A. Meeks. 'On Trusting an Unpredictable God: A Hermeneutical Meditation on Romans 9-11'. In *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer* (ed. John T. Carroll et.al; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990).

to carnal Israel' which we will later deal with in Romans 11. (Cosgrove: 1996: 275).

In sum, Paul has managed to argue for the impartiality of God with regard to election. He does this by bringing in the Gentiles through his argumentation and re-reading of the Septuagint texts, particularly, the Hosea texts. In the process we have moved from Jewish particularism to Jew-Gentile universalism with regard to election. So initially, we were about to think of individualistic and particularistic election but now we have landed ourselves in an inclusive system of the concept of election that is based on the sovereignty of God.

2. Romans 9:30-10:1-29: The Law

In 9: 30 Paul states that there is a weakness in Israel's faith which is due to their obsession with the law and that gentiles have therefore overtaken them in terms of the law of righteousness.

This was because the Israelites saw righteousness in terms of works and not in terms of faith. The laws became a mark of self-identity and self understanding for the Israelites at some point in their history in the post- temple era and so generations upon generations of Israelites diligently obeyed the law.

The charge is clearly directed against what Paul regarded as a basic misunderstanding of how God deals with his people and what he requires of his people—that is, God's righteousness as God's gracious accepting and sustaining power to faith, therefore open to all and not the special prerogative of Israel to be defended by the sword (see on 10:2). See further on 2:4. For *dikaïosunh qeou`* see particularly on 1:17'.¹⁸

Thus with regard to the law, the word *telos* in Romans 10:4 is interpreted in several ways with regard to the relationship between Christ and the law. In one sense it could be regarded as the cessation or cancellation of the law or *nomos* which sets the Israelites apart as the sole choice of God. However, taking this definition to the extremes by Christians in particular creates a situation where the heritage of the Israelites is demeaned. On the other hand, there is the

¹⁸ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38b: Romans 9-16*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998).

other alternative where *telos* is taking as the goal or fulfillment of the law. In that vain, Dunn argues that

in which case Christ is the realization of God's final purpose in choosing Israel initially....The epoch of Israel's exclusive prerogative is ended; the role of the law as a badge of election is over and done. Christ has come, and with his coming the original purpose and promise of God can now be seen to extend to all nations.¹⁹

Furthermore, Jewett stressed that such a broadening of the catchment area for the elect to cover all nations was necessary. He stated that 'The crucial point is the avoidance of zealotism, the assumption that conformity to a particular standard guarantees superiority over those who do not conform. Such zealotism is a pervasion possible to Jews as well as Christians'.²⁰

Now in 10: 6-11, Paul gives further clarification concerning the place of the law in the attainment of righteousness. He used Deuteronomy 30:11-14 in doing this. The Septuagint text is as follows:

For this commandment, which I command to you this day, is not excessive, neither is it far from you. It is not above in the heaven, as if one were to say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven and bring it to us, so that, when we hear it we may do it?' Neither is it beyond the seas, as if one were to say, 'Who will cross over the sea for us, and bring it to us, and make it audible for us, so that we may do it?' The word is very near you- in your mouth, and in your heart, and in your hand- so that you may do it.²¹

Paul here in using the above-quoted text, did not first quote the passage accurately...Instead, he transformed the passage into a more direct statement of the meaning he found in it. The recontextualised text is as follows:

Do not say in your heart, "Who will go up into heaven?"(that is, to bring Christ down); ⁷or"Who will go down into the abyss?"(that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).But what does it (*the righteousness that comes from faith*)²² say? The

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Robert Jewett, 'The Law and the Coexistence of Jews and Gentiles in Romans'. In *Interpretation* vol.xxxix, No.4 1985, pp.345-356.

²¹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Reading Romans* (NY: Crossroad, 1997). The translation of Deuteronomy 30:11-14.

²² Italics is From Cobb & Lull: 2005: 143.

word is near you, on your lips and in your heart that is the word of faith that we proclaim.²³

From the above-rendering of the passage one cannot fail to recognize that Paul freely selected from the text and changed it ‘in order to bring out the meaning that he found in it for the present situation’ (Cobb & Lull: 2005: 143). This strategy of recontextualization and reconfiguration is used by Paul in advancing his argument throughout chapters 9-11. Looking at the text in Deuteronomy, Paul’s Midrash of them are ‘faith’ and ‘confession’.²⁴ Paul reconfigured the Deuteronomy30: 11-14, by giving it a Messianic slant in his interpretation. He did this by replacing ‘commandments’ with ‘the Messiah’ and ‘doing them’ with ‘having faith’ in the Messiah (Cobb & Lull: 143). Here Paul recasts the whole passage that is based on the commandments of Moses entirely to reflect the expression of faith that is centred on the acceptance of Jesus as Messiah and this continues for the rest of Chapter 10.

This means that Paul have left no option for Israelites who are still not convinced that they should abandon their individual stance based on obedience to the law and join in with the ‘other’(i.e. mostly gentiles) whose salvation is based on faithfulness to Messiah Jesus. So how would Paul proceed in a situation like this where he is uncompromising concerning the Israelites whose self-understanding as a community is closely linked to the law and their interpretation(s) of it? Their election as a nation is precisely based on the law and its stipulations to them as a people. To be told now that the goal posts have been moved and others have gained an upper hand and that there is a new formula for election and this time round you have been rejected as a specific group and only a few who tow the new line would be deemed as God’s elect is a big challenge to the Jews. At this point, Paul’s work offers very little solution to this problem.

²³ Dunn, James D.G., *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38b: Romans 9-16*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998).

²⁴ Cobb & Lull have argued that those two are the focus ‘rather than other forms of faithfulness (Cobb & Lull: 205: 143). The word *pistis*’ wide ranging meanings which include, believe, faithfulness, trust, loyalty is of great importance here as Paul explores issues surrounding faithfulness in this text.. For much of the treatment of Romans 10: 6-21, I am indebted to Cobb & Lull *Romans*. Missouri: Chalice: 2005.

3. Romans 10:30-11:32: Salvation of All Israel

In chapters 9 and 10, Paul places emphasis on the inclusion of gentiles among those who are covered by God's election of peoples and nations. This then gives the impression that the ethnic Israelites who were once God's people have been rejected as an individual nation. It therefore gives the signal that God has not been faithful to the Israelites in revoking the promises and covenants he made with them. Romans Chapter. 11 is to respond to that issue. Paul states categorically in his opening verses that "God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew" (Romans 11:2). This is to establish the credibility of God in God's method of election.

Here Paul would like to re-define 'election' which is the key concept to save the situation. So to answer the question, is Israel elected? his answer is certainly yes! The purpose of Chapter 11 is to use his redefinition of (κατ'ἔκλογην)²⁵ to resolve the problem. Commenting on Paul's statement, Dunn stated that with regard to the Israelites, in the context that Paul was writing, the relationship between the concept of 'remnant' and that of 'election' still holds as far as Paul was concerned. What actually is crucial is the introduction of 'grace' into the argument. Dunn established this by saying that

there is the emphasis on God's grace reinforcing the κατ'ἔπισημασίᾳ of the Elijah quotation (v 4). The perfect tense (γεγονεν), as usual, indicates an original action (God's choice of Israel) establishing a situation which still pertains. God's original choice of Israel still holds true into the "now time," precisely because it was an election of grace; that is, it did not depend on Israel's performance of covenant obligations, and so it was not restricted by them either'

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Paul then goes ahead to quote Septuagint passages to support his argument. He quoted Ps. 68: 23-24, Deut. 29:3 and Is.29:10.

With Romans 11: 8, the quotation is largely from Deut.29:3. 'The major departure from the Deuteronomy text is the insertion of πνεῦμα κατ'ἀνοχὴν" from Isa 29:10,²⁷ The note of divine judgment is more strongly marked in Isa 29:10 than in Deut 29:3, so that the

²⁵ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38b: Romans 9-16*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998). Election is to be understood as 'an act of God's free and unconditional choice' according to Dunn.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

insertion of the phrase underscores the claim that the rest of Israel’s present failure is the result of divine action and part of God’s purpose’.²⁸

The rationale here in quoting the Septuagint text from Deuteronomy is to make a connection between the obtuseness of the Israelites in the wilderness and that of the Israelites in Paul’s time.

In Romans 11: 9, ‘Ps.68:23–24 is quoted, with kai; eij’ qhran, “and for a trap,” replacing ehw pion autwn, “before them,”. The piling up of the four eij’ phrases (including the inserted eij’ qhran) is particularly effective, and heightens the note of intended judgment’.²⁹ This was to warn Jews who were complacent and self-righteous that they would face retribution.

What Paul aimed at achieving in bringing in the above-mentioned texts is first to explain why some Israelites have not been elected. He argued that it is partly due to their non co-operative attitude and also partly God’s own divine plan. He justified the plight of the non-elected Israelites as a means of giving opportunity for gentiles to be elected in Romans 11: 13-25. A similar view is expressed by Colenso, who states that,

God will use this very season of their impoverishment, as a time of blessing for the Gentiles, and He would have them stirred up by this to a godly rivalry; so that they may rise again from their fall, and the whole Church be enriched by their enrichment.³⁰

Paul is here saying that the failure of Jews is a blessing to the gentiles and the failure of the gentiles is also a blessing to the Jews. So the gentiles should also take a cue from the Jews that if even the Jews could be dis-elected how much more they being gentiles.

Paul then turned his attention to his last quotations in chapter 11 upon which he dwelt to explain his famous statement that “all Israel would be saved’ in Rom.11:26. This is covered in Rom.11: 26-32. The scripture he quotes as proof is Isa 59:20–21 with a line from Isa 27:9 added to it.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ J.W. Colenso, *Commentary on Romans* (Jonathan Draper, ed., Pietermaritzburg-South Africa: Cluster: 2003).

The focus of the two texts is mainly the establishment of the New Covenant which is a re-echo of the one spoken of in Jeremiah 31: 33. However, here Paul was re-configuring the texts to refer to the Israelites solely. Also, according to Dunn, the last part of the quotation, *ὅταν ἀφέλωμαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας αὐτῶν*, “when I take away their sins” is taken from Isa 27:9. The only difference is that the plural (“their sins”) replaced the singular (“his sin”).³¹

In Dunn’s view this,

interpretative merging of two texts would be quite acceptable in view of the close similarity of theme between the two passages, the previous line of 27:9 also talking about the taking away (*ἀφέλωμαι*) of Jacob’s guilt or breach of the law. The association of forgiveness of sins with Israel’s final vindication or specifically with renewal of the covenant was sufficiently well established in Jewish expectation.³²

Paul here according to some scholars, mainly deals with the ‘supersessionist’ view where Christians monopolise the New Covenant for themselves and relegate the Jews to the Old Covenant which they think have been superseded by the New Covenant. Here Paul is making a point that the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus is even more for the Jews than for the gentiles. This implies that Unlike other peoples, the Jews are not called to something entirely new, and unexpected but rather invited to share in the fulfillment of their ancestral pledge made to Abraham’ (Bloesch: 1989: 130).³³

On the other hand, there is another view held by other scholars that ‘all Israel shall be saved’ could also be in reference to both gentiles and Jews and not only Jews.

As argued by Colenso,

St. Paul imagines the fullness of the Gentiles would be gathered into the Church, and the Gospel would be preached among all nations, in his own day, and so the Deliverer would come, antiquity be turned away from Jacob, by the Jews, as a nation, embracing the Gospel, and all Israel, the whole believing Family, whether originally Jews or Heathens, ‘be saved’ (Colenso: 2003: 240).

³¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38b: Romans 9-16*, (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, Publisher, 1998).

³² *Ibid.*

³³ G. Bloesch Donald, “All Israel Will Be Saved” Supersession and the Biblical Witness: Supersessionism and the Biblical Witness,” in *Interpretation* (Vol. XLIII. No.2, 1989), 130-144.

Whichever way one looks at it, the most important thing is that the pole position that the Jews occupy due to their traditional heritage is being flagged here but it is not necessarily done in order to relegate other nations. In other words, the Jews are being recognized in order for them to take their rightful place together with others in God's salvation plan.

Paul further consolidated his stance about the salvation of Israel by stating that 'the gifts and callings of God are irrevocable' (Rom.11:29) and that is the more reason why 'all Israel will be saved'. His argument was that 'in spite of the disobedience of the Israelites (Rom.11:30-31) God could not revoke his promise of election to them because God was merciful to all and 'remained faithful to the covenant' (Cobb & Lull: 2005: 149). Paul then ended on a joyful note with the hope that all his people, the Jews would join together with the gentiles in being beneficiaries of God's promises to the point that the conversion of the gentiles will arouse in them some jealousy that would induce them to 'accept the revelation of God's righteousness in Jesus' faithfulness' (Cobb & Lull: 205: 150).

However, this optimism of Paul did not materialize in his life time and have not yet materialized since very few Jews have actually yielded to the acceptance of Messiah Jesus as part of God's salvation plan. As stated by Cobb and Lull part of the reason for this was that,

The emergence of a new messianic community, which correctly claimed to interpret the Jewish scriptures in a competing way, had the historical effect of intensifying the Israelites' 'zeal for God,' which Paul considered unenlightened (10:2). Their increased 'zeal for God' sharpened their opposition to the new community (Cobb & Lull: 2005: 150).

So there seems rather to be a backlash so what do we do?

Conclusion

We have looked at intertexture reading of Romans 9-11 and what comes to the fore is the complex nature of the involvement of God on one hand and humankind on the other in determining whether one is a beneficiary of God's election or not. The reading and re-reading of the scriptures, particularly the Septuagint texts has helped to clarify a few points with regard to the Church in Rome and Paul's letter to them.

Firstly, it has been observed that both Israelites and gentiles, Judaism and the Church has common expectations in life and a

common end in sight. They both would not like to be left out of God's elect. This implies that we are looking at election of nations as well as people groups from age to age and from all over the world. In other words, no nation, theological grouping, socio-political grouping can lay a sole claim to God's election. God's election is therefore generally cooperate and universal in scope and cannot be hijacked by any group or era. It is not time bound but dynamic and progressive in nature.

Secondly, it seems the election process is not based on hereditary or by some kind of random sampling by God. It is therefore not like the 'Calvinistic notion, of the Almighty "electing", by an arbitrary fiat of His Will, a few only, a "remnant", of the human race for life, and consigning the rest to endless misery' (Colenso: 2003: 235). It is freely given graciously by a merciful God 'to all those, whom God sees in any nation...approved, and 'elected' by Him, to enjoy the richer blessings of His favour, not for their righteousness sake' (Colenso: 2003: 235).

Thirdly, there is the need to continually re-contextualise the concept of election as one moves from one dispensation to another. In doing this work, I observed that a lot of commentaries related the concept of elections to Jewish –Christian relationships and the issues concerning the Holocaust and anti-Semitism. Issues concerning Christian mission to Jews also featured prominently in the commentaries. Zionism also featured in some of them. I was therefore not surprised when Bishop Colenso writing from South Africa and commenting on Rom.10: 13 in his commentary on Romans on the phrase – 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated', said that, 'As regards their state in the eternal world, Ishmael and Esau and their descendants (among whom we may reckon the Zulus and the Kafirs) (Colenso: 2003: 26).' More importantly, Colenso later on stated that 'England has God loved and Africa has He hated' (Colenso: 2003: 26) as a re-statement of the text. All that Colenso has stated above are re-contextualisations of the text. But since Paul himself used reconfiguration and recontextualisation in his letter we can also do so. The only caution here is to be careful not to short-circuit the entire meaning of the text by limiting it to our context alone and perhaps sometimes mis-representing the text. For instance, a lot of recontextualisation of the Roman 9-11 has led to all sorts of negative

attitudes of Jews towards Christians and Christians towards Jews over the decades because of their exclusivism. But all said and done, I will still argue that there is the need for recontextualisation because if the Israelites were open to it, and the gentiles in the Church in Rome were also open to it, perhaps it will have helped in clarifying the controversies and conflicts concerning the concept of elections in both Church and Synagogue and Christianity and Judaism.

In applying the text to the contemporary situation, the story is no different in our context today. Decades ago, as Colenso said, it was England who felt ‘elected’ by God as they carried Christianity to the ‘heathens’ in Africa. Today, it is Africans who are now making all the noise in making statements like ‘the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted to Africa’ and Africans are now making claims that they are in this century the ‘elect’ of God and by implication trying to infer that God has dis-elected Western Europe due to secularism. Is this not similar to how adherents to Judaism and adherents to Christianity had problems relating to each other over the centuries? For instance, historically there was a time when Christianity felt oppressed and persecuted when they faced the zealotism of the Jews against them and later the tables turned when Christianity gained the upper hand they also treated Jews as enemies of Christ and killed and displaced many of them all in the interest of claiming bonafide ‘election’ by the same God in Western Europe?

In another vein in Ghana in West Africa there is, also the intra-religious problems concerning denominationalism, where Pentecostals and Pente- Charismatics who sometime ago were regarded as ‘*Mushroom Churches*’³⁴ and were marginalised and degraded by the mainline Churches have now gained the upper hand and pointing at the mainline Churches as the dis-elected of God mainly due to their adherence to certain traditions.

This therefore calls for a realization that we are dealing with a God of abundance and endless grace which God makes available in different shades to different people in different ages which is never in short supply and which God has not given to a particular group of people to distribute. God distributes it. Also, God is infinite in mercy. So despite the faults and short comings of nations God can visit and

³⁴ This term was used by Ghanaians to classify non-mainline Churches as inferior

re-visit both ancient and modern nations with his favour and continue to elect people. So there is no need to limit God's election project using one community's standards and measures.

Since we live and work in a situation where there are and will always be people fore-ordained by God, there is the need to be accommodative to the 'other' who might not seem to us to be worthy of God's election and also those of us whose 'election papers' needs renewal ought to be humble enough to renew them. In order words, communities need to be in tune with the dynamism of God's election and not to associate it with some static tradition of theirs.

Finally, I would suggest a continuous collaborative strategy in dealing with the issue of election. From the start we realized that God collaborated with individuals like Abraham and others in choosing them and the individuals also collaborated with God. He also did the same with Israel as an individual nation. As long as the collaboration continues, election continues to be effected. This was how the election practice of God has continued to the time of Jesus and I believe it has continued till today. The concept of election has developed over the centuries and therefore needs a more complex interplay of collaboration between God and humankind and between the potential recipients and those who already have it. This implies that there is the need for collaborative spaces to be created by groups for communities to continually interact with biblical texts, and with others so as to realize, affirm and recognize their corporate election. In doing this they need to give *epistemological respect* to each other's view rather than *epistemological privilege* so as to safeguard the romanticizing of the views of one's partner.³⁵ In that vein, starting from the Jewish- Christian corporate election to Western Europe/Non-Western Europe to denominationalism in Ghana, I would recommend the need to give *dialogical privilege* to each other. '*Dialogical privilege* has to be given by the above-mentioned groups to each other by being in conversation with one another while at the same time given *epistemological respect* to one another'(Anum: 2008:159) in order to achieve their common goal that is the election that we all seek from God.

³⁵ Eric, Anum 'Collaborative and Interactive Hermeneutics In Africa: Giving Dialogical Privilege in Biblical Interpretation' In *African And European Readers of the Bible in Dialogue: In Quest for A Shared Meaning*. Hans De Wit & Gerald West (edited.), Leiden, Boston: Brill: 2008), 143-168.

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