

Paul's Purpose

In Writing

Romans.

By

Melancthon W. Jacobus.

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PAUL'S PURPOSE IN WRITING ROMANS.

THAT man works best who thinks in his working. And that man thinks best who bases his thinking on the work that he has done. The minister, therefore, or the missionary who goes to his service thinking the truth of God, will make his work tell, and the preacher or the writer who utters his thoughts with the practical experience of his life work behind him will make his words tell.

Paul did both. However germinal may have been the theology he received on the Damascus road, he thought it out in the years that intervened between his conversion and his settled work, and kept developing it as his work went on. And however profound may have been the inspired thoughts which, when that work was over, he gathered into his epistle to the church at Rome, he had behind them the personal experience of all his journeys over the mission fields, and all the close contact into which those journeys had brought him with the souls of men, in the deep darkness and foul deadness of their sin. So the theology of Romans, God-given as it was, was perfectly natural too. What other theology could be expected when the man who wrote it had gone thinking through the Jewish and the heathen world? Paul was the Calvinist he was, not only because of the truths which he had received from God, but also because of the confirming facts which had confronted him in the world in which he lived and worked. Unconsciously, therefore, this great epistle has laid hold of the minds of men, because, unwittingly to them, it has put before them in theologic terms the very facts they had all along been conscious of in the actual life around them. And so men have treated it as they have treated these facts; as they have admitted the facts they have accepted the epistle; as they have denied the facts they have laid the epistle aside and said that Paul has not given us the last word about these truths. In an immeasurably large way, therefore, Romans is a great epistle.

But this is simply by way of apology for the paper which

follows. Romans has a reason for its importance in the study of the scholar and the thought of the church. That importance, we feel, justifies the investigation we wish to make. For if there is anything which determines the epistle's meaning it is the light and shade which fall upon its several parts. And if there is anything which determines the light and shade to be cast upon the epistle's statements, it is the angle at which the epistle was written. It stands before us according to the attitude of its author's mind when he brought it into being. It comes to us according to the motive he had in mind when he started it on its way. If it be then the great epistle that it is, to find the motive which its author had in writing it is no little matter. In fact, since Baur's day that has been the great question about the epistle. And in the zeal which has gathered round it, Godet is perhaps not exaggerating when he says that it has been one of the most controverted questions in the whole range of New Testament criticism.¹ What might be called the first move in the Tübingen attack on the New Testament was in the direction of this epistle, and it was based on this question of the motive behind the letter's writing.² And though that attack has failed and the battle has begun from another quarter and is directed against another point, it is yet the chief question in the scholarly critique of the epistle, "Why was it written?"

The theories are legion, but they gather themselves readily into two general groups: 1, Those that hold that the motive was determined by the needs of the church to which the letter was sent. 2, Those that hold that the motive was determined by the needs of the apostle who sent it. The first group separates itself very clearly into two sub-groups: (1) The didactic; (2) The

¹ *Com. Romans*, p. 47, (1889.) (Revised translation.)

² Baur's critical work really began with his articles in the *Tüb. Zeitschr. f. Theol.* on the *Christ-Party in Corinth* (1831), which were followed by his work on the *Pastoral Epistles* (1835). Then came his discussion of the *Aim and Motive of Romans* (1836). This formed the basis of his great work on *Paul* (1845), that brought to issue the question of the New Testament's right to exist. Cf. Weiss, *Einkl. in d. N. T.* (1886), p. 9 ff. Also his (*Meyer*) *Kom. üb. d. Römerb.* (1891), pp. 25-30. Godet, *Com. Rom.* (1889), p. 48, note. Hilgenfeld's article. *Römerbrief* in *Zeitschr. f. Wissensch. ft. Theol.* (1892), III., p. 297, note.

polemic; while the second group as clearly sums itself up into one which might be termed the apologetic. It will not be possible to come, in a proper way, to the position we take without a fair consideration of these groups. They have, each of them, something in their favor. They could not have been as widely held as they have been were they absolutely without support. The most isolated criticisms generally have some show of reason for themselves, and these criticisms are by no means poverty stricken for support. 1. The didactic group holds, in substance, that the epistle is an attempt on Paul's part to present to the Roman Church a systematic exposition of Christian truth for their enlightenment and strengthening in the faith, some taking this exposition in a more, some in a less, elaborate sense of the word. This is what may be called the ancient view. It was advanced as far back as the time of the Muratori Fragment, whose unknown author says: "The apostle explains to the Romans the plan of the Scripture by inculcating the fact that Christ is their first principle." It was taken up with varied modifications by several of the early Greek expositors (Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret), some of the middle age scholastics (John of Damascus, Œcumenius, Theophylact), some of the Reformers (notably Calvin and Melancthon), by Grotius, by later German critics (among them De Wette, Meyer, Reuss), also by Renan, and by Godet.¹ It is not difficult to understand why this should have been so generally the first view of the writer's motive, for the epistle seems to say as much by the general systematic character which it bears. Paul doubtless wrote all his epistles, more or less, for instruction's sake, but none of his epistles are written after such a thoughtfully laid out plan, so logically developed. Some of his epistles, doubtless, were written with a decided unity of thought, *e. g.*, Galatians; but none in which the unity was so deliberately purposed and so carefully carried out. Galatians' unity comes from the pressure under which the letter was written. It is the unity of quickness, of surprise and indignation and protest, put into a single thought, at a single writing. Romans' unity comes from the care of its

¹ Cf. Godet *Com.* p. 54 ff. Also catalogue of views in Holtzmann. *Lehrb. d. historisch.-krit. Einleit. in d. N. T.* (1892) p. 237.

composition. It is the unity of forethought and of systematic handling, of a distinct plan and a definite development. Romans stands by itself. Not even Ephesians is like it in its air of treatise writing. And while this has been made an objection against its genuineness, as though Paul could not write outside of one epistolary style,¹ it is held by the supporters of this view that it has not a little in its favor from the fact that Paul left no church, which he counted as his own, without a careful exposition among them of the great principles of his gospel, which exposition he is here supposed to send to the Roman church by this epistle in advance.² All this is to be admitted in favor of a didactic purpose behind the epistle's writing. 2. The polemic group holds, in brief, that the letter was written to combat a tendency to Judaistic views in the church at Rome, a tendency which, as some think, had already gained a foothold and formulated itself into a distinct Judaizing party in the church, or, as others believe, was simply threatening to enter in, and showed itself only as a possible trouble in the future. That is to say: Either Paul saw that the same struggle which had met him in Galatia and in Corinth was following him to Rome, and so wrote his epistle as he had written Galatians and II. Corinthians before, or else, having won the battle in Galatia and in Corinth, he determined it should not have to be fought in Rome, and so wrote his epistle to prevent its possibility. This is also by no means a recent view. It was held by some of the fathers (Augustine, Hilary), by some of the writers in the middle ages (Rabanus Maurus, Abelard), by one or two of the Reformers (Erasmus, chiefly), while, in more modern times, it has been supported by many of the German critics (Bleek, Tholuck, Philippi, Ewald, Volkmar and others), and, in a certain sense, is the view held by Dr. Charles Hodge. It contains within itself, of course, a maze of modifications, but they all tend

¹ Baur, quoted by Godet *Com.* p. 55.

² Cf. Godet *Com.* p. 56, where Thiersch (*Versuch zur Herstellung des histor. Standpunkts*, p. 91 f.) is quoted. Also note recurrence of phrases in Paul's epistles which refer evidently to points of previous catechetical instruction in the churches to which he was writing. (1 Thess. iii. 3, 4; iv. 2, 6; v. 2; 2 Thess. ii. 6, 15; 1 Cor. iii. 16; vi. 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 19; 2 Cor. iii. 5.) Also such historical references as Acts xviii. 11; xix. 8-10.

to this main idea.¹ And there is much in the epistle that would seem to justify this view; *e. g.*, There is the old familiar insistence upon justification by faith alone, and not by works of the law (chap. ii.-v.; cf. Gal. ii. 3.) There is the old rejection of the position which abuses the freedom from the Mosaic law (chap. vi., vii.; cf. Gal. chap. v.) There is a seeming trace, at least, of the old personal element, as though over against those who would call into question his apostolic work; and an apparent hint at some who were causing divisions among them (chap. xv., xvi.; cf. 2 Cor. x.-xii., Gal. i., ii., v., vi.) Paul seems to have his old controversy on hand again, either in actuality or in foreboding. Apparently the old objections are up once more for refutation, and his desire is either to rid his people of their present foes, or to fortify them against those which he fears may come. So at least these passages would seem to indicate. These are the two groups of views which consider that the epistle's motive was shaped by the church's needs. The group, on the other hand, which considers it to have been determined by the apostle's needs, holds that the purpose was an apologetic one; that Paul's aim in writing the letter was to prepare for himself a favorable reception at Rome in view of the prejudices which existed in that church; some taking those prejudices to be against himself, some taking them to be against the doctrines of his gospel, and some taking them to be against the practice of his gospel work. In other words, Paul is supposed to be, at one or all of these points, hostile to the Jews and partial to the Gentiles, and he writes this epistle simply to show the falsity of the supposition. This is the view which Baur started and which, with varied modifications, has been held by most of his followers since.² And in its favor must be acknowledged that there is a strange prominence given to the Jews and to Jewish lines of thought at varied points in the epistle, as though the writer would testify to the high place they held in his theology, and so

¹ Godet *Com.* p. 52 ff; Holtzmann *Einl.* p. 237.

² It was advanced independently in the same year (1836) by Credner, in his *Einl. in. d. N. T.* § 142, and by Baur in *Tüb. Zeitschr. f. Theol.* III., but through Baur it was carried into the criticism of the Tübingen school. Cf. Godet *Com.* pp. 48-51, Holtzmann, *Einl.* p. 237.

conciliate them to his side, and, further, it is to be admitted that chapters ix.-xi. have a significance in the epistle's argument which it is useless to deny.

These, then, in general, are the views which have been held of the writer's motive, with the points which can be gathered from the epistle in their favor. It is evident that, in order to judge of their real value, even before the epistle is subjected to its inductive study, one question regarding the church to which the epistle was written must, as nearly as possible, be settled, and that is: What was its composition? Was it Jewish or Gentile? Or was it both, with the two elements nearly balanced? We believe the felt need of having this decided, before the greater question be assumed, accounts for the large attention devoted by the critics to this otherwise unimportant point. For the influence of its answer is apparent. Whether the church was Jewish or Gentile will mean a great deal as to whether the letter was or was not one which would instruct. A treatise on Paul's gospel for a Jewish church would have a different cast from that which it would have for a Gentile church. One has only to think of the character of Hebrews, and the question of its possible Pauline authorship, to see the direction in which a Jewish instruction can go. Whether the church was Jewish or Gentile will be quite significant in considering whether the letter was or was not a polemic against an actual or a threatened Judaizing tendency in the people's midst. A very decided proportion of Jewish element must have been necessary to make Judaizing possible. And this statement is none the less true from the fact that the churches of Galatia and Corinth were in Gentile lands. Whether the church was Jewish or Gentile will go far towards determining what sort of an apologetic the apostle would present to them, if any. For if his apologetic was shaped by their prejudices, their prejudices, in turn, would be shaped by what they themselves were. Jewish prejudices against Paul, or his gospel, or his mission work, would be one thing; Gentile prejudices against them would be quite another thing. This problem then must be, as far as possible, solved. Can it be? We grant it is a difficult

undertaking—difficult because of the lack of information about the church.

But, then, there are facts to be considered. 1. As to the church's origin, the theory that it was founded by the Apostle Peter during the reign of Claudius must be laid aside. It is incapable of historical proof, and impossible, in view of Paul's distinct statement in our epistle (xv. 20), that the principle of his mission work forbade him building on another man's foundation, in view of which principle he was purposing to leave the East, where such independent work had reached its limits (vs. 23) and go to Rome. 2. We come, thus, to the choice between two possible positions, (a) That the church owed its origin mainly to the Jewish Christians who came to Rome from Palestine, which is the position taken by Weiss.¹ (b) That the church originated with Gentile Christians who came to Rome from other quarters than Palestine, which is the position of Godet.² To decide between these two positions we need merely a consideration of such facts as can be gathered in the case. (1), Whatever Jews may have been brought to Rome by Pompey from his Syrian wars, and his capture of Jerusalem (B. C. 63),³ we are informed, (a) that by the time of the first triumvirate (B. C. 59) they had grown to be a considerable and not unimportant part of the Roman population.⁴ (b) Their growth continued until, under Augustus (B. C. 31—A. D. 14), they were assigned a quarter beyond the Tiber for their residence;⁵ (c) While Tiberius, (A. D. 14—37), fearing possibly their increasing power, issued against them severely restrictive measures, among other things, transporting 4,000 to Sardinia, to serve in war against the free-booters of that island (A. D. 19);⁶ (d) Until, at last, Claudius (A. D. 41—54), seeing their continued increase in spite of all restrictions, deliberately, on account of alleged tumults

¹ *Kom.* pp 16-23. ² *Com.* p. 40 f.

³ *Florus*, iii. 5; *Jos. Antiq.* xiv. 4, 4, 5; *Bell. Jud.* i. 7.

⁴ *Cicero, pro. Fluc.* xxviii.

⁵ *Philo, De Legat. ad Cajum*, pp. 1014 f. (Ed. Frankfurt). Philo states here that the most of these Jews were freedmen; while we know from what Josephus says (*Antiq.* xvii. 11, 1) as to the great company of them [8,000] that joined the popular embassy which came to Rome against Archelaus (A. D. 6) that their numbers must have been very considerable.

⁶ *Sueton. Lib.* 36; *Tacit. Ann.* ii. 85; *Jos. Antiq.* xviii. 3, 5.

among them, banished them from the city (A. D. 52).¹ (e) However, at his death (A. D. 54), they returned to Rome, where they resumed their former prosperous condition, making proselyting inroads upon the Roman population around them.² (2) Further, we know from Acts ii. 10, that "Roman sojourners" were present at Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. They were doubtless Jews and proselytes both, and they must have often afterwards come in contact with the Christian church in Jerusalem as they went up there to various feasts. (3) As to the presence of Christians in Rome, we know from classic testimony that there were Christians there prior to the writing of our epistle; for this edict of Claudius against them was for tumults which occurred "*impulsore Chresto*," which must mean disturbances in some way due to the claims of Christ, whatever else it may or may not involve.³ (4) Further, from the epistle itself, it is clear there were Christians present in Rome at the writing of this letter, and present in some sort of an organized church character and form (Rom. i. 8, xvi. 1-16, 19, xii. 5-8).⁴

Now from these facts it must be said that, as far as these two theories are concerned, (a) It would seem in accordance with the nature of events that the Roman sojourners at Jerusalem should, some of them, be converted to the Christian faith on that day of Pentecost, and others afterwards, and returning to Rome, should preach Jesus

¹ Sueton. *Claud.* c. 25; *Dion Cass.* lx. 6. ² Juvenal, xiv. 96-98; Tacit. (as above).

³ It is true that this question has been vigorously debated. Lewin (*Life of Paul*, vol. I., p. 274 f.) lays the whole statement of Suetonius aside, but apparently without justifying reason, while Meyer and Wieseler have maintained that *Chrestus* was simply a political disturber among the Jews; but (1), the very significant testimony of Tertullian (*Ad. Nat.* i. 3 and *Apol.* c. iii.), and Lactantius (*Inst. div.* iv. 7) that *Chrestus* is merely the vulgar mispronouncing of *Christus*, and (2), the serious difficulty of accounting for the complete historical silence regarding any such adventurer has brought the criticism of to-day almost universally to the position here taken. And if it be objected that, on this supposition, it is strange that, having come into conflict with Christians, the Jewish church should, nevertheless, at Paul's coming be in ignorance of a Christian church in their midst, it is to be remembered that the statement of the Jews (Acts xxviii. 21 f.) might have been made in perfect honesty and yet a Christian church be existing in their midst. Such a fact their statement does not at all deny. (Cf. Gloag, *Introd. Paul. Ep.* p. 241.)

⁴ Weiss, *Einkl.* p. 226, note 3.

in the synagogue. (b) Further, it would seem in accordance with the nature of events that, Jesus being thus preached, not only discussion should arise between Jews and Christian converts, but great disturbances should take place, which would agree with the cause assigned for the Claudian edict. In which case the first of these two theories would be right, and we would have to acknowledge that the church originated from Jewish Christians and through the synagogue. But, on the other hand, from these facts we also gather, (a) That nothing would prevent converts coming to Rome from the Christian churches in Gentile centres, as well as from the Christian church in Jerusalem itself. Rome was in touch with all the East, as well as with Palestine. It was the focal point towards which everything from everywhere made its way. (b) That nothing would prevent this disturbance between the Jews and the Christians, which was the cause of the Claudian edict, from being outside the synagogue and not inside it. In fact, the word *tumultuari*, which Suetonius uses, would refer to outward riot, rather than to inward dissension; in which case the second of these two theories would be right, and we would have to say that Christianity came into Rome through Gentile Christians, and was propagated, not through the synagogue, but outside of it. Which, then, is likely to have been the case? We see no reason why both may not have been, in a certain way, true. There is no reason why some of the "Roman sojourners" may not have been converted under the Pentecostal preaching of Peter, and have returned to Rome as the first Christians in the city. There is no reason why converts from the Gentile churches should not, soon after,¹ have begun coming to Rome, and have continued coming, in ever increasing numbers, as the Gentile work went on. But there is every reason to believe, that, even though the Jewish converts may have been the first to come, it was the Gentile Christians who began the organizing of the church at Rome, and carried it on to that degree of organization which it had when our epistle was written.² In other words, we see nothing against

¹ If Pentecost is placed in A. D. 33, it would be but seven years until the founding of the church at Antioch (A. D. 40).

² Cf. Godet, *Com.* p. 41, as to the hindrances likely to have been against a propagation of the gospel in the synagogue by the early Jewish converts.

the possibility of Jewish converts from Pentecost having been the first Christians at Rome (for which Weiss so strongly argues), and yet the formal church having been begun and carried on by the Gentile converts from regions outside of Palestine, and so having been definitely and decisively Gentile in its origin.¹

At least this Gentile beginning of the church seems in every way the most reasonable; for (a) so comes to its best meaning the statement of the Jewish leaders on the occasion of Paul's arrival in the city. The Christian church was outside the synagogue. Its work was done mostly by Gentile converts and mostly among Gentile inquirers. So they would be less in contact with it than if it had been done by Jewish converts and among inquirers in the synagogue. Their statement, while not making impossible the existence of a Christian church in the city, makes most improbable that Christianity, as a religion, had been preached in the synagogue and grown up among the Jews as a heretical sect.² (b) So is best accounted for the fact that the church was only imperfectly organized (xii. 5-8)—a fact which would more likely be if it were founded outside the synagogue, and less likely if it were organized within at least the circle of synagogue people; since, in that case, the elder basis would have been followed,³ (c) while, on the other hand, if the church was founded by Jewish converts, then we have a church founded out of analogy with all other churches in apostolic times; for it is a fact that the pilgrims at Pentecost who came from parts of the diaspora, where Paul afterwards labored, however truly they may have been converted at that great revival, in no case accomplished any church organization in the cities to which they returned. In each case Paul had to begin that work himself. But in Antioch, where the influence at the church's founding had been Gentile,⁴ there a

¹ We cannot but believe that this is practically a solution of the much debated problem as to the origin of the church at Rome. It simply had two origins, an unorganized origin in the first Jewish converts from Pentecost, and an organized one in the first Gentile converts from the extra Judean work.

² Godet *Com.* p. 40.

³ Weiss admits that the church was at least organized, if not fully so. *Einl.* p. 226, note 31. *Kom.* p. 17, note.**

⁴ See Appendix Note of W. & H. to the reading *Ἑλληνιστᾶς*, Acts xi. 20. (Greek Test. Vol. II. p. 93.) Also Warfield's *Text. Crit.*, p. 89 f.

church organization was accomplished, and an organization very much after the kind of the Roman church.¹ And if it be objected² that, unless the church were founded at the early date of Pentecost, there was no time for the gospel to have grown among them and spread out into the surrounding world so as to justify the liberal statement of the church's faith (i. 8), it is to be remembered that the church at Antioch was the first church established after the mother church, and that converts going thence to Rome would have given the church a life of eighteen years before the epistle was written.³ In fact, those who, like Weiss, hold to a Jewish origin of the church, find themselves compelled to admit, that before the time of our letter's writing its character had completely changed to Gentile. The evidence furnished by the epistle itself leaves them no other course. The Greek persons saluted in the epistle's closing chapter—many of whom were the apostle's personal friends (ch. xvi.); the Pauline type of gospel, with which the church was evidently already acquainted (vi. 17); the frequent classing of the readers as belonging under the *ἐθνῶν* (i. 6, 13; xi. 13); the connection of the epistle's writing with Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles (xv. 15 f.), and, indeed, the fact of the writing of the epistle at all (Gal. ii. 7 ff.; 2 Cor. x. 13 ff.), show, beyond doubt, what the character of the church was when the letter was written.⁴ That its character, then, should have been essentially different from that which it had at the beginning of its formal life we feel, in view of the above careful survey of the facts, is hardly possible to be proven.⁵

It was, therefore, to a Gentile Christian church—Gentile in its development, Gentile in its then present condition—that the apostle sent his letter. But we see, at once, how our groups of views are affected by this fact. 1. The polemic group is

¹ Compare Rom. xii. 6, 8, with Acts xiii. 1.

² Beyschlag, *Das gesch. Problem des Römerbr. Stud. & Krit.*, 1867.

³ Godet, *Com.* p. 41.

⁴ Weiss, *Einkl.* p. 226. *Kom.* pp. 20-23.

⁵ It is interesting to note that since 1876 the German critics have, almost all of them, changed to the Gentile view. See Hilgenfeld's *Zeitschr. f. wissenschaft. Theol.* 1892, III. p. 299.

virtually set aside; for if the origin and development and growing character of the church was Gentile, it becomes exceedingly difficult to find anything to justify the existence in its midst of a Judaizing party. Such a church would be the last kind to which such a party would find its way. Its Gentilism was evidently of too pronounced a sort and too far removed from the Jewish Orient to be attractive to such an attempt. 2. The didactic group is rendered most improbable; for if the character of the church was, from its origin, Gentile, and if that Gentilism grew as Paul's mission work extended and his gospel became known—a Gentilism of the Pauline type—where was the need that Paul instruct it in the principles of his theology? If this church had been in every particular a completely stranger-church to Paul and his gospel work, perhaps such an advance instruction could be accounted for. But out and out unknown to the apostle and his theology was just what this church was not. The necessity for its instruction, therefore, finds itself hard to be understood. 3. The apologetic group is thrown into a decided doubt; for if the church in its history was preëminently Gentile, and in its then present condition was Gentile, in a Pauline way, where could have been its prejudices against Paul himself, or his gospel, or his mission work? It was the Jewish element which found fault with the apostle's doctrine and work. If the letter was written to remove prejudices among them, and so, apologetically, to prepare the way for Paul's coming among them, then the trouble must have been of a kind to fit in with the Gentile character of the church and its religious views.

We have, thus, nothing but general uncertainty regarding these views, and so we are compelled, all the more, to come to the epistle and gather inductively the testimony which it is prepared to give. But, taking up the epistle for our study, we find that the didactic view is at once disposed of, and that too, simply because the contents of the epistle are not the contents of Paul's gospel. There is lacking all discussion of the doctrines of Christology and Eschatology, though elsewhere Paul had already given to the latter of these such particular treatment (1 Thess. iv.; 2 Thess. ii.; 1 Cor. xv.; 2 Cor. v.) *A fortiori*, are the contents of the epistle not the

contents of the general circle of Christian truth. There is no treatment of Creation, or the Incarnation, or the Church,¹ besides the untouched Pauline doctrines. The holders of this view have recognized this unquestionable objection and have sought, in various ways, to give an explanation of it. They have said that these themes are not wholly omitted; that they are touched upon here and there throughout the epistle—the apostle confining himself simply to those parts of Christian doctrine, the Law, Sin and Grace, on which, in reality, the knowledge of Christianity depends.² But this is just the fact which prevents the epistle from being a resumé of Christian doctrine, or a treatise on the system of truths which Paul has gathered up into his gospel. The epistle is not general. It is specific, even within Pauline lines.

A study of the epistle renders the polemic view also impossible. Strong and vigorous as the argument of the apostle is—there is no trace of its being directed against any Judaizing party in the church. It is not, technically, a controversial epistle. Place it alongside of Galatians and the Corinthians and even the Thesalonians, and the difference is at once apparent. The very way the apostle introduces the objections which he feels his positions may provoke, is evidence in confirmation.³ There is but one passage that can, in any way, be said to refer to Judaizers, and that is the passage, iii. 8, *καθώς Φασίν τινες ἡμᾶς λέγειν*; but *τινες* here loses all significance, from the fact that there is nothing in the reference that would in any way indicate that these slanderers were in the Roman church, or even in Rome's com-

¹ Rom. xii. cannot be held to be a discussion of Ecclesiology, as Godet insists it is. And even granting that the Sacrament of Baptism is presented in ch. vi., there is no reference in the epistle to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, of which, if we may infer anything from the experience of the Gentile church at Corinth, it would be quite necessary to treat.

² So Melancthon in his *Loci Com.*, 1521. Similarly, also, in general, Grotius, Tholuch (1st ed.), Olshausen, Meyer, Reuss, Godet.

³ Chaps. iii. 1, 3, 5, 31; vi. 1, 15; vii. 7, 13; xi. 1, 11, present these objections a simply arising from the argument itself, not as coming from personal opponents, whose replies are anticipated and answered. Compare with this, 1 Cor. xv. 12, 35, and note that Gal. iii. 21, is of no weight against the otherwise clear presence of opponents in the letter's argument.

munity.¹ And even were that to be granted, the discussion to which this reference belongs (chs. vi.–viii.), is one which is introduced and carried on in a way so apart from, and so above any mere partisan opposition against its truth, that it is hard to see in it any hint at Judaistic foes.² Should there be cited, however, the passage xvi. 17–20, *παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, σκοπεῖν τοὺς τὰς διχοστασίας καὶ τὰ σκάνδαλα παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν ὤμεῖς ἐμάθετε ποιοῦντας, κ. τ. λ.*, and should it be said that this passage implies the presence of Judaizers in the church's midst, then it becomes very difficult to understand how, if the letter be a polemic against these errors, all specific mention of the errorists should have been omitted until the closing verses—in fact, until the postscript of the epistle. The place for such mention would have been in the introduction, or, at least, at the opening of the argument; but those parts are as innocent as they can well be of any rebuke to a straying church, or any arraignment of an errorizing teaching, or any warning against the possibility of coming trouble. If they are marked by anything, it is rather by a commendation of the church's faith, (i. 7, 8, 12).³ Further, the moral exhortations of the epistle show no trace of any anti-Judaistic applications, which is in sharp contrast with Gal. v. 6–12, 14, 18, 23; vi. 12–16. And all this holds equally well whether the apostle's object be said to be the protection of this Roman people against errors already among them, or the fortifying of them against errors which threatened to enter in. In either case there is no apparent reference to the errors. If it be asked, then, how the seemingly controversial parts of the epistle are to be explained, the reply is ready, that, however argumentative, these portions are not a polemic against an opposition party in the church. The views which are discussed in ii. 1–iii. 20,

¹ Lipsius, *Holtzm. Hand-Kom. z. N. T. II. Bd. II. Abt.* p. 67.

² Weiss *Kom.*, p. 28.

³ Compare with this. 1. Cor. i. 4–11, where the Corinthians' otherwise good record is immediately contrasted with the dissensions in the church. Also 2 Cor. i. 16–24, where their complaints against his conduct are treated without contrast. Also 2 Cor. x., where, as soon as the corrections of the church's conduct are finished, the opposition of the false teachers is taken up and carried through the remaining chapters of the epistle. Also Gal. i. 6–9, where the rebuke has nothing of any kind to relieve it.

are the views, not of Judaizers, but of unbelieving Jews. The statement of the new way of salvation, with its Old Testament proof (chap. iv.), and its practical development (chap. v.) has to do with the trust which unbelieving Jews place in the law, and not with the Judaizers' application of it to the admission of Gentiles into the church, while chaps. vi.—viii, as said before, go out beyond all mere party discussion of the questions which they involve; and chaps. xv., xvi., have in them none of the hints at personal opposition which we would otherwise expect. In fact, nowhere in the epistle, within the limits of these apparently controversial parts, or outside of them, does Paul take up the question of his apostolic authority, either as opposed by others, or proclaimed by himself. These parts lack those features which characterize Paul's anti-opposition arguments. The peculiar personalness which marks the presence of opponents in the argument is absent from them.¹

It would seem, then, that we were driven for refuge to the apologetic view. But a study of the epistle shows us how unsafe such a refuge would be. For if Paul desired, in writing this epistle, to remove from the Roman church the prejudices which it had against him, because of his hostility to the Jews and his partiality towards the Gentiles, then it is evident that he has taken a strange way of doing it. Granted the pro-Jewish tone of chaps. ix.—xi., how can the argument of chaps. ii.—v., be in any way considered conciliatory to a Jewish element in the church? Where is the applicability of the moral chapters (xii.—xiv.) on this supposition? What reference do they have to Jewish prejudices against his work? or, granted that they have, how would chapter xiv. serve to conciliate the Jewish views?

We come, thus, to the end of our testing of these groups of views by the epistle itself, and we find there is no one of them that we can satisfactorily hold. Where, then, are we to take our place? It seems clear that we must remember there are two things to be considered in the solution of the problem; first, the

¹ Compare chaps. ii., v., with Gal. iii. Also chap. vi., with Gal. v. Also chap. xvi., with 2 Cor. x., xii., and Gal. i., ii., v., vi. And see in general Lipsius, *Holtzm. Kom.*, p. 67 f, and Weiss *Kom.*, p. 28 f, for full treatment of this point.

epistle and then the apostle. In other words, we must first secure a view that will fit in with the exegetic character of our epistle, and then we must put that view to the test of the apostle's historical surroundings at the time of the epistle's composition. Critics are inclined to forget the latter point, much as they insist upon the need of historic criticism in Biblical work. They fail to give sufficient weight to the fact that, even after the epistle's approval has been secured, the peculiarity of the apostle's situation must have at least a veto power in deciding the motive with which the letter was sent from his pen. We must come now to the epistle for ourselves and find from our study of it what conclusions it justifies us in reaching. To make clear to the reader the line of thought which the epistle follows, we ask him simply to recall the outline of its doctrinal argument. After the greeting (i. 1-7) and introduction (i. 8-15) the epistle's theme is stated in verses 16, 17; thereupon follows,

- (A.) The first general division, viz.: The dogmatic presentation of the Gospel Righteousness, as opposed to the alleged Law Righteousness (i. 18-viii. 39), which is subdivided into two parts:
- (A) The necessity of the Gospel Righteousness (i. 18-iii. 20), which necessity is evidenced by the impossibility of a Law Righteousness.
- (a) On the part of the Heathen (i. 18-32).
- (b) On the part of the Jew, (ii. 1-iii. 20).

Having reached this conclusion, the apostle is ready to give

- (B) The positive presentation of the Gospel Righteousness (iii. 21-viii. 39), which presentation is arranged in the following order:
- (a) The historical fact of the provision of this Gospel Righteousness (iii. 21-26).
- (b) Its agreement with the Old Testament Scripture (iii. 27-iv. 25).
- (c) Its surety for the present and all the future (v. 1-11).
- (d) Its universality for the race of man (v. 12-21).
- (e) Its result in the sanctification of the individual believer (vi. 1-viii. 39).

Then follows:

- (B.) The second general division, viz., The presentation of the facts in the case regarding Israel's election, (ix. 1-xi. 36) which is accomplished in the following way:
 - (A) The fact of God's liberty in the election (ix. 1-29).
 - (B) The fact of Israel's responsibility in the election (ix. 30-x. 21).
 - (C) The plan which God has in the election (xi. 1-36).

Brief as this outline is, it cannot be fairly considered without the conclusion being formed that, true as it may be that this epistle is no didactic resumé of the system of Christian truth, or of the circle of Pauline doctrines, it is nevertheless didactic in its form of presenting what truths it does include. Evidently there is here a carefully prepared and conscientiously followed plan of instructing the church at Rome from some specific point of view regarding some specific matter. The claims of the didactic view are justified as far, at least, as concerns the general character of the treatment which the epistle's theme receives. Again, a consideration of the epistle's argument will bring us to the conclusion that, however far it may have been from being motivated by a Judaistic opposition within the Roman church, there was evidently a desire on the apostle's part to direct his instruction against wrong views that his people held. The epistle is not merely instructive, it is argumentatively so; and in saying this we do not confine ourselves simply to the passage, ii. 1-iii. 20, where the claims of the unbelieving Jews are refuted and laid aside. We mean the whole discussion. Place the entire letter, if you will, alongside of Philippians and see the contrast; or, to be particular in comparison, place the theological argument of Philippians, chap. ii., over against the soteriological argument of Romans, chap. xi, and note the difference in tone. There is, to be sure, no party controversy in Romans. There is no trace of any combat against the Judaistic errors. The old struggle of Galatians and Corinthians is not here. But there is throughout the epistle's doctrinal discussion an evident attitude against some error point. It would solve the problem if we could find the point. Is it possible? We come back to the epistle's argument again

and we find ourselves justified in saying, still further, that, while the apostle had no motive towards apologizing before the Jewish prejudices of the church, he had a motive towards preparing the way for his coming to them and his working among them. Godet is right in saying that the introduction of the epistle's argument, by the transition from v. 15 to v. 16 of chap. i., shows clearly the epistle's didactic character.¹ But previous to v. 15 are vs. 8-13, and the transition from them to the epistle's argument shows just as clearly that the instruction which follows is to be an introduction to his own presence and preaching among them. Add, then, to the effect of these preceding verses that of the succeeding ones in chap. xv., where his writing of the epistle is connected with his apostleship to the Gentiles (v. 15 f), and that, in turn, with his soon-to-be-undertaken journey to them (vs. 17-24), and, to use the word in its most general sense, the apologetic character of the letter is without doubt.

But yet this leaves the specific purpose of the letter undiscovered. We have, to be sure, made progress toward the finding of it. We have secured an idea of the general epistolary lay of the land—a didactic argumentative letter sent ahead to prepare for the apostle's coming work. We have even located where the motive is likely to be found—in the erroneous views of his people, which the apostle had in mind when he wrote the letter. Now, as to what these views were, we believe they are very strongly hinted at by what we may term the peculiarities of the epistle's argument. (1) It cannot but be noticed that the argument begins with an arraignment of the morals of the heathen world (ch. i.). Now, logically, this is simply the first part of the general proof that mankind is in need of a righteousness other than his own, and with assigning it its logical place most critics have contented themselves.² But we cannot escape the impression of its signi-

¹ *Com.* p. 57.

² See Godet's outline of the instruction of the epistle, (*Com.* p. 56.) and his more particular reference to it, p. 99; also Lipsius' scheme of epistle's argument *Holtzm's Kom.* p. 4; and his more detailed outline, p. 70, § v; also Weiss's analysis of the passage, *Kom.* p. 73; and his note to p. 236 of his *Einkl.* In all of these it is evident that the beginning of the argument with this church is not given any special meaning.

ficance. Galatians, which treats of the need of a righteousness other than man's own, does not begin its doctrinal argument this way—does not, in fact, introduce this element into its argument at all.¹ It occurs nowhere else in any of the apostle's letters, or in any of his speeches in his mission work. There must have been some reason for its introduction here, and if it be said that the reason is found in the generality of the argument, the apostle going back to the state of the sinful world around him, then we call attention to the counter peculiarity which meets us at the close of the epistle's argument. It cannot be unnoticed that the argument ends with a climax hope of the ultimate salvation of Israel (ch. xi.). Logically, also, this is merely the rounding up of the general discussion of the plan of salvation, as it had to do with the Jewish and Gentile worlds, showing how, in spite of the present rejection of Israel, the promises made to the fathers would ultimately be fulfilled; and with this logical statement of the chapter critics generally are satisfied. But, again, it is difficult for us to escape the impression that there was a significance intended in giving the argument this ending. Galatians has no such ending to its argument—no such feature in it anywhere.² It does not occur elsewhere in the apostle's doctrinal discussion of Israel's future. Why should it occur here? Putting before ourselves these two peculiarities, therefore, we find ourselves asking, why such emphasis should be placed, at the beginning, on the moral death of the heathen world; and why such emphasis, at the end, on the promised future of the Jewish world? And these emphases are rendered still more striking by a third peculiar fact, that, so to speak, lies in between them. The argument in which are considered the views of the unbelieving Jews (ii., iii.) is conducted on a basis of perfect equality between Jew and Gentile in the salvation plan. The Jew is not treated by himself, but in connection with the Gentile; and while his greater advantages are acknowledged and, consequently, his greater guilt in abusing them, the last analysis always brings him to the same level as the Gentile—as without a righteousness before the judgment seat of God

¹ Cf. Gal., ii., iii. ² Cf. Gal., iv.

(ch. ii. 6, 11, 25 ; iii. 9, 10-20, 22, 23, 29-31). Why should this be? We feel these things suggest the conclusion toward which we have all along been tending, and to which we are now ready to come. Paul's purpose was to correct the attitude of the Gentile element in the church at Rome. They were exalting his gospel at the expense of the Jew. His plan in writing the epistle, therefore, was to take up this gospel of his, so far as it was now wrought out, intellectually in his mind and practically in his work, and show that, after all, it did not ignore the Jew, either as an essential element in the Christian church, or as the still unbelieving people of God outside of it. In other words, that his Gentile gospel was not to be overpressed and placed in opposition to all the revelation and work of God so far. That it did not separate the Old and New Dispensations, but rather joined them vitally together. That it did not alienate, but rather united, the Jewish and Gentile Christian life.¹

We are convinced that this, and this alone, explains the introduction of the first chapter. It was the prejudice of the Gentile element in the church which he was combating, and he begins by reminding that element of what they had been, and of what their fellows in the world around them yet were. Gentilism had nothing in which to boast save the merciful grace of God,

¹ If it be said that this view gives a condition of affairs in Rome which lies in the direction of that represented in the Epistle of Barnabas, and that this epistle is of too late a date to stand in any connection with apostolic times, it must be remembered,

(1) That a very early date is claimed for the Epistle of Barnabas—not later than A. D. 119, and (Cunningham) as early as A. D. 79.

(2) That if Colossians and Ephesians represent the beginning tendencies to Gnosticism, it is not impossible that Romans may represent the beginning tendencies of this Anti-Judaistic phase of it.

(3) That, if this is the correct exegesis of the epistle, we are not critically wrong in asking: Why is not a connection with the Epistle of Barnabas thereby established? For, granting the right of historical facts to condition exegesis, the question here is: Are the historical facts in this case sufficiently strong, in themselves, to destroy the exegesis of the epistle which we have presented? We believe the only answer to this question is a negative one.

(4) That Romans is not the only epistle of Paul's in which this attitude towards the Gentile element in his churches is taken. It is present in Eph. and Phil. (Cf. Dods. *Introd. N. T.*, pp. 123-125, 132 note †. Salmon, *Introd. N. T.* pp. 428-431.)

which had rescued it from the wrath of God.¹ If the Jews, in spite of their advantages, entered the kingdom of God by grace, most truly so did they. If the Jews, in spite of their works of the law, had come to the level of faith, thoroughly so had they. And if it be questioned whether this meaning is not perhaps being read into the chapter, we have only to turn to the eleventh chapter, which holds the counter emphasis to it, and see how this very idea runs through it, and even forms the basis of its thought. The Jews yet hold a place in the salvation plan of God, Paul says, for they are yet the people of God, and God hath not cast his people away, (v. 1 f.) They have been rejected, (v. 7.) Yes, but only for the present, in order that this offer of the Gospel might come to the Gentiles, (v. 11 f.) When the fulness of the Gentiles is come in, then they shall be taken back, and all Israel shall be saved, (v. 25 f.) They are the root, the Gentiles are but the branches. There should be then no boasting by the branches against the root. They should not be high-minded, but fear, (vs. 16-2+.) And in this we are convinced the introduction of this eleventh chapter itself is explained. And so also is explained the level placing of Jew and Gentile in the argument of ii. 1—iii. 20. In fact, we feel we are not going too far when we say, so is explained the introduction of the argument against the Jew at all—in order that the Gentile may understand how thoroughly he occupied before God the same place with the Jew (ii. 6-11; iii. 9-20). Paul had argued all through his mission ministry against the self-conceited claims of the Jew. He yet argued against them (ii. 1-5, 17-29). But his argument now has the aim and purpose of bringing Jew and Gentile to the same guilty standing-place before the judgment bar of God (ii. 9f; iii. 9), and to the same gracious standing-place within the kingdom of Christ (iii. 22-24, 28-30). His gospel against the legalism of the Jews had been misunderstood as giving the Gentiles the præminence. He therefore repeats it here in order to

¹ See again Weiss' note (¹) to p. 236 *Eintl.*, where he brings out the fact that the gist of this first chapter is not so much the sinfulness of the heathen world as rather their condemnation under the wrath of God, (*Zornverfallenheit.*)

show its true bearing on Jew and Gentile alike.¹ In view of this it seems to us not impossible to understand the apostle's reason for developing his argument into that of chapters iv. and v. and chapters vi.-viii. He is still repeating his gospel, with this new application of it to Gentile and Jew alike, but to the Gentile first.² And it seems hard not to recognize this same equality as present in the moral part of the epistle (chs. xii.-xv.) with the special reference, however, rather to the offending Gentile element in its liability to be enslaved again in its previous sinful life and in its present disposition to boast.³ While, lastly, it would seem to account for his mention of the offering which he had gathered and was now about to take to the saints at Jerusalem. He brings that into the letter in order to show that, practically, he was not, and never had been, ignoring the Jew in his gospel work.⁴

But we are under duty, now, to enter upon the second stage of our problem's solving. We have apparently accounted for the peculiar character of our epistle by the theory which we have

¹ It is interesting to note how the elements of the apostle's argument in Gal. ii. 14, 17 (on the self-sufficient position of the Jew as over against the Gentile) reproduce themselves in chapter ii. 1, 13, of our epistle; and the elements of the argument, Gal. iii. 10 f., on the inability in the Jew to keep the law, reappear in chapter ii. 17, 24. Also how the elements of the apostle's statement in Gal. v. 3, (as to the slavery of circumcision) come out in the argument of chapter ii. 25-29.

² The inversion of this order in the specific statements of chapters i. 16 and ii. 10 has, of course, nothing to do with the general argument of chapters iv. to viii, and is readily accounted for in the contexts. On the other hand, see the reappearance of the idea of equality in chapter v. 12-19, which equality is not without a trace in the balance between chapters vi. and vii., the argument in chapter vi. being from a Gentile point of view (see vs. 12, 13, 19, 21, which seem to forbid the specific Jewish meaning of *law* in vs. 14), while that in chapter vii. is rather from the Jewish point of view (see vs. 1, 4, 12, 14, 22), while chapter viii. sums up both sides in the common conclusions (see combination of the spirit of chapters vi. and vii. in vs. 2-9, 12-15.)

³ Cf. xii. 2, 3, 9 f., 16; xiii. 13, 14; xiv. 3, 5 f., 13-17, 19-23; xv. 1, 2, 5-7, while note the concluding passage, xv. 8-14, in its connection with the statement about the writing of the letter, vs. 15 f.

⁴ If the above view be correct, it shows in plain light the inconsistency of the old Tübingen position. They rejected the books which showed a balance between Jew and Gentile as being due to *Tendenz*. They accepted Romans, and yet it shows a most evident balance. Why, then, if balance is apparent in other writings, should they not be just as genuinely Paul's as this?

advanced. We must now test that theory by the apostle's peculiar surroundings when he wrote the letter. Does it agree with them? In reply to this let us notice the following facts: Paul had finished his work in the East, and was in purpose now to begin it in the West. But his work in the East had been largely the struggle and victory of his gospel of Gentile Christianity. What gospel more acceptable to the Gentile Christian church—the Pauline Gentile Christian church of Rome? Where would it be more likely to be accepted with heartiness and propagated with zeal?¹ And what more likely than that just this zeal would be an injury to the truth, distort it by overpressing one side of it, hinder it by overburdening one part of it? What, then, was there for Paul to do but send in advance a clear exposition—not of his whole system of Christian truth, but of that particular part of it which had to do with the relation of these two elements of Jew and Gentile in the salvation plan? His gospel, after all, was bound up with the fact of the Jews, with their existence in the economy of redemption, with their preëminence in it, in view of their covenant relation to God²—all of which this overwhelmingly Gentile church of Rome was in danger of underestimating and letting go by. So, then, our view of Paul's motive agrees with just the historical situation in which the apostle found himself at the letter's writing. This being the situation in which he was, this was exactly the sort of a letter we would expect him to write.

We do not present this view, of course, with the hope that it will satisfy those who have worked out other theories; but we believe it will satisfy many of the necessities in the epistle on which these theories have been worked out. It will account for the didactic cast given to the epistle; for the misunderstanding of the apostle's gospel into which the Gentile element of this church had fallen necessitated that the true principles of that gospel should be didactically presented to it. It will account for what polemic tone there may be in certain portions of the letter; for the attitude which this Gentile element had assumed towards the Jewish element was one that needed to be opposed and very de-

¹ See Weiss' hint at this very situation of affairs. *Kom.*, p. 20, § 2.

² See this in the epistle's theme, chap. i. 16, 17.

cidedly rebuked. It will account for the apologetic attitude which the apostle assumes in his writing; for the apostle's future work throughout the West was in the balance, and a removing of prejudices and a correcting of misinterpretations was necessary if that work was to be saved from hindering interference. At the same time, also, this view offers an explanation—whether the right one or not we are willing to leave to the criticism of others—of the peculiarities in the epistle which none of these theories wholly cover. It is well enough for Godet to say that this letter presents, in writing, the course of instruction which Paul was accustomed to give in other churches by word of mouth.¹ But how does that touch the selection of views which the letter has gathered into its instruction, and the strangeness of the way in which they are presented? It is right enough to say, with the Weizäcker school, that the attitude which the apostle has assumed in his epistle is one of hostility to opposing views.² But how does that account for his attitude being against the Gentile rather than the Jewish element? It is all proper to hold, as has been done so generally since Theodore Schott suggested it, that it was an apologetic idea which the apostle had in sending the letter ahead of his own coming.³ But how does that explain the peculiarity of the church's Gentile attitude towards that work and the necessity of the apostle's restraining attitude against it?

In our opinion, Weiss is the one to whom is due, in largest measure, the credit of turning the critics in the right direction. He has shown that, if the epistle is to be lifted up to its rightful level, it is not by holding any one of the old line views, but by allowing to enter into the epistle's purpose the situation in which the apostle found himself at the letter's writing, namely, at the turning point between his finished work in the East, and his untried work in the West; and also the position of the church to which he was writing, namely, the position of influence and power for all this

¹ *Com.*, p. 56-58.

² See specially Grafe's brochure, *Ueber Veranlassung u. Zweck des Römerbriefes*, (1881.)

³ See his *Römerbrief seinem Endzweck u. Gedankengang nach ausgelegt*, (1858.)

western world and all this untried work. So that it became an easily natural thing for him to write this epistle, which should place before his people his gospel in its world-wide meaning for Jew as well as Gentile—a gospel which knew no party in the church.¹ This is undoubtedly a point of view which cannot critically be ignored. But the question remains, why did Paul present to this world-important church of Rome his Jew and Gentile embracing gospel? We feel it is inadequate to answer, as Weiss does, that Paul wanted this great church to be the representative to all future time of an undivided Christianity. This gives the spirit of the letter, a dignified spirit we admit, well fitting the circumstances of its composition; but it is not the spirit of the letter for which we are searching.² What we want is the specific purpose for which the letter was written, and which lay behind its general spirit. The question is: What was the definite object which the apostle had before him in view of the condition of affairs in the church at Rome?³ We believe this question is answered by the view which we have tried, however imperfectly, to present—the correcting of the attitude of the Gentile element in the church. And if it accomplishes nothing in the future study of the epistle beyond bringing this element into a more careful consideration, assigning it, at least, a more definite place in the church's position towards the apostle, and a more decided part in the apostle's thought towards the church, we will be satisfied.

MELANCTHON W. JACOBUS.

Theological Seminary, Hartford, Conn.

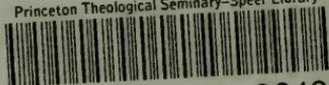
¹ *Kom.* pp. 31-33. *Einl.*, pp. 233-235.

² The fact is, this general spirit of an undivided Christianity may be said to have been present in most of Paul's letters, though not in the same significant way as in the epistles of his captivity and in this epistle to Rome. See especially 1 Cor. xii., xvi.; 2 Cor. xiii.

³ Holtzmann shows this in the advance which he makes upon Weiss' view. See his *Einl.*, pp. 240, 241. See also Hilgenfeld's article* in *Zeitschrift für Wiss. Theol.*, quoted above. And Lipsius, *Einl.* to his *Kom. über d. Römerbrief*.

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Paul's purpose in writing Romans.

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