

- 1 Before there was original sin, the "intelligent design" of us included our mortality (Gn.3: not eat of the tree of life & "live forever"). But the "redesign" does include immortality (as a gift: "new birth," "resurrection," "eternal life").
- 2 Postmortal human life is implicit not in humanity but in God's hegemony--the sovereignty of God (the Trinity as thrice "Lord"), the power of Christ's resurrection. PARADOX: (a) Human decisional freedom/responsibility/accountability is real (therefore, eternal life is conditional); (b) God's love is UNconditional & his promises "irreversible" (Ro.11.29 & he'll have "mercy on all"--v.32).
- 3 In the sphere of universalism (same v.), what's special about the universal salvation of Jews ("all Israel," v.26, [HCStudyB] "on the same basis as Gentiles, i.e., by faith"--v.23 NRSV, "if they do not persist in unbelief")?
- 4 10.1, Paul's prayer that the Jews "may be" (not will be) saved.
- 5 God's freedom to "harden[s] the heart of whomever he chooses" (9.18) frees God (in Paul's mind) from the accusation, the accusation that his word "failed" (v.6) to win most Jews to Christ. But furthermore, just being a Jew is not proof that you "belong to Israel" (same v.): (v.8) "it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise," & these are the Christians--Gal.6.16; N.T.Wright says that here, "the Israel of God" is not Jews; but in Ro.11.1, God's people are the Jews, who (v.12) will come to "full inclusion" in the gospel; (vv.25-26) it's a "mystery," but the "hardening [which] has come upon part of Israel" is temporary: mystery in that (v.33) we can't penetrate into God's "unsearchable" judgments & "indecipherable" ways).
- 6 Unlike antisupersessionists, who calmly accept the fact that most Jews refuse Jesus as Lord & Savior & (some of them) even consider the Jews on a different salvation-track, Paul offers the gospel "to the Jews first" (Ro.1.16) & (9.2-3) has "great sorrow and unceasing anguish" over their rejection of the gospel (& v.3, would even give up his own salvation if it could lead to theirs).
- 7 The righteousness necessary to salvation "has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction" (Ro.3.21-22).
- 8 No theodic problem: since God's promise was through Abraham's faith, & not through the (Israelite-Jewish) law, it "rests on grace" offered in Jesus Christ to all: God's grace-faith-promise is 100% effective (Ro.4.13-16). In claiming that God's promise, to be successful, must be effective with all Jews else it would be "reversible" (Ro.11.29), the antisupersessionists use one word in Ro.11 to cancel the argument of Ro.3 & 4.
- 9 Ro.10.3: Jews are "ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God" & "have not submitted to God's righteousness." Next v.: "For Christ is the end [both completion & termination] of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes." Can any supersessionist top that? (In loco, THE NEW INTERPRETER'S STUDY BIBLE: "righteousness in Christ ends all other attempted means of justification.")
- 10 The UCC GS25's semi-restoration of "Jesus is Lord" should contribute to more real Jewish/Christian conversations. The earliest Xn sermon proclaims Jesus as Lord (Ac.2.36), & the kneeling / spoken allegiance to YHWH (Is.45.23) was early applied to Jesus (Phil.2.11)--the YHWH-Jesus identification, that which nothing else could be as offensive to Jews (cp. the tight ID, "my Lord and My God!" [Jn.20.28]). The early Christians taught that we are saved by specific sounds, viz. "Kurios Iesous" ("Jesus is Lord") from our "lips" (Ro.10.9), our "mouth" (v.10), "tongue" (Phil.2.11). "Lord" is the Jesus title in which we Christians are to be "rooted and built up in him" (Col.2.6).
- 11 Jesus told his disciples to preach the gospel to the Jews (Ac.1.8), but anti-supersessionists (in a "kind of anti-Semitism"--209 of D.Bloesch's THE LAST THINGS [IVP/04], in chap.10, "Israel's Salvation: The Supersessionist Controversy") are against it; Bloesch is not. 207: Jesus is "the Torah personified." 208: Judaism will "merge" into Christianity. 207-208: Hebrews "could possibly be designated as a supersessionist book" (the only relief being 11.40). Recently at UTS:NY I heard a prof say it should'nt be in the NT--but we have OT/"NT" only in Hebrews: 8.6: Jesus "the mediator of a better covenant...better promises" (the first covenant is "obsolete" [v.13]; "a new covenant" [9.5]; Judaism was a fore-"shadow" of the gospel [10.1]).

Romans 11.23 NRSV: Jews will be grafted back into the tree of salvation "if they do not persist in unbelief" in Jesus. †

REFLECTIONS on this morning's meeting discussing chap.10 ("Israel's Salvation: The Supersessionist Controversy") of Don.Bloesch's THE LAST THINGS (IVP/04)

1 General comments on the chapter (I, as session-leader, going last). General opinion: Bloesch here leans too supersessionist. I then distributed the reverse side of this Thinksheet for future reading, asking that attention be paid only to the vertical sentence (based on Ro.11.23). When we turned to the chapter to process it page by page, I was shocked to notice that the first sentence after the chapter's subtitle was this quote from the controversy's most embattled Bible chapter!

2 This morning, before the session, I studied the verse (Ro.11.23) in 11 commentaries on Romans, being esp. concerned to find any softening of its conditional "if"--but found none: Paul's gospel allows for no exceptions: as in 1.16-17 (salvation is "to everyone who has faith" [that Jesus is Lord], no Jew/Greek distinction), in 11.23 Jews who "persist in unbelief" [that Jesus is Lord] are unsaved, ungrafted into the living organism.

3 The hermeneutical puzzle is this: since Ro.11 thus clearly states that persistent Jewish unbelievers in Jesus are excluded from salvation, how could anyone spin anything else in this chapter to deny their clear exclusion? A fundamental hermeneutical principle is that in any text, something clear has priority over anything less clear, esp. anything canceling the clarity. Yet antisupersessionists do indeed find in the same chapter some multivalent phrases useful for canceling Paul's univocal & absolute "if," the central "if" of his either/or Christian call to repentance & faith. Further, a solid canonical principle is that any biblical text is to be understood not only in its own particular literary context but also in the context of the total canon, the whole Bible (which, for Bloesch, as for most Christians, includes the Apocrypha).

Now, what happens when we focus these two klieg lights on Ro.11? (1) v.23's exclusion of persistently unbelieving Jews is supported by a multitude of NT texts stating unequivocally the sheep/goats, saved/lost divide between Jesus-believers & Jesus-unbelievers; (2) nowhere else in the NT is there any suggestion that this polarity can be rightly compromised, to say nothing (with the antisupersessionists) of canceled (by the post-Holocaust peshering [spinning] of vv.25-32).

4 Peshering? All the leading antisupersessionists confess/ed that horror/shame of the Holocaust was/is the basic historical reason for their taking a new look at what the NT says about Jesus-rejecting Jews. The Qumran Scrolls, esp. the biblical commentaries, show heremeneutical spinings [Heb.-Aram., "pesher"] from the shock of historical horrors (1st the corruption of the temple, 2nd the destruction of Jerusalem). We are able to use Qumran's pesher-distortions of Scripture to understand, sympathetically, the antisupersessionists' pesher-distortions of Paul, esp. in Ro.11. But few biblical scholars have challenged the antisupersessionists' Bible abuse: who wants to be called antisemitic?

5 An official UCC antisupersessionist pronouncement does well to "recommend... conversational theology" (LIVING THEOLOGICAL HERITAGE 7.612), but "diverse [Christian] voices" should not include excluding Jews from the "all" whom the Great Commission (Mt.28.19-20) enjoins us to seek for Christian baptism & obedience. (It's the only NT passage in which the Holy Name ["onoma"] is specifically trinitarian.)

6 Because Jesus so stood out as a mercy preacher as to be open to the accusation (by hearers of his radical parables) of being regardless of justice's downside, viz. judgment, apostolic preaching (the NT) announced grace more than it pronounced negative retribution & denounced sinners. Rejectors of the message were in danger of eternal loss, but (2P.3.9 TEV) "the Lord...does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins" (cp. "mercy on all" [Ro.11.32; vs.26: "all Israel"]; "all will proclaim...Jesus is Lord" [Phil.2.10-11]*; "I will draw everyone to me" [Jn.12.32 TEV]). (Indicatives with optative [hoping] force.)

7 The NT's theodicy is, on the resisting-Jews issue, heuristic (there being no picture on the box of jigsaw pieces, & no pieces may be discarded)--with these sureties: (1) God is (in DB's phrase) "ganz gewiss" (entirely reliable); (2) Jesus alone can save; (3) "Jesus is Lord" of some & will be Lord of all.