

EXPOSITION AND EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 1:3-4: Early Tradition and Pauline, to what Extent?

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Résumé de l'article

Depuis de nombreuses années et encore aujourd'hui, le contenu de Rom 1,3-4 a beaucoup attiré l'attention des exégètes et des théologiens. Il y a dans cette péricope des éléments qui témoignent d'un matériel pré-paulinien tandis que d'autres sont des expressions pauliniennes. De manière plus précise, les versets 3a et 4e pourraient être considérés respectivement comme l'introduction et la conclusion de la riche formule contenue en 3b-4d. Paul y a ajouté la précision « avec puissance » et le substantif ἁγιωσύνη, déjà communs dans ses lettres antérieures à Romains (et dans cette lettre elle-même) et, dans certains cas, mis en relation directement ou en lien étroit avec le Saint-Esprit. L'usage du langage de la sainteté n'est pas seulement limité à 2 Co 7, 1 et 1 Th 3, 13 mais il est encore présent dans d'autres passages pauliniens attribuant parfois expressément à l'Esprit Saint la fonction de sanctification.

EXPOSITION AND EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 1:3-4: Early Tradition and Pauline, to what Extent?

JOHN S. ADIMULA

1. Introduction

The aim of this article is to provide new biblical arguments in support of the presence of both the early tradition's material anterior to Paul and Paul's redaction in Rom 1:3-4. It will argue that the evidence to support Paul's redaction in this pericope, especially with regard to the expression ἐν δυνάμει ("in power") and the substantive ἁγιωσύνη ("holiness"), is not limited to only two Pauline passages (2 Cor 7:1 and 1 Thess 3:13); rather they are common to other Pauline passages even before Romans and in the letter to the Romans itself. It will further argue that, with the redaction by Paul, verse 4 does not incorporate moral implication of the believers but refers to Christ's spiritual condition, a passage that is fundamentally Christological. It will then conclude that, with the rapprochement of the usage of the substantive and the language of holiness with the Holy Spirit in other Pauline letters, κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης ("spirit of holiness" Rom 1:4) could be understood as the Spirit who sanctifies as suggested by Paul's modification.

For centuries, scholars have been engaging with the introductory part of the letter to the Romans. Rom 1:1-4 contains rich information that not only expresses Paul's experiences of faith in Christ, but also incorporates faith expressions he inherited.¹ Many scholars argue for the presence of pre-Pauline material in the *exordium* of Romans, but not all of them agree on the same level. They differ in what it is that is traditional and what is Pauline.² Some

1. It was Johannes Weiss who first suggested pre-Pauline material/origin in Rom 1:3-4 (Johannes WEISS, *Das Urchristentum*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917, p. 89).

2. See for example Vernon H. NEUFELD, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1963, p. 50; Werner KRAMER, *Christ, Lord, Son of God* (Studies in Biblical Theology, 50), London, SCM, 1966, pp. 109-111; Robert JEWETT, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Situations* (Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums, 10), Leiden, Brill, 1971, pp. 453-456; Klaus WENGST, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums* (Studien zum Neuen Testament, 7), Güttersloh, Gerd Mohn, 1972, pp. 112-114; Paul-Émile LANGEVIN, "Une confession prépaulinienne de la 'Seigneurie' du Christ.

scholars doubt the presence of pre-Pauline material in verses 3-4,³ while others do not see any redaction by Paul.⁴

2. Brief Literary Observations on Rom 1:1-4

In line with the normal way of writing a letter in the Greco-Roman world of Paul, the letter to the Romans begins with the name of the sender, Paul.⁵ He is not just Paul that could easily be confused with other personalities who bore the same name during his time and perhaps in the same Christian congregation, but he is Paul a servant/slave of Jesus Christ, an apostle.⁶ He is concerned with the gospel of God⁷ which is traceable to the Holy Scriptures and promised long ago through the prophets. Here, Paul employs both the prophetic and

Exégèse de Romains 1, 3-4," in Raymond LAFLAMME – Michel GERVAIS (ed.), *Le Christ hier, aujourd'hui, et demain*, Québec, Université Laval, 1976, pp. 284-291; Jürgen BECKER, *Auferstehung der Toten im Urchristentum*, Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1976, pp. 23-24; Heinrich ZIMMERMANN, *Neutestamentliche Methodenlehre: Darstellung der historisch-kristischen Method*, Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1982, p. 198; Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary* (Hermeneia), Minneapolis MN, Fortress, 2007, p. 98; Matthew W. BATES, "A Christology of Incarnation and Enthronement: Romans 1:3-4 as Unified, Nonadoptionist, and Nonconciliatory," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 77 (2015), pp. 107-127.

3. Vern S. POYTHRESS, "Is Romans 1:3-4 a Pauline Confession After All?," *Expository Times*, 87 (1976), pp. 180-183; James M. SCOTT, *Adoption as Sons of God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of ΥΙΟΘΕΣΙΑ in the Pauline Corpus* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 48), Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1992, pp. 229-236; Christopher G. WHITSETT, "Son of God, Seed of David: Paul's Missionary Exegesis in Romans 1:3-4," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 119 (2000), pp. 661-681; David J. MACLEOD, "Eternal Son, Davidic Son, Messianic Son: An Exposition of Romans 1:1-7," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 162 (2005), p. 82.

4. Oscar CULLMANN, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, London, Lutterworth, 1949, pp. 55-56; Archibald M. HUNTER, *Paul and His Predecessors*, London, SCM, 1961, pp. 25-28; Vernon H. NEUFELD, *The Earliest Christian Confessions*, pp. 50-51; Bernadin SCHNEIDER, "κατὰ πνεῦμα ἀγιοσύνης (Romans 1,4)," *Biblica*, 48 (1967), pp. 360-369; Hans-Werner BARTSCH, "Zur vorpaulinischen Bekenntnisformel im Eingang des Römerbriefes," *Theologische Zeitschrift*, 23 (1967), pp. 329-339; Ernest BEST, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans* (Cambridge Bible Commentary), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967, pp. 10-11.

5. For further exploration of the prescript see: Otto ROLLER, *Das Formular der paulinischen Briefe. Ein Beitrag zur Lehre vom antiken Briefe*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1933, pp. 55-61; Heikki KOSKENNIEMI, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* (Annales Academiæ Scientiarum Fennicæ, 102), Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1956, pp. 155-156; Chan-Hie KIM, *The Form and Structure of the Familiar Greek Letter of Recommendation* (Society of Biblical Literature. Dissertation Series, 4), Missoula MT, Scholars Press, 1972, pp. 9-21; William G. DOTY, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, Philadelphia PA, Fortress, 1973, pp. 12-17; Klaus BERGER, "Apostelbrief und apostolische Rede: Zum Formular frühchristlicher Briefe," *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 65 (1974), pp. 191-207.

6. The elaborate nature of the introductory section might be due to the fact that Paul has not met personally his audience. In this way, the expanded prescript helps to establish his right and authority to write to the Roman Christian communities. See also Heikki KOSKENNIEMI, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.*, pp. 155-167; Samuel BRYSKOG, "Epistolography, Rhetoric and Letter Prescript: Romans 1.1-7 as a Test Case," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 65 (1997), pp. 37, 40.

7. The same language is used in Gal 1:15: "set apart" for the Gospel of God.

scriptural evidence to back up the authenticity of his gospel.⁸ The centre of the gospel is “his Son” who descended from the Davidic line. One notices the gradual presentation of history in a very concise form. In the flesh, “his Son” came from the genealogy of David reflecting the messianic expectations after the reign of King David.⁹ The author describes this Son as the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness given access to by the resurrection.¹⁰ Verse 4 concludes with the clear identity of the subject of the gospel who is the Son of God, Jesus Christ with his exalted title, Lord.

The sequence of what follows after the writer’s identification of himself is as follows:

- 1) The gospel of God
- 2) Which is not very new but contained in the Holy Scriptures preached or spoken about by the prophets
- 3) This gospel is about “his Son”
- 4) Who is described from the lineage of David, testifying to the prophets’ testimonies of “his Son” being the son of David
- 5) By complement, “his Son” is also the Son of God. This identity is clearly revealed by his resurrection. In other words, his resurrection enlightens his followers of his special relationship with God
- 6) This Son is Jesus Christ
- 7) Who is now Lord following his resurrection and exaltation.

8. Some scholars think that with the usage of these terms at the beginning of this letter, Paul is probably adapting liturgical tradition in verse 2, since that appears to be the only time Paul makes such claims: Hans-Jürgen van der MINDE, *Schrift und Tradition bei Paulus. Ihre Bedeutung und Funktion im Römerbrief* (Paderborner Theologische Studien, 3), Munich, Schöningh, 1976, p. 39; Otto MICHEL, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978, p. 70; Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary*, p. 103.

9. See for example 2 Sam 7:12-16 which gingers the Old Testament messianic expectation: Isa 11:1,10; Jer 23:5-6; 30:9; 33:14-18; Ezek 34:23-24; 37:24-25. See also *Pss Sol* 17:21; 4Q174 10-13. See more in Dennis DULING, “The Promises to David and Their Entrance into Christianity: Nailing Down a likely Hypothesis,” *New Testament Studies*, 20 (1973-1974), pp. 55-77.

10. The resurrection is likely precisely that of Jesus just as other events in the pericope refer specifically to Jesus: see John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent. A Dialectic of Flesh-Spirit at the Root of New Testament Pneumatology* (Études Bibliques, Nouvelle Série 85), Leuven – Paris – Bristol CT, Peeters, 2021, pp. 118-119; see also Hans LIETZMANN, *An die Römer* (Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, 8), Tübingen, Mohr, 1928, p. 25; Jürgen BECKER, *Auferstehung der Toten im Urchristentum*, Stuttgart, Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1976, pp. 30-31; Jacob KREMER, “ἀνάστασις κτλ.,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 1 (1990), p. 92; who believe that it refers precisely to the resurrection of Christ. Certain scholars see the reference to the general resurrection: S. H. HOOKE, “The Translation of Romans 1.4,” *New Testament Studies*, 9 (1962-1963), pp. 370-371; James D. G. DUNN, “Jesus – Flesh and Spirit: An Exposition of Romans 1.3-4.,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, 24 (1973), p. 56; Ernst KÄSEMANN, *Commentary on Romans*, Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans, 1980, p. 12; Hans-Werner BARTSCH, “Zur vorpaulinischen Bekenntnisformel im Eingang des Römerbriefes,” pp. 330-335.

Verses 3-4 could be distinguished from verses 1-2 structurally. Verse 1 contains the normal author's introduction of his identity; he talks about himself so that the recipients could know from whom they are receiving the letter. Verse 2 continues the claim of the author of what he is called to do. From 3a he mentions the content of the gospel "his Son."¹¹

Verses 3b to 4d, though continuing the description of who the content of the gospel is, touch on the deeper issue of the messianic promise to David. They show some striking elements such as flesh-spirit antithesis, Son of God (again after "his Son" of v. 3a), and resurrection. Grammatically, one discovers other terminologies, the two verbs: to descend and to appoint.¹² The tone changes from 3b-4.¹³ These verses briefly describe Christ's mystery of entrances into the earthly realm and into the spiritual realm beautifully expressed with the antithesis of flesh-spirit. The idea that the Son descended from David is not Pauline. Paul is here quoting (or rather referencing) the tradition before him.¹⁴ The resurrection of Jesus which forms the backbone of verse 4 is also not originated from Paul. The belief in and the expressions about Jesus' resurrection began earlier before Paul came into the picture.

Based on these two reasons above, verses 3b-4d could be set aside for further examination. These two verses contain elements that are not originally Pauline's expressions. Based on this too, one would not agree with the scholars who feel that every element in Rom 1:3-4 is typically Pauline.¹⁵ Rather one will go with those who find pre-Pauline elements, but to what extent are those elements pre-Pauline? Can one suspect Paul's redaction as well? If yes (as some scholars have shown), to what extent and what evidence to show for it?

11. See below for the breaking of the pericope into verses.

12. For the translation of the verb ὀρίζω (to appoint), see Leslie C. ALLEN, "The Old Testament Background of (προ)ὀρίζειν in the New Testament," *New Testament Studies*, 17 (1970-1971), pp. 104-108; Gerhard SCHNEIDER, "ὀρίζω," *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 2 (1991), p. 532; Nicholas DODSON – Brian SCALISE, "An Inquiry in the Early Creed of Romans 1:3-4: Does the Word 'ΟΡΙΖΩ Support an Adoptionistic Christianity?," *Eruditio Ardescens*, 2 (2016), pp. 1-14; for more on this verb see John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, pp. 116-118.

13. For example, these verses engage in third person singular pronoun unlike the surrounding environments which engage in the "I" and "we" (vv. 1-2,5) of Paul and the "you" of the Romans (vv. 6-7); for more details on the distinctive characteristics of the pericope see John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, p. 96-97.

14. The connection of Jesus to the Davidic descent seems unusual in Pauline letters. See for example Paul's thought in 2 Cor 5:16: "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view [according to the flesh]; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view [according to the flesh], we know him no longer in that way." The reference to his physical descent in Rom 9:5 has no mention of Davidic scion. In the New Testament, the title "son of David" appears in Mt 1:1; 2 Tim 2:8 (a passage which is also regarded as testifying to the early tradition); Rev 5:5; 22:16.

15. See note 3 above for some of those scholars.

3. Division of Rom 1:3b-4d

The division will help to easily refer to each part of the pericope in the course of this discussion and to identify different characteristic features.

3a περί τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ (concerning his Son)

3b τοῦ γενομένου (was descended)	4a τοῦ ὀρισθέντος (was appointed)
3c ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ (from the seed of David) ¹⁶	4a+ υἱοῦ Θεοῦ (Son of God)
	4d ἐξ ἀναστάσεως νεκρῶν (by resurrection from the dead)
	4b ἐν δυνάμει (in power)
3d κατὰ σάρκα (according to flesh)	4c κατὰ πνεῦμα (ἀγιωσύνης) (according to the spirit of holiness)

4e Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν (Jesus Christ our Lord)

Based on the parallel structure, the uncommon vocabularies and the style of the verbs, 3a and 4e could be taken as what Paul uses to introduce and conclude the pericope respectively.¹⁷ The structure of verses 3b-4d is unique within the context of the introductory section of the letter. It displays antitheses which play between the entrances into two opposing realms. In fact, this portion of the introduction shows Jesus' entrance into human existence and spiritual existence. These antithetical expressions are shown with: son/seed of David – Son of God; flesh – spirit; descent from the seed of David – resurrection from the dead. “Son of David” portrays Jesus' human identity traceable to King David; while “Son of God” portrays his spiritual identity. The descent from the seed of David is antithetical to the resurrection from the dead in that, the former is the means through which Jesus enters earthly condition while the latter is the means through which he enters the spiritual condition. The flesh in verse 3 opposes the spirit in verse 4. The former portrays the earthly condition while the latter the spiritual condition which was given access to by the resurrection.¹⁸

16. 3c could be regarded as antithetical to both 4a+ and 4d. 3c and 4d usher in the earthly and the spiritual existences respectively. See more in John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, p. 105.

17. For detail on these distinctive features see John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, pp. 105-106, 123-124. Some scholars even believe that Paul added only these (v. 3a and v. 4e) to encase the traditional formula: Peter STUHLMACHER, “Theologische Probleme des Römerbriefpräskripts,” *Evangelische Theologie* 27 (1967), pp. 374-389; Ferdinand HAHN, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity*, New York NY, World, 1969, pp. 246-252; Ulrich WILCKENS, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Vol. 1 (Evangelisch-katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, 6), Zurich, Benziger, 1978, pp. 56-65; Ernst KÄSEMANN, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 13.

18. See detail in John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, pp. 114-116.

Again, to what extent does this pericope contain pre-Pauline material? Scholars have debated on this topic to decipher what is pre-Pauline and what is Pauline. Robert Jewett has offered an interesting hypothesis with three stages of development and modifications.¹⁹ First, he recognizes that verses 3-4 are not completely Paul's original composition. The three stages are: 1) Jewish Christian composition which expresses the mystery of Christ in their early development and reflections. 2) With the interpenetration with the Hellenistic community, the first composition was modified by the Hellenistic Christian community. 3) This was finally modified by Paul as further reflections grew on Christian thoughts. The Jewish Christian's composition only contains 3b (was descended), 3c (from the seed of David), 4a (was appointed Son of God), and 4d (by the resurrection from the dead). The second stage includes 'according to (the) flesh' (3d) and 'according to (the) spirit' (4c) influenced by the Hellenistic cultural attachment to πνεῦμα. Then Paul added the substantive and the expression "in power."²⁰

The primary reason for these modifications is that Christianity was getting to understand the person of Jesus. The process was gradual based on the experiences of the early Christians. It appears that at first, the early Christians did not fully understand Jesus as transcendent in the way Paul later comes to understand and express it in his theology and Christology. This early understanding is reflected in the composition of the original pre-Pauline creed. Gradually as more insights and reflections opened up on Christ Event and the promises of God to Israel, modifications were made to complement the original both from the Hellenistic Christian community and Paul. Jewett would talk about the aim of Paul's mission to Spain as one of the reasons for the incorporation of the traditional material and his redaction so that it would serve as a binding belief for the two communities (Jewish and Hellenistic).

4. "According to flesh" (v. 3d) and "according to spirit" (of holiness) (v. 4c)

This expression would not have been originally Pauline. The "spirit of holiness" is not found elsewhere in both the Old Testament and the New Testament but in the *Testament of Levi* (18:11). Some scholars propose a literal translation of

19. Robert JEWETT, "The Redaction and Use of an Early Christian Confession in Romans 1:3-4," in Dennis E. GROH – Robert JEWETT (ed.), *The Living Text: Essays in Honor of Ernest W. Saunders*, Lanham MD, University Press of America, 1985, pp. 99-122; Robert JEWETT, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Situations*, pp. 136-138; Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary*, pp. 104-107.

20. Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary*, pp. 103-108; see also John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, pp. 121-126.

the Semitic-like Hebrew expression רוּחַ קֹדֶשׁ (ruah qedoshah).²¹ But it is difficult to justify the Greek rendition as the Holy Spirit. There is no evidence to correlate the Greek with the Hebrew here.²²

The meaning that the antithesis carries within the context of verses 3-4 is not evident in the Pauline corpus. Paul is fond of using the binomial terms flesh-spirit within anthropological and moral perspectives, and in some cases as human components.²³ In another sense, Paul employs the same opposing expressions to distinguish the status of birth between the free-born and the slave (Gal 4:29). Its usage in Rom 1:3-4 within a different context (referring to Jesus' human existence and spiritual condition respectively) is alien in the Pauline corpus.²⁴ A close passage is 1 Cor 15:45, but the antithesis plays between ψυχή and πνεῦμα within the context of the believers.²⁵ This further suggests that Paul is using another source. In addition, early investigation of the manner of expression of faith by the early Christian communities, both Jewish and Greek backgrounds, shows the usages of antitheses in conveying and explaining their beliefs.²⁶

Jewett's proposition seems tenable that after the Hellenistic Christian community's modification with the addition of κατὰ σάρκα and κατὰ πνεῦμα, Paul while incorporating this traditional formula in his letter added the phrase ἐν δυνάμει "in power" and the substantive ἁγιωσύνη "holiness." However, it seems that Jewett's argument is not enough to buttress this assertion. His argument could be summarized as follows: 1) for the phrase "in power," Paul added it in order to discourage the idea of adoptionism perceived in the original material. To further this point of Jewett, one could also claim that Paul has further reflected on the mystery of Christ and has come to understand the Son of God as not just from the messianic point of view but also from the transcendent perspective, hence his caption of "his Son" in verse 3a and the addition of "in power" to the creedal formula. Paul's interest in the pre-existent

21. See for example Henry P. LIDDON, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, London, Longmans, 1893, p. 4; James D. G. DUNN, "Jesus—Flesh and Spirit: An Exposition of Romans 1.3-4," p. 143; James D. G. DUNN, *Romans 1-8*, Vol. 1 (Word Biblical Commentary, 38A), Dallas TX, Word, 1980, p. 15.

22. See John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, pp. 114, 132-133 for more on this expression.

23. See few examples: Rom 8:4-8; 1 Cor 5:3,5; Gal 3:3; 5:17; Col 2:5.

24. See also Egon BRANDENBURGER, *Fleisch und Geist. Paulus und die dualistische Weisheit* (Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament, 29), Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1968, pp. 44-52; Robert JEWETT, *Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Situations*, pp. 453-456.

25. For detail analysis of 1 Cor 15:45 in respect to this antithesis in Rom 1:3-4 see John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, p. 155.

26. See Joseph KROLL, *Die christliche Hymnodik bis zu Klemens von Alexandria*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968, pp. 3-10. See also the abasement and exaltation language in Phil 2:6-11.

lordship of Christ also favours this redaction.²⁷ 2) For the substantive: a) Paul added “holiness” in order to avoid the tendency of libertinism perceived in the addition by the Hellenistic Christian community. By this addition, he calls them to be responsible even in their charismatic freedom; b) Jewett cites two major Pauline passages where, according to him, the substantive is used within moral contexts: 1 Thess 3:13 and 2 Cor 7:1.

Where it seems that Jewett’s supportive pieces of evidence are not sufficient lie on the following: 1) the passages and their contexts he cites for the substantive. 2) There are few (or no specific) passages to support the claim that Paul was conversant with the phrase “in power.” 3) There is no clear cut between Jewett’s connection of the traditional formula with the moral obligations of the believers and the action of the Holy Spirit. Efforts will now be made to supply these insufficiencies.

5. The Phrase ἐν δυνάμει: Its Usages in the Pauline Corpus

This expression is found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus even before the letter to the Romans. This is not the case, for example, with the verb ὀρίζω found also in the same credal formula which does not appear again in the Pauline corpus. The expression “in power” is already common to Paul before writing the letter to the Romans. He uses ἐν δυνάμει 5 times in the letters anterior to Romans that are considered undisputed²⁸ and 5 times in other letters including Romans (excluding Rom 1:4).²⁹ It is appropriate to lay more emphasis on those letters that are anterior to Romans where the phrase appears: 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Cor 2:5; 4:20; 15:43; 2 Cor 6:7 and 2 Thess 1:11 (if it is considered originally Pauline).

In 1 Thess 1:5, Paul was talking about the message of the gospel that is being communicated to the believers as something that does not only come to them in word but in power and in the Holy Spirit. This means that the reception of the gospel is not just through the preaching of the word but that there is a force behind it which turns the believers into accepting it. One notices that as early as in this letter, this phrase is already being used by Paul. The context of its usage in 2 Thess 1:11 is the coming judgment of Christ where Paul prays for the believers for God to make them worthy of his call, and in the power of God, fulfil their good resolve and work of faith. It is the power

27. For example, his incorporation of Phil 2:6-11 shows this belief (also in Col 1:15-20); see also Klaus WENGST, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, p. 114; Christoph BURGER, *Jesus als Davidsohn. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Forschungen zur Religion und Lliteratur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, 98), Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970, pp. 31-32.

28. 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Cor 2:5; 4:20; 15:43; 2 Cor 6:7.

29. Rom 15:13,19 (2x); Col 1:29; 2 Thess 1:11.

(of God) that helps the faithful hold firmly to the work of faith performed in good intentions. Paul is not exhorting them to do good or to avoid evil, but praying specifically for the fulfilment of every good resolve aided by (the) power (ἐν δυνάμει). 1 Cor 2:4-5 is similar to 1 Thess 1:5 in context. Paul is convinced that his proclamation of Christ crucified, who is the content and subject of his gospel (1 Thess 1:5), is not just with the use of plausible words of wisdom but with a demonstration of the Spirit and power. What confirms and makes effective his efforts is the power behind the gospel and the Holy Spirit; and so, the emphasis is for the believers to put their faith not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

The expression ἐν δυνάμει is employed in 1 Cor 4:20 within the context of moral behaviour and admonition. Paul expresses his desire to come to Corinth and deal with what is behind the arrogant talk which had been reported to him. His immediate audience understood what he meant by this “talk of these arrogant people.” His main concern is not on the talk but on the power of the Kingdom, “for the Kingdom of God depends not on talk but ἐν δυνάμει.” The chapter that follows immediately this verse reveals what is at stake: the problem of sexual immorality. Its usage in 1 Cor 15:43 is found within the context of the resurrection body which distinguishes between two modes of existence, earthly and spiritual. The earthly existence is characterized by σῶμα ψυχικόν (natural/physical body) which is sown in weakness (ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ) because of the reality of death. But death is not the end, for if there is a σῶμα ψυχικόν there is also σῶμα πνευματικόν because the former will be raised in power (ἐν δυνάμει). In 2 Cor 6:7, ἐν δυνάμει appears among the list of the good qualities and graces (ἐν δυνάμει Θεοῦ) enjoyed despite the many difficulties and persecutions that Paul and his fellow Christians faced.

In Romans, apart from 1:4, ἐν δυνάμει appears 3 other times (15:13,19 [2x]). Within the benediction section of 15:13, Paul employs the phrase with direct connection with the Holy Spirit (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου). It is also used in a similar way in the second part of 15:19 (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος). Paul’s accomplishments, especially the obedience won from the Gentiles, are attributed to Christ in the power of signs and wonders (ἐν δυνάμει σημείων καὶ τεράτων), in the power of the Spirit of God (ἐν δυνάμει πνεύματος ἁγίου/θεοῦ). Most of the passages above are not directly linked to moral obligation and some are directly linked to the Holy Spirit: 1 Thess 1:5; 1 Cor 2:5 (from v. 4); 15:43; Rom 15:13,19.

6. The Substantive ἀγιωσύνη: Its Language in Some Pauline Letters

Robert Jewett is one of the scholars who proposes that ἀγιωσύνη is Pauline redaction because this term is found in two other Pauline passages: 1 Thess 3:13 and 2 Cor 7:1. However, further reflection on this reveals that the idea of

the language of the substantive “holiness” is not limited to these two passages.³⁰ When one investigates the Pauline letters anterior to Romans and in Romans itself, it is obvious that Paul employs the language of holiness up to 63 times: as a verb ἀγιάζω (6 times), as nouns ἁγιασμός (7 times), ἅγιος (46 times), ἁγιότης (once) and substantive ἁγιωσύνη (3 times). It is without a doubt that the language and idea of holiness are common to Paul even before the letter to the Romans. This gives more possibility to the proposition that ἁγιωσύνη is an addition of Paul to the κατὰ πνεῦμα of Rom 1:4. There are two other passages in the New Testament with the similar presentation within the same resurrection context of Jesus. These two passages, 1 Tim 3:16 and 1 Pet 3:18, contrast flesh with spirit without the substantive. Since the two passages have also been regarded as testifying to the early tradition anterior to Paul,³¹ it, therefore, suggests strongly that the early tradition simply employs σάρξ-πνεῦμα in their expressions of faith in describing the mystery of Christ in this sense. Paul, having the idea of holiness and the terminologies already, redacted Rom 1:4 without wanting to alter the traditional representation simply added the substantive to κατὰ πνεῦμα.

The reason given by Jewett for this addition, that is, to discourage libertinism tendencies of the Hellenistic Christian community may be tenable, but not his application of the moral contexts of the two passages (1 Thess 3:13 and 2 Cor 7:1) to the credal formula in Rom 1:3-4. If the wide usages of the language of holiness in the Pauline corpus could have influenced the redaction in Rom 1:4, then it is appropriate not to restrict the influence to only two passages. The contexts of many of these passages anterior to Romans and in Romans exposed above where the language of holiness appears do not carry moral obligations or implications. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul employs the verb ἀγιάζω in the final exhortation and benediction section (5:23). The noun ἁγιασμός is first used with God as “your sanctification” and second, within the moral exhortation (4:3-7). He uses ἅγιος 5 times,³² first in connection with the Holy Spirit and the gospel (1:5,6), second, directly within prayer context referring to the saints of God (3:13), third, in connection with God as the one who gives the Holy Spirit (4:8), and fourth within the admonition of brotherly greetings with a holy kiss (5:26).

In 1 Corinthians, the verb ἀγιάζω is used 4 times³³ and the noun ἁγιασμός once (1:3). In all these occurrences, some are used in connection with Christ Jesus and the believers being sanctified in him (1:2; 6:11; 1:30) while the other

30. *Contra* Vern Poythress who holds that “Hagiōsynēs cannot be adequately accounted for. Explaining its presence in a Greek-language creed is as difficult as explaining it in Paul himself”: Vern S. POYTHRESS, “Is Romans 1:3-4 a Pauline Confession After All?,” p. 182.

31. See John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, pp. 54-56 (for 1 Tim 3:16), 91-94 (for 1 Pet 3:18).

32. 1:5,6; 3:13; 4:8; 5:26.

33. 1:2; 6:11; 7:14 (2x).

occurrences appear within the context of marriage whereby the believing spouse makes the unbelieving spouse holy (7:14). The form ἅγιος appears 12 times³⁴ and 8 times in 2 Corinthians;³⁵ and ἀγιότης appears once in 2 Cor (1:12). With these occurrences of the language of holiness, the substantive in Rom 1:4 is Paul's redaction, bearing in mind also the two other New Testament passages with the similar representation of the early tradition, 1 Tim 3:16 and 1 Pet 3:18, lack the substantive.

7. Moral Implications of the Believers in Rom 1:4?

There is another concern. Does Paul's redaction in Rom 1:4 imply moral implication in the creedal formula? Robert Jewett suggests that it gives a clue to moral obligations requested of the believers. It is obvious that the context and the content of the early tradition formula in Rom 1:3-4 have no moral link. It is strictly Christological, concerning Jesus' two modes of existence and the resurrection without any moral exhortation of the believers. Jewett has probably been influenced by the way he reads the two passages 2 Cor 7:1 and 1 Thess 3:13.³⁶ He reads the two from the moral point of view, defilement of the body and spirit and sexual fidelity respectively. The first passage (2 Cor 7:1) is found within the moral context but not the second one. The mention of ἀγιοσύνη in 1 Thess 3:13 is found directly within the prayer and benediction context. What comes before this verse has to do with Paul recounting their persecution and the boldness they have in coping with it, and also the encouraging report presented by Timothy (1 Thess 3:6-12). There are prayerful wishes that come from both Paul and the Thessalonians. In this verse, "holiness" refers to the action of God wished for the Thessalonians. It is not addressed to them to be holy but that God should make them holy, in this sense, it is used with the understanding that God (and the Lord Jesus) is the one who makes holy (who sanctifies). And so, Paul prays "And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness..."

The addition of ἀγιοσύνη to the traditional formula in Rom 1:3-4 does not evoke moral obligation of the believers (*contra* Robert Jewett).³⁷ In Paul's theological reflections, there is no doubt about the use of the language of holiness in connection with moral obligations of the believers, but not in Rom 1:3-4. As already stated, there are many occasions where the language of holiness is used without moral implication before the letter to the Romans.³⁸ Its addition would rather portray the evolution of the Spirit as an agent of sanc-

34. 1:2; 3:17; 6:1,2,19; 7:14,34; 12:3; 14:33; 16:1,15,20.

35. 1:1; 6:6; 8:4; 9:1,12; 13:12,13,14.

36. Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary*, p. 106.

37. Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary*, p. 106-107.

38. 1 Thess 1:5,6; 4:8; 5:23,26; 1 Cor 1:2; and 1 Thess 3:13.

tification already expressed in the Pauline corpus, as the Spirit who sanctifies.³⁹ In this sense, one sees the link in the usages of “holiness” (ἁγιωσύνη) with the Holy Spirit in the Pauline letters.⁴⁰

In the traditional formula of Rom 1:3b-4, one may point out “in power,” “holiness” and the expression “Jesus Christ our Lord” as typically Pauline.⁴¹ Κύριος is common in the Pauline corpus, it appears about 274 times; while the expression “Jesus Christ our Lord” with slight variations could be found 26 times in the undisputed letters of Paul. One notices Christological titles merged in these two verses: Seed of David, Son of God, Christ, and Lord.

Conclusion

Rom 1:3b-4d is a product of two principal materials: early tradition anterior to Paul and Pauline reflections. The material from the pre-Pauline tradition must have experienced a gradual development as Christianity burgeons. It is the tradition well known to Paul and in fact central to his call and mission so much so that he employs it, modifies and includes his own experience from his encounter with his newfound faith in Jesus Christ. The elements that this article mentions as Pauline terminologies (“in power,” “holiness” and the lordship of Jesus Christ) are frequently used in Pauline corpus in different contexts. In a special way, the substantive (ἁγιωσύνη) in Rom 1:4 does not imply moral obligation of the believers but rather points to Paul’s idea of the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier present already in other Pauline passages.

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SUMMARY

For many years and still today, the contents of Rom 1:3-4 have attracted a lot of exegetical and theological attention from scholars. There are elements in this pericope that testify to pre-Pauline material, while others are Pauline redactions. In a more precise way, verses 3a and 4e could be regarded as the

39. For the gradual evolution or transition of the tradition’s presentation of spirit as the spiritual condition of Christ to the later tradition’s Spirit as an Agent see John S. ADIMULA, *Πνεῦμα: From the Spiritual Condition of Christ to the Holy Spirit-Agent*, chapter 4 (pp. 131-159).

40. See for example where holiness is the function of the Holy Spirit: Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Thess 2:13.

41. See also Klaus WENGST, *Christologische Formeln und Lieder des Urchristentums*, pp. 112-117; James D. G. DUNN, “Jesus- Flesh and Spirit: An Exposition of Romans 1.3-4,” pp. 40-68; Robert JEWETT, *Paul’s Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Situations*, pp. 136-139; Robert JEWETT, *Romans: A Commentary*, p. 106.

introduction and concluding parts respectively of this rich formula in 3b-4d. Here (3b-4d), Paul included “in power” and the substantive ἁγιωσύνη as they are already common in his previous letters before Romans (and in Romans), in some cases having a direct link or close usage with the Holy Spirit. The usage of the language of holiness is not only limited to 2 Cor 7:1 and 1 Thess 3:13 but common to other Pauline passages, sometimes expressing that it is the function of the Holy Spirit as the sanctifier (who makes holy).

SOMMAIRE

Depuis de nombreuses années et encore aujourd’hui, le contenu de Rom 1,3-4 a beaucoup attiré l’attention des exégètes et des théologiens. Il y a dans cette péricope des éléments qui témoignent d’un matériel pré-paulinien tandis que d’autres sont des expressions pauliniennes. De manière plus précise, les versets 3a et 4e pourraient être considérés respectivement comme l’introduction et la conclusion de la riche formule contenue en 3b-4d. Paul y a ajouté la précision «avec puissance» et le substantif ἁγιωσύνη, déjà communs dans ses lettres antérieures à Romains (et dans cette lettre elle-même) et, dans certains cas, mis en relation directement ou en lien étroit avec le Saint-Esprit. L’usage du langage de la sainteté n’est pas seulement limité à 2 Co 7, 1 et 1 Th 3, 13 mais il est encore présent dans d’autres passages pauliniens attribuant parfois expressément à l’Esprit Saint la fonction de sanctification.