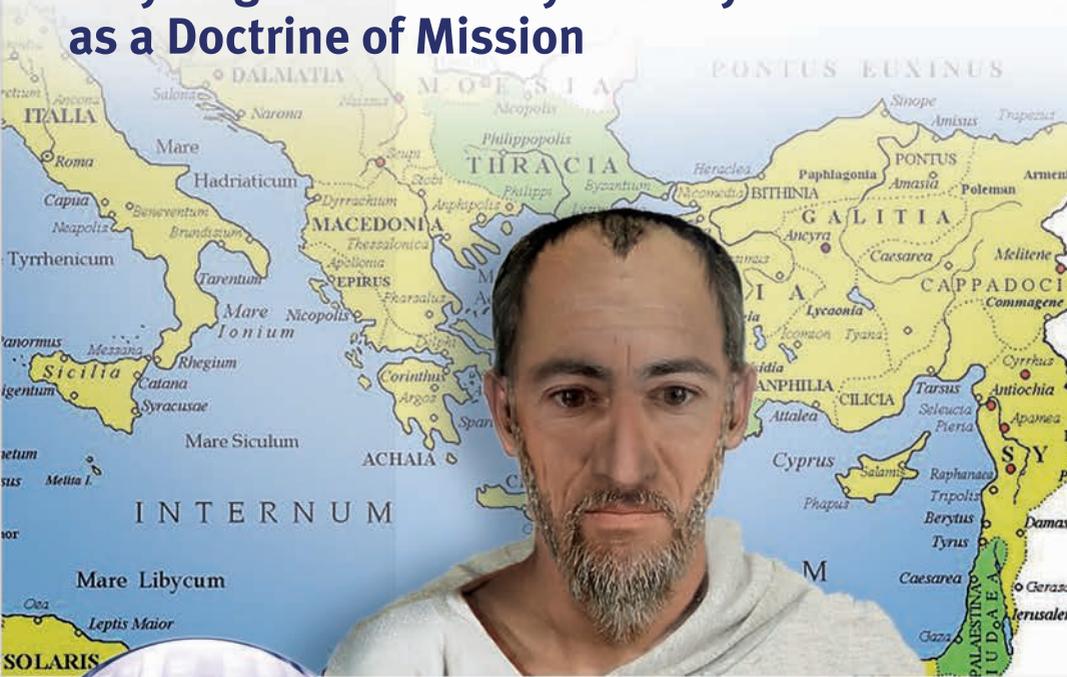


Thomas Paul Schirmmacher

The Letter to the Romans – a Charter for World Mission

Why Dogmatics is Only Healthy as a Doctrine of Mission



WEA

WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Theological Commission

Thomas Paul Schirrmacher

**The Letter to the Romans as a
Charter for World Mission**

World of Theology Series

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MY PUBLICATIONS ON THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

This book brings together all my contributions that deal with the topic of mission in the letter to the Romans and with the so-called introductory questions to the letter to the Romans.

The contributions are published in their original version, i. e. they have not been revised.

Duplications have not been deleted. Exceptions are some tables and overviews that have been repeated, each of which is referred back to the place where it was first used in the book.

Only the last contribution on the history of the mission thesis has not been published.

To the labelling of the title list:

= reproduced here

* = excerpts reproduced here

* *Der Römerbrief 1*, Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1994¹, 331 p. und *Der Römerbrief 2*, Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1994¹, 323 pp.

* *Der Römerbrief*, 2 vols., VTR: Nürnberg & RVB: Hamburg, 2001².

Der Text des Römerbriefes: Für das Selbststudium gegliedert. Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft: Bonn, 1994. 68 pp.

“Romans as a Charter of World Mission: A Lesson in the Relation of Systematic Theology and Missiology”, *Reflection: An International Reformed Review of Missiology* 4 (1993/94) 1/2 (Sept–Nov): 34–39; reprinted in *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10 (1993) 4 (Oct): 159–162; reprinted in: *Chalcedon Report* No. 342 (Jan 1994): 43–47.

“The Book of Romans and the Missional Mandate: Why Mission and Theology Must Go Together”, pp. 48–63 in: Samuel T. Logan (Hg.), *Reformed Means Missional*, Greensboro (NC): New Growth Press, 2013; reprinted in: “The Book of Romans a Charter for World Missions”, pp. 353–378 in: Reuben van Rensburg, Zoltan Erdey, Thomas Schirrmacher (Hg.), “Be focused ... use common sense ... overcome excuses and stupidity ...”: *Festschrift in Honor of*

Dr. Manfred Waldemar Kohl on the occasion of his 80th birthday: Essays on Holistic Biblical Ministries, World of Theology Series 22. ISBN 978-3-86269-236-1

“Paulus – Theologe und Missionar: Gedanken anhand des Römerbriefes”, *Evangelikale Missiologie* 27 (2011) 1: 3–20.

“Gemeinde und Mission im Römerbrief”, *Sounds (ISM)* Okt 2002: 1–2.

“Gemeinde und Mission im Römerbrief”, *transparent (SMD)* 2/1999: 6 = *Evangelikale Missiologie* 16 (2000) 3: 109–110.

“Der Römerbrief als Charta der Weltmission”, *Evangelikale Missiologie* 14 (1998) 1: 2–8; reprinted in: *Bibel und Gemeinde* 96 (1996) 1: 56–64.

“Paulus – Theologe und Missionar: Gedanken anhand des Römerbriefes”, *Evangelische Missiologie* 27 (2011) 1: 3–20.

I CHURCH AND MISSION IN THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

Summary of a lecture by Dr. Thomas Schirrmacher, held on April 9, 1999, at the AfW (IFES)-Post-Easter-Conference, originally published in German as "Gemeinde und Mission im Römerbrief". Magazine transparent (SMD/IFES) 2/1999: 6 and Evangelikale Missiologie 16 (2000) 3: 109-110, translated by Hans-Christian Beese.

In what way does the epistle to the Romans deal with this topic?

If you consult a concordance or the commentaries, you will not discover immediately what the epistle to the Romans has to do with mission and church. At first glance, it deals extensively with what the church believes, what mission proclaims, with the gospel, but apparently little with the relationship between church and mission.

This results from an interpretation of the epistle to the Romans that has become lopsided in the course of church history. Like no other New Testament book in Western church history, Romans has played a central role in key controversies. For centuries, Romans was at the heart of dogmatic battles, and we have become accustomed to reading it entirely against this background. It has become the first dogmatics of Christians.

Paul – a missionary by main profession

But we have seen Romans solely from this point of view, solely as the first great dogmatics. We have acted as though Paul was primarily an important teacher of theology with a professorial chair in Jerusalem or Antioch. But we know that Paul had a completely different profession. Paul was, by main profession, a missionary and apostle. He traveled across the world planting as many churches as he possibly could. If somewhere the church was halfway self-contained, Paul moved on to the next place. So the question arises as to how this fascinating dogmatics related to Paul's profession. Why did Paul write such a laborious letter in his situation, in this stress, in his soul-problems? The answer to this question can be found in the letter itself.

The occasion of the letter to the Romans is first and foremost mission!

This becomes completely apparent in the first 15 verses of the epistle. The epistle does not begin with the famous words in verse 16, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel”. Already in the salutation in verse 1 he describes his task as to preach the gospel of God. His task is further specified in verse 5: to establish the obedience of faith among all heathens. He wants to visit the church so that he can also evangelize in Rome, for “I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks” (v. 14). The reason why he wants to preach the gospel to all is explained in v. 16 and in the following chapters.

At the end of the letter, in chapters 15 and 16, the occasion for writing the letter becomes even clearer. From 15:7 on, he shows that Christ has come both for the Jews and for the Gentiles, and after the more general verses about the calling of the Gentiles, his personal plans follow from verse 14 onwards. He relates why he cannot think about anything other than the mission among the heathen. And also here (verse 18) he explains his central task, to bring the obedience of faith to the Gentiles in word and deed.

Paul needs the support of the church

Those who know Paul’s mission strategy understand that he wanted to plant churches in strategic places and that these churches were to perform the further tasks. Once the church was established there, Paul said, “I have nothing more to do in these countries” (Rom 15:19–23). Passing through on his way to Spain, he now desires to be strengthened by the congregation in Rome. Paul and his team make the mission plans. But he is looking for the support of the church – starting with evangelism in Rome and then with further mission in new areas. He knows he has something to bring to the church as a missionary. Until this day, it has never harmed a church to have missionaries bring “spiritual gifts”. Missionaries have something to contribute that we ourselves lack – experiences with God where new churches are emerging and where impossible situations are resolved by God’s interventions, but also the challenges, the unpleasant aspects, the memories of persecution. But Paul also expects that as a missionary he will not get only logistical backing from the congregation. The church becomes part of the mission by making the work of the missionaries its own special issue. Even if the church cannot be geographically present where the missionaries are active, it can be spiritually at the center of the mission. For this purpose Paul wrote Romans, describing in great detail why the proclamation of the Gospel among all Gentiles is not a side issue.

2 THE BOOK OF ROMANS AS A CHARTER FOR WORLD MISSIONS

Why mission and theology have to go together

A gift from the Theological Commission to the Missions Commission of WEA.

Thoughts on the relationship of theology, missiology and mission, presented by the chair of the Theological Commission of World Evangelical Alliance (WEA), Thomas Schirrmacher, to the General Assembly of the Missions Commission of the WEA at Schwäbisch-Gmünd, Germany, November 2011 (corrected version February 2021)

Foreword

I live in a country in which the theology of evangelization has been harmed more than anywhere else. Constantly, new liberal blueprints are arising which have so weakened the proclamation of the gospel that many Christians and churches lack the power of conviction necessary for any type of missions effort. Moreover, the disputes caused by both liberals as well as devout Christians are leading to paralysis. Might it not be appropriate to simply make theologizing the main culprit?

And yet, even though emotionally and instinctively, more teaching and doctrine and theology have led to less evangelization for many Evangelicals in Germany – because even among us Evangelicals, contention has hindered us from moving ahead and tackling issues – teaching which is directly antagonistic to evangelization cannot be answered by an absence of theology. Rather, it can be answered only by true, healthy, and well-thought-out biblical teaching and through more biblical and Reformational theology. I would like to illustrate this claim by reference to the letter to the Romans.

Paul: Theologian and Missionary

“What is at issue in the letter to the Romans? It all has to do with God’s plan for the world and how Paul’s mission to the Gentiles belongs in this

plan”¹. This close relationship between the letter to the Romans and the practice of missions has been too seldom considered by commentators. Emil Weber, in his important contribution entitled “The Relationship between Romans 1–3 and Paul’s Missionary Practice”², did not get beyond Romans 3, and other authors have only sketched out the topic.³ Nils Alstrup writes in this connection, “Paul is identified as the first Christian theologian and the greatest Christian missionary of all time. However, researchers have not often appreciated how closely these two aspects are related to each other.”⁴ Similarly, on Robert L. Reymond calls Paul the “missionary theologian”⁵.

At the same time, however, texts from the letter to the Romans played a major role in the history of missions.⁶ Thus, for several hundred years Romans 10:14 ff. was one of the favorite texts for missionary ser-

¹ Krister Stendahl, *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden: Anfragen an das abendländische Christentum*, Chr. Kaiser: München, 1978, p. 42; Stendahl, *Ibid.*, pp. 43–49, for this reason holds Romans 9–11 to be the center of the letter.

² Emil Weber, “Die Beziehungen von Röm. 1–3 zur Missionspraxis des Paulus”, *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* 9 (1905) Issue 4, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1905.

³ E. g. Walter B. Russell III., “An Alternative Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 174–184; Paul S. Minear, “The Obedience of Faith: The Purpose of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans”, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 2/19, SCM Press: London, 1971, especially both appendices on missions, pp. 91–110; Nils Alstrup, “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans”, pp. 70–94 in: Nils Alstrup, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission*, Augsburg Publ.: Minneapolis (USA), 1977; Krister Stendahl, *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden*, op. cit.; L. Grant McClung, “An Urban Cross-cultural Role Model: Paul’s Self-image in Romans”, *Global Church Growth* (Corunna/USA) 26 (1989) 1: 5–8; Gottlob Schrenk, “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument”, pp. 81–106 in: Gottlob Schrenk, *Studien zu Paulus*, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 26, Zwingli-Verlag: Zürich, 1954; Charles Van Engen, “The Effect of Universalism on Mission Effort”, pp. 183–194 in: William V. Crockett, James G. Sigountos, *Through No Fault of Their Own?* Baker Book House: Grand Rapids (MI), 1993 (1991 reprint), pp. 191–193 (very good); Karl Müller, “Das universale Heilsdenken des Völkerapostels nach dem Galater- und Römerbrief”, *Studia Missionalia* 9 (1955/56): 5–33 (rather general but good); Chris Schlect, “Romans as a Missionary Support Letter”, *Credenda Agenda* 6 (1994) 3: 9; Robert L. Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian*, Geanies House (GB): Christian Focus Publ., 2000, pp. 208–213.

⁴ Nils Alstrup, “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans”, op. cit., p. 70.

⁵ Robert L. Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian*, op. cit.

⁶ Documented in A. F. Walls, “The First Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and the Modern Missionary Movement”, pp. 346–357 in: W. Ward Gasque, Ralph P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday*, Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (MI), 1970.

mons.⁷ Among Calvinist Puritans in Great Britain and the USA from the 16th to the 18th centuries, to which the great majority of modern, Protestant global missions efforts trace themselves back,⁸ the concern of missions sermons found a point of entry in the exegesis of the letter to the Romans. Otherwise, the exegesis of Romans remained untouched by the intense promotion of world missions.

Paul presumably wrote Romans in 57 A. D., at some point in the three months mentioned in Acts 20:2–3 prior to his trip to Jerusalem. His letter was thus composed after he had collected funds from all his congregations in order to help the congregation in Jerusalem. From Jerusalem, he wanted to travel to Rome to use the church there as his starting point for his additional missions plans, particularly an outreach to Spain (Romans 15:27–31).

Romans 1:1–15

Paul does not waste much time before mentioning his missionary plans (Romans 1:8–15). Paul wants to proclaim the gospel to all people without exception, regardless of language, culture, or ethnicity (“Greeks and non-Greeks”, Romans 1:14) as well as regardless of education or social class (“the wise and the foolish,” Romans 1:14). Furthermore, it is for that reason that he comes to Rome (Romans 1:15). Paul moves from these practical missions concerns directly to the ‘real’ topic. In the famous verses of Romans 1:16–17, Paul begins his teaching with “for ...” (NASB). He thus doctrinally justifies what he wants to practically do in Romans 1:8–15. There is no indication that Paul changes the topic at hand between verses 15 and 16.

The first 15 verses of Romans relate to Paul’s concerns. The letter does not begin with Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel ...” As early as the greeting in Romans 1:1, Paul describes his mandate to preach God’s gospel. His mandate is stated more precisely in Romans 1:5: “to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith”. He wants to visit the church so that he can also preach in Rome, since “I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks” (Romans

⁷ Ibid., pp. 346–347.

⁸ Comp. Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*, Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1971 und Thomas Schirrmacher (ed.), “Die Zeit für die Bekehrung der Welt ist reif: Rufus Anderson und die Selbständigkeit der Kirche als Ziel der Mission”, *edition afem - mission scripts* 3, Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft: Bonn, 1993, pp. 31+35 and often.

1:14). He explains why he wants to proclaim the gospel to everyone beginning in Romans 1:16, as well as in the following chapters.

Romans 1:15 is not a superfluous introduction. Rather, it gives us the actual reason for composing the book of Romans, namely to demonstrate that the expansion of world missions is God's very own plan. Anders Nygren writes in this regard, "While in declaring this Paul is holding firmly to the thought of the introduction and rebuffs suppositions about the cause of the long delay of his trip to Rome, he has already gotten around to his major theme of the gospel as God's saving power. 'It is almost inaudible how he glides from making a personal address to a lecture.'"⁹

Romans 5:7–16:27

We find the same thing at the end of the actual teaching portion of his letter. In Romans 15:14, Paul seamlessly segues from Old Testament quotations about the peoples of the world directly to his practical mission plans, and he repeats a lot of what he has already said in the introduction.

In chapters 15 and 16, the reason for the composition of the letter becomes even clearer. Beginning in Romans 15:7, Paul demonstrates that Christ has come as much for the Jews as for the Gentiles. After the general verses about the calling of the Gentiles, his own personal plans begin in Romans 15:14. He reports why he can think about nothing other than the mission among the Gentiles. And even here (Romans 15:18), he mentions that his central task is to bring obedience to faith to the Gentiles in word and deed.

This becomes clearer when one contrasts the introduction of Romans 1:1–15 with the complete final section of Romans 15:14–16:27. This framing of Romans actually identifies the reason for and the topic of the letter in the beginning and ending verses (Romans 1:1–6; 16:25–27): the "obedience that comes from faith" has to be proclaimed among all peoples and planted, just as the Old Testament foretold (for example, compare Romans 15:21 to Isaiah 52:15 and the broader context of Isaiah 52:5–15, from which Paul frequently quotes in Romans). The parallels between Romans 1:1–15 and 15:14–16:27 show that Paul does not lose sight of the practical missionary considerations of his letter during the entire epistle.

⁹ Anders Nygren, *Der Römerbrief*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1965, pp. 53–54, at the end with the use of a quote from "Jülicher".

On the framework of the letter to the Romans: Parallels between Romans 1:1–15 and 15:14–16:27		
1:1–6	The gospel was foretold in the Old Testament.	16:25–27
1:5	The obedience that comes from faith has to be proclaimed to all nations.	16:26; 15:18
1:7	Grace and peace to you ...	16:20
1:8	The faith of the Roman Christians is known throughout the whole world.	16:19
1:8–13	Travel plans to Rome via Jerusalem.	15:22–29
1:11–12	Paul seeks to be spiritually encouraged by the Christians in Rome.	15:14, 24
1:13	In spite of his wishes, Paul was prevented from traveling to Rome up to this time.	15:22
1:13–15	The gospel has to be proclaimed to all peoples.	15:14–29; cf. 16:26

The letter to the Romans has too often been interpreted as a theological treatise without observing these points that frame the letter. “Most authors actually ignore the introductory and concluding declarations of his intention and concentrate on the theological interpretation of the core of the letter.”¹⁰

The misuse of the letter to the Romans as pure doctrine

Like no other New Testament book, Romans has played a central role at the crossroads of western church history. For centuries the letter to the Romans stood in the center of dogmatic battles, and we have become accustomed to reading it completely against this background. It has become Christians’ first ‘doctrinal theology’.

In the process, Romans was often seen *only* from this vantage point, as the first significant doctrinal theology. In addition, complete parts of Romans were concealed or overlooked without further ado. People acted as if Paul were above all an important theology professor who had a teaching

¹⁰ Walter B. Russell III., “An Alternative Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans”, op. cit., p. 175.

chair in Jerusalem or Antioch and had composed a textbook. We know, however, that Paul had a completely different calling, as a church planter and missionary with body and soul, very much an apostle. “The missionary of the New Testament is the Apostle Paul.”¹¹ He traveled throughout the world and started as many churches and missionary centers as possible. If a church anywhere had become halfway independent, Paul moved on to the next city.

We could ask what relationship the fascinating doctrinal developments in Romans had to Paul’s calling and sending. Why did Paul write such a labor-intensive letter in light of the situation in his churches, the stress of traveling, and his responsibility for a large number of fellow workers within the entire Roman Empire? The answer to this question is found, as we have seen, in the letter to the Romans itself, above all in the first and last two chapters.

Gottlob Schrenk has aptly emphasized, “The letter to the Romans is the most important declaration of the leading missionary of the Christian church.”¹² “To what extent is Romans a missions document? If we now attempt to test this key concept as a methodological norm of interpretation, then it is necessary to more precisely define the exercise. As is the case with every utterance by Paul, this has also grown out of unmitigated missionary activity. However, this letter much more than all others contains the summary of the foundational missionary convictions the apostle has. That is the matter before us now.”¹³

Doctrine and world missions

This is why I, as a missiologist and systematic theologian, have written a book about Romans, a book that is normally left to exegetes.¹⁴ This most systematic and ‘most theological’ of Paul’s letters was written out of the context of concrete missions work and substantiates, in comprehensive fashion, the justification and necessity of missions in unreached areas through the use of systematic theology and a study of the Old Testament. As a result, we can reach the following conclusion:

¹¹ Einar Molland, “Besaß die Alte Kirche ein Missionsprogramm und bewußte Missionsmethoden?”, pp. 51–67 in: Heinzgünther Frohnes, Uwe W. Knorr (eds.), *Die Alte Kirche, Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte* 1, München: Chr. Kaiser, 1974, p. 59.

¹² Gottlob Schrenk, “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument”, op. cit., p. 81.

¹³ Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁴ Thomas Schirrmacher, *Der Römerbrief*, 2 vols., Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1994¹; RVB: Hamburg & VTR: Nürnberg, 2001².

Whoever only pragmatically conducts ‘missions’ and for that reason dispenses with ‘doctrine’ in the end conducts missions in one’s own name and does not look after *what God* has said and written about missions.

Whoever teaches a ‘set of doctrines’ which does not have missions at the center and does not lead to practical missions work presents a teaching in one’s own name and disregards *why God* said and wrote particular things.

Practical missions work always begins with healthy, foundational doctrine and Bible study, and healthy, foundational teaching will always lead to practical missions work!

Gottlob Schrenk has formulated this best with respect to the letter to the Romans: “And furthermore: How will the missionary church be equipped? Out there the big wide world is surging ahead. Should we not be rushing about in some hasty fashion? To what end, then, is our immersion in the self? No, missionary centers only develop by the fact that in them the message we have is taken very seriously. In addition to that, there also have to be sharp, deeper efforts at achieving knowledge.”¹⁵

World missions: the fulfillment of the Old Testament¹⁶

Two special messages that more precisely explain what is at stake in world missions should now be underscored with the help of Romans 15–16. The first message is the meaning of the Old Testament, to demonstrate that world mission is desired by God. The second message is that world mission seeks above all to reach the unreached – the major message of the letter to the Romans.

Let us first turn to the meaning of the Old Testament. Paul reminds the ‘strong’ Gentile Christians “that Christ has become a servant of the Jews” (Romans 15:8), which is to say that he submitted himself to the law and in particular to Jewish ceremonial law. With that said, “the promises made to the patriarchs ... [were] confirmed” (Romans 8:15). Astonishingly, Paul directly changes from the “promises made to the patriarchs” with reference to the Jewishness of the Messiah to the fact that “the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy,” which relates to non-Jews: “As it is written: ‘Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name’” (Romans 15:9). He thus reminds Gentile Christians of Romans 9–11, where he has already made it clear that Gentiles have Christ’s work and the history of Israel to thank for their salvation.

¹⁵ Gottlob Schrenk, “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument”, op. cit., p. 83.

¹⁶ Cf. Robert L. Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian*, op. cit., pp. 373–384, “The Old Testament Roots of the Pauline Gospel”.

In Romans 15:9–12, Paul quotes five texts from the Old Testament that demonstrate that the nations will one day glorify God: 2 Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18:50; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1; and Isaiah 11:10. After Paul has repeatedly made it clear in the entire letter that the proclamation of the gospel and world missions do not contradict the Old Testament, there is a last bit of machine-gun fire in the form of Old Testament quotations. This is because the Old Testament actually underpins and calls for proclamation of the gospel and world missions. Adolf Schlatter wrote the following about these five quotations: “The joint prize of God, in which all people participate, is the goal of God which the Scriptures proclaimed. In 2 Samuel 22:50, Paul presumably heard Christ, who wants to profess God among the peoples and sing to the praise of his name. It is the work of Christ that the church does this. Deuteronomy 32:43 is quoted because this dictum calls peoples to jointly praise God with Israel. Psalm 117:1 proclaims that indiscriminately and without exception all peoples are invited to praise God. Isaiah 11:1 justifies the worship which people will bring with the fact that they are under the lordship of Christ. ... Paul underpins his intercession with the promises of Scripture.”¹⁷

The many Old Testament quotations should have not only convinced (and should still convince¹⁸) the Jews; they were and are of significance for Gentile Christians who not only rejoice about their personal salvation but who are to bring the gospel to all peoples of the earth in salvific continuity. C. E. B. Cranfield writes in this connection, “Neither the continual use of the Old Testament, which is found throughout the entire letter, nor the use of the words ‘I am speaking to men who know the law’ in Romans 7:1 demonstrates that Paul wrote to a predominantly Jewish Christian church. This is due to the fact that the Old Testament was the Bible of the Gentile Christians just as it was for the Jewish Christians, and it is important that Paul presuppose a familiarity and reverence for the Old Testament in his letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Adolf Schlatter, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief*, Calwer Verlag: Stuttgart, 1975⁵, p. 383.

¹⁸ Comp. “Die Dreieinigkeit im Alten Testament und der Dialog mit Juden und Muslimen”, *Bibel und Gemeinde* 94 (1994) 1: 19–27; “Trinity in the Old Testament and Dialogue with the Jews and Muslims”, *Calvinism Today* 1 (1991) 1 (Jan): 24–25+21+27 = *Field Update: GR International* (Apr/Mai 1991): 6–8 + (Jun/Jul 1991): 5–8; “Der trinitarische Gottesglaube und die monotheistischen Religionen”, pp. 113–151 in Rolf Hille, E. Troeger (eds.), *Die Einzigartigkeit Jesu Christi*, Brockhaus: Wuppertal, 1993.

¹⁹ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., *The International Critical Commentary* 11, T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1989 (1979 revised reprint), vol., 1, pp. 18–19; similarly Otto Michel, *Der Brief an die*

The question is often asked why Jesus' Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–16) is not quoted by the apostles after Pentecost, even if reference is made to the Great Commission a few times by speaking of Jesus' "command" (e. g., Acts 1:2; 10:42). Was the mission among all peoples never a disputed issue within the New Testament church, such that pointing to Jesus' command was superfluous? On the contrary, the mission among the Gentiles was something that only slowly got into gear and was for a long time very controversial (as shown by the Jerusalem council and the letter to the Galatians). If, however, we look at the New Testament discussions about the justification of missions, we are astounded to realize that at that point where we would have quoted Jesus' Great Commission, the Old Testament is almost always cited.

In other words, global mission is not primarily justified by Jesus' Great Commission but rather by the Old Testament. Jesus' Great Commission was in a certain sense the initial declaration of that which had long been announced and prepared for, and which now was to be finally put into gear. The letter to the Romans and in particular Romans 15 are an obvious example of this, since Paul incessantly quotes Old Testament passages.

The election of the Old Testament covenant people happened with a view to all peoples, such that global mission is already a topic in the Old Testament. The promise to the patriarchs that through them all the peoples of the earth should be blessed (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4; 28:14) is repeatedly drawn upon as a justification for mission work among non-Jews (Luke 1:54–55, 72; Acts 3:25–26; Romans 4:13–25; Ephesians 3:3–4; Galatians 3:7–9, 14; Hebrews 6:13–20; 11:12). In Acts 13:46–49, it is reported that Paul and Barnabas were rejected by the Jews and, for that reason, were orienting themselves toward the Gentiles in Antioch. In this connection they quote Isaiah 49:6 (equivalent to Acts 13:47): "For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" The context in Isaiah makes it clear that the apostles are taking up an Old Testament command for missions: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

Römer, *Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* 4 (14th edition), Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978⁵, S. 36; John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1984, B. 1, pp. XX.

In his concluding address at the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15:13–21, James justifies Paul’s right to tell the Gentiles about the gospel by referencing Amos 9:11–12 (similarly expressed in Isaiah 61:4; Psalm 22:27–28; Zechariah 8:22). This is where David’s “fallen tent” will be restored – which for James is the church – and it brings together the remnant of Jews and the Gentiles who were also coming in (“and all the Gentiles who bear my name”). As a justification for preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, especially Cornelius, Peter connects the Great Commission from Jesus by pointing to the Old Testament: “He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name” (Acts 10:42–43).

There are many places in the Old Testament where Gentiles heard the message of God via Jews and found faith in the one true God. At the same time, many texts, particularly in the Old Testament prophets, are directed at Gentile peoples. The book of Ruth reports on the conversion of a Gentile, the book of Jonah tells of a successful missionary journey to Nineveh, and almost all Old Testament prophets call upon Gentile peoples to convert. Naaman the Syrian, Jethro the father-in-law of Moses, and the prostitute Rahab are just three examples among many people born as Gentiles who converted to belief in the living God. Circular letters from world rulers to all peoples, in which they praise the God of Israel, are frequently found in the Old Testament (above all in Daniel, Esther, Ezra, and Nehemiah).

Accordingly, world mission cannot be presented and practiced independently of the Old Testament, nor can it be presented and practiced independently of Old Testament salvation history and the destiny of the Jewish people. Paul documents this primarily in Romans 9–11. In the process, two factors must be considered concerning the relationship of Christian missions to the Jewish people: the election of the Jews, on one hand, and endemic disobedience on the other hand. “As far as the gospel is concerned, they are enemies on your account; but as far as election is concerned, they are loved on account of the patriarchs” (Romans 11:28). Paul also makes it clear that the future turning of the people of Israel to their Messiah Jesus Christ will have unimagined positive repercussions on missionary work relating to all peoples (Romans 11:15, 24–26).

**Direct quotations from the Old Testament in the letter to the Romans
(not in italics)**

Allusions and phrases from the Old Testament
found in the letter to the Romans (*in italics*)

1:17	Habakkuk 2:4
1:23, 25	<i>Deuteronomy 4:15–18; Jeremiah 2:11; Psalm 106:20</i>
1:25	<i>Genesis 9:26; 1 Samuel 25:32</i>
2:5	<i>Zephaniah 1:18; 2:3; Psalm 110:5</i>
2:6	<i>Proverbs 24:12; Psalm 62:13; Jeremiah 50:29</i>
2:15	<i>Jeremiah 31:33; Proverbs 7:3</i>
2:21–22	<i>Exodus 20:12–17; Deuteronomy 5:16–18</i>
2:24	Isaiah 52:5
3:4	Psalm 116:11
3:4	Psalm 51:6
3:10	<i>Ecclesiastes 7:20; Psalm 4:3; Psalm 53:2–4</i>
3:11–12	Psalm 14:2–3
3:13	Psalm 5:10
3:13	<i>Psalm 140:4</i>
3:14	Psalm 10:7
3:15–17	<i>Isaiah 59:7–8; Proverbs 1:16</i>
3:18	Psalm 36:2
3:20	<i>Psalm 143:2</i>
3:29–30	<i>Deuteronomy 6:4; Isaiah 37:16, 20</i>
4:3	<i>Genesis 15:6; Psalm 106:31</i>
4:5	<i>Exodus 23:7</i>
4:7–8	Psalm 32:1–2
4:9	Genesis 15:6
4:11	<i>Genesis 17:5, 10–11</i>
4:13+16	<i>Genesis 12:7; 13:15, 17; 24:7; 26:4 and often</i>
4:17	Genesis 17:5
4:18	Genesis 15:5

4:19	<i>Genesis 17:17; 18:11-12</i>
4:22	<i>Genesis 15:6</i>
4:25	<i>Isaiah 53:4, 11, 12; 1 Samuel 15:25; 25:28</i>
5:1	<i>Isaiah 53:5; 57:19; Micah 5:4; Numbers 6:26</i>
5:19	<i>Isaiah 53:4, 11, 12; 1 Samuel 15:25; 25:28</i>
6:12, 14	<i>Psalms 119:133; Genesis 4:7</i>
6:21	<i>Ezekiel 16:61+63</i>
7:2-3	<i>Deuteronomy 24:1-4;</i>
7:8+1	<i>Genesis 2:16-17; 3:1; Proverbs 9:17</i>
7:7	<i>Exodus 20:12-17; Deuteronomy 5:16-21</i>
7:10	<i>Leviticus 18:5; Ezekiel 20:11, 13, 21</i>
7:11	<i>Genesis 3:1-7+13</i>
8:20	<i>Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; all of chapter 2</i>
8:27	<i>Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10; 20:12; Psalm 7:10; 26:2</i>
8:33	<i>Isaiah 50:8-9</i>
8:34	<i>Psalms 110:1, 5</i>
8:36	<i>Psalm 44:23</i>
9:5	<i>Genesis 9:26; 1 Samuel 25:32</i>
9:7	<i>Genesis 21:12</i>
9:9	<i>Genesis 18:10; 18:14</i>
9:11	<i>Genesis 25:21-22</i>
9:12	<i>Genesis 25:23</i>
9:13	<i>Malachi 1:2-3</i>
9:15	<i>Exodus 33:19</i>
9:17	<i>Exodus 9:16</i>
9:18	<i>Exodus 33:19</i>
9:20-22	<i>Jeremiah 18:3-6; Isaiah 45:9; 29:16; 64:7</i>
9:22	<i>Jeremiah 50:24; Isaiah 13:5; 54:16</i>
9:25	<i>Hosea 2:25; 1:6-9; 2:3</i>
9:26-27	<i>Hosea 2:1</i>
9:27-28	<i>Isaiah 10:22-23</i>

9:29	Isaiah 1:9
9:30-31	<i>Isaiah 51:1</i>
9:32-33	Isaiah 28:16; Isaiah 8:14; 10:5; Leviticus 18:5
10:6-8	Deuteronomy 30:12-14
10:11	Isaiah 28:16; Isaiah 8:14
10:13	Joel 3:5
10:15	Isaiah 52:7
10:16	Isaiah 53:1
10:18	Psalms 19:5
10:19	Deuteronomy 32:21
10:20	Isaiah 65:1
10:21	Isaiah 65:2
11:2	Psalms 94:14
11:3	1 Kings 19:14, 10
11:4	1 Kings 19:18
11:8	Isaiah 29:10; Deuteronomy 29:3
11:9-10	Psalms 69:23-24
11:11, 14	<i>Deuteronomy 32:21</i>
11:16	Numbers 15:20; Ezekiel 44:30; Leviticus 23:10 and often
11:16-17	<i>Jeremiah 11:16; Psalm 52:10; Zechariah 4:3, 11, 12, 14</i>
11:25	<i>Proverbs 3:7; Isaiah 5:21</i>
11:26-27	Isaiah 59:20-21; Isaiah 27:9
11:34	Isaiah 40:13
11:35	Job 41:3
12:9	<i>Amos 5:15; Psalm 97:10</i>
12:14	<i>Psalm 109:28</i>
12:16	Proverbs 12:15; 24:12
12:16	<i>Proverbs 3:7; Isaiah 5:21</i>
12:17	Proverbs 3:4
12:19	Deuteronomy 32:35

12:20	Proverbs 25:21–22
13:9	Exodus 20:13 = Deuteronomy 5:17
13:9	Exodus 20:14 = Deuteronomy 5:18
13:9	Exodus 20:17 = Deuteronomy 5:21
13:9	Leviticus 19:18
14:11	Isaiah 45:23
14:13	<i>Isaiah 8:14</i>
14:20–21	<i>Isaiah 8:14</i>
15:3	Psalm 69:10
15:9	Psalm 18:50; 2 Samuel 22:50
15:10	Deuteronomy 32:43
15:11	Psalm 117:1
15:12	Isaiah 11:10
15:21	Isaiah 52:15
16:26	<i>Genesis 21:33</i>

The Old Testament justification of New Testament missions shows that global missions is a direct continuation of salvation history, animated by God's action since the fall of mankind into sin and the election of Abraham. According to the Great Commission as related in the gospel of Luke, Jesus expressly confirmed the Old Testament justification of New Testament mission work. As he said to them, “‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things’” (Luke 24:43–48). According to these words of Jesus, there is not only talk of his coming and the cross in all parts of the Old Testament. Rather, there is also mention of world missions: forgiveness must be proclaimed to all the nations.

Systematic theology and ‘the Scriptures’

What is the significance of the fact that Romans bases so much of its message on the Old Testament? The answer is simple. *Systematic theology seeks*

nothing other than to be a complete view of things – that is to say, not to invent new theology but rather to see God’s entire historical revelation and apply it to the current situation and the world.

Paul does not want to bring about anything new, although as an apostle he was charged by God to reveal what up to that time had been a “mystery” (Romans 11:25; 16:25; 1 Corinthians 15:51; Ephesians 1:9; 3:3, 4; Colossians 1:26, 27; 2:2).²⁰ Rather, he was to convey only what God had always revealed and proclaimed. At the beginning and at the end of Romans, Paul emphasizes that his gospel is in accordance with what God had revealed through the prophets and in the ‘Scriptures’ (Romans 1:2; 16:26). In the entire letter he repeatedly introduces evidence for this, often with express reference to ‘the Scripture’ (Romans 1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 15:4; cf. “prophets in the Holy Scriptures” in Romans 1:2; “the prophetic writings” in Romans 16:26, and “the law and the prophets” in Romans 3:21). If Paul had, for instance, been of the opinion that he could simply place something new on top of something old and faded, he would not have had to delve into the future of Israel so comprehensively. As it was, he had to show that the gospel for the Gentiles was compatible with everything that the Old Testament says about the Jews. This is because it is unthinkable that “God’s word had failed” (Romans 9:6), for “the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (Romans 9:29). To such belong “the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises ... [and] the patriarchs and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ” (Romans 9:4–5).

In this respect, *Hebrews 11 is an outstanding example of systematic theology.* The writer sees the thread of ‘faith’ in the history of innumerable men and women of God found in Old Testament salvation history, regardless of whether the Hebrew equivalent for faith is found in the respective historical account or not. In some of the prominent examples, faith is expressly mentioned (e. g., Abraham, Moses), though in others it is not (e. g., Abel, Rahab).

The diversity of styles in the Bible

The letter to the Hebrews begins with these famous words: “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in

²⁰ With the word “mystery” Paul can also mean truths that have already been revealed but which are intellectually difficult to understand. See 1 Corinthians 2:1, 7; 4:1; Ephesians 5:32; 1 Timothy 3:9; cf. Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:3; Revelation 3:16.

various ways” (Hebrews 1:1). Whereas the Koran²¹ was written in one style in a short time and revealed to a single person, the Bible has texts alongside each other that demonstrate literary, historical, geographic, and ethnological diversity. Even within individual books, such as Psalms and Proverbs, there are texts from the most diverse group of authors, collected from the entire surrounding environment of the time. Since all Scripture has been inspired by God’s spirit (2 Timothy 3:16), God can use many very different ways and styles to reveal himself, his being, and his will: proverbs, love songs, songs of lament, records of endless discussions (Job), archived documents, descriptions of visions, historical accounts, biographies, personal and official private letters, circular letters, and comments on current situations and questions.²²

The pathway from this literary diversity to an ordered summary of biblical teaching, not to mention a ‘scientifically’ thought out ‘theology’, appears to be somewhat obscure. And as a matter of fact, Western theology has to allow itself to be ‘enlightened’. It has to recognize that God does not speak only through systematic treatises and that to address actual problems a systematic presentation is often not the most useful approach. For example, we must not reduce Job or the Lamentations of Jeremiah to just a collection of proof texts for our doctrine, as much as these topics are taught there. Rather, first of all they have to fulfill their actual character. Thus, we for instance see the lamentations of an individual who lived completely for God, take them seriously as such, and draw upon them with respect to our own failures in the present day.

Most of Paul’s epistles are occasional letters in which he does not set out to present systematically and summarily what he wants to say. Rather, he is guided by prevailing problems and questions in situ. Thus we have Pauline teaching on the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 only because there were practical problems with the Lord’s Supper. Therefore, the path from historical problems in Corinth to doctrinal formulations on the Lord’s Supper must be repeatedly trod discussed. This method applies equally to us today: we do not have to say everything about what is important in the Christian faith in every sermon, in every evangelization, in every counseling conversation. Rather, we are permitted to address con-

²¹ Comp. Thomas Schirrmacher, “Bibel und Koran als ‘Wort Gottes’: Das Offenbarungs- und Inspirationsverständnis im Christentum und Islam”, *Islam und christlicher Glaube – Islam and Christianity* 5 (2005) 1: 5–10 (there also the English edition).

²² Comp. Thomas Schirrmacher, *Die Vielfalt biblischer Sprache: Über 100 alt- und neutestamentliche Stilarten, Ausdrucksweisen, Redeweisen und Gliederungsformen*, Bonn: VKW, 1997¹; 2001².

crete issues relating to a particular situation. Whoever compares the common criticism after a sermon – ‘You didn’t mention the love of God at all’ – with the New Testament will be astonished at what the apostles do not mention in individual New Testament letters and would be forced to designate Paul’s address in Athens (Acts 17:1–16) as error.

So-called ‘narrative theology’, to mention just one theological model that has grown out of a literary style found in the Bible, is correct insofar as large parts of biblical revelation are revealed in a narrative fashion. Life histories, folk histories, and indeed world history have the important task of illustrating God’s actions. Narrative theology is incorrect only insofar as other forms of God’s oral revelation are eliminated.

Different cultures have a preference for certain types of biblical literature. African Christians love the book of Proverbs, the Old Testament narratives and all the reports of wonders, but they do not love the more systematic letters; the situation is the other way around for Christians from the West. Both sides have their justification, if they do not deny the complete breadth of biblical revelation or hold up their own preference as the more spiritual orientation in a one-sided manner.

Fortunately – for Western theology – we have the letters to the Romans and the Ephesians, the two systematic doctrinal letters of the New Testament. They are clearly broken down into a dogmatic portion and, beginning with “therefore, I urge you, brothers” (Romans 12:1; Ephesians 4:1), an ethical and practical portion. It is no wonder that Western theology has raised Romans to the level of a norm and turned other letters, such as Galatians, into a similarly pure doctrinal letter, stripping it of its original practical context.²³

When we start out from the breakdown of styles in the Holy Scriptures, even if it can surely not be a normative process, we reach this conclusion: *Systematic theology is a justifiable and apparently necessary way of bringing God’s revelation to humanity and into the heart of the individual. This must be declared to everybody who would rather get along without doctrine, dogma, and theology. However, systematic theology is only one of the available ways of revealing God to humanity and not even always the most important one, let alone the most frequent.*

A good example of how a biblical writer who was rather unsystematic in his thinking and writing refers to the doctrinal letters of Paul, which often call for much intellectual effort, appears at the end of 2 Peter. There

²³ Comp. Thomas Schirrmacher, *Gesetz und Geist: Eine alternative Sicht des Galaterbriefes*, Hamburg: RVB, 1999; *Law or Spirit? An Alternative View of Galatians*, Hamburg: RVB, 2001.

Peter writes, “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction” (2 Peter 3:15–16). The human side of the Bible – in this instance, the distinctiveness of the Petrine and Pauline styles – does not detract from the divine side whatsoever. Even Peter has difficulty understanding Paul’s letters. And yet there is no question for Peter that Paul is writing in the name of God and that a person who distorts Paul’s letters does so to his own doom.

Peter’s opinion is thus an important text for understanding the inspiration of the Bible. The Bible thoroughly mirrors the differences in character among its authors. Peter writes in short, concise sentences and gives warnings that can easily be remembered, changing the topic frequently and appearing to follow no overarching outline in his letters. Paul, in contrast, writes within the framework of protracted outlines, often using long, nested sentences that occasionally were left unfinished because they became too long. He justifies one thing from the previous thing. Peter is easy reading, and Paul is not. Even Peter can see this with respect to Paul, since Peter himself has difficulty understanding Paul.

Excursus: The example of the project “Summit” of New Tribes Mission²⁴

Among tribes with whom they worked, missionaries of the New Tribes Mission simply began by building upon topics found within salvation history. They thus did not begin at the end, with the resurrection, Pentecost, or with the churches started by the apostles. Rather, they started at the beginning, with the creation, the building of the Tower of Babel, the flood, and the Patriarchs. The entire history of Israel and finally the time which Jesus spent living with his disciples came later. Only then did they get to ‘the real objective’. Additionally, they did not only recount God’s history to the newly converted, but rather also to non-Christians. Thus they told about the Christian faith to everyone who wanted to know.

Is that not demanding too much? Should it not be the case that one comes to speak of the cross and resurrection as quickly as possible? Is the

²⁴ The following text is essentially my ‘foreword’ on p. 9 in: Trevor McIlwain, Nancy Everson, *Auf festen Grund gebaut: Von der Schöpfung bis Christus*, Hänssler Verlag: Neuhausen, 1998.

presentation of salvation history not rather a problem of ‘post-treatment’ than of evangelization?

It would surely be seen as progress if every new convert received a good overview of salvation history as part of discipleship (or as ‘post-treatment’), and the material²⁵ available from New Tribes Mission is ideally suited for this purpose. However, even given the necessity of ‘post-treatment’, the need for ‘preparatory work’ prior to conversion is not refuted. The cross and resurrection, Pentecost, and the New Testament church can be rightly understood only by someone who already has understood God’s history with humanity. For example, how does one expect to explain Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross if one does not talk about the sacrifices of Cain and Abel, the patriarchs, and the Israelites? How does a person explain what sin is if one neither talks about the fall from grace nor the law of Sinai in which God defines what is and is not sin?

One reason, among others, that I am so glad to be a missiologist is that there is an enormous amount to learn for church work and theology from the experiences of missionaries. From early church history onwards, theology has been substantially shaped by the actual situation of evangelizing and conducting apologetics *vis-à-vis* the non-Christian world. Missionaries from New Tribes Mission have made their experience in teaching tribal peoples accessible, not by writing long treatises about it, but rather by making their program and teaching materials available for Western churches and audiences. Whoever studies the materials establishes very quickly that what they have in their hands comes from practical experience and is written for practical use.

Systematic theology is important and permissible and finds its paradigm in the carefully thought-out and systematically constructed letter to the Romans – although this, too, begins with creation and leads to the fall from grace, the law, and Israel and then all the way to redemption through grace. However, it is not by chance that only a small portion of the Bible is systematically written. The larger part of the Bible recounts the events of salvation history and the life histories of men and women with whom God has written his history.

²⁵ Trevor McIlwain, Nancy Everson, *Auf festen Grund gebaut: Von der Schöpfung bis Christus*, Hänssler Verlag: Neuhausen, 1998.

Excursus on fragmented fields of study²⁶

The strict separation of fields of study has greatly contributed to ‘overtheorizing’ and overspecialization within theological education and theology itself.²⁷ On one hand, systematic theology often completely breaks away from exegesis, while on the other hand it breaks away from a practical orientation towards missions and the church. It is all too easy for each area of theology to view its own subject as the hub of the Kingdom of God. As a result, it is too easy to judge students exclusively by what they achieve in one ‘discipline’ and not according to their overall development in life and doctrine.

In theology, what is at stake is the overall picture that arises from comprehensive religious service, which is repeatedly tested against the spirit of the age, or the *Zeitgeist* (Romans 12:1–2). This comprises everything from personal heart piety all the way to a large-scale worldview, from the invisible peace an individual has with God to the future of the earthly creation, from an individual’s everyday existence to the meaning of the state.

Paul A. Beals rightly calls the fragmentation of disciplines within theology “educational provincialism”²⁸. From the obligation to pursue an orientation toward the church and missions, he correctly does not even make an exception for exegesis.²⁹ In many an evangelical educational institution, the sacred cow of exegesis does not have to account for itself, what end it serves, and how it fits into a comprehensive Christian worldview. But exegesis should not be sacrificed to ‘biblical criticism’. Rather, it should defer to the biblical claim that all Scripture is “useful for teaching” (2 Timothy 3:16). In other words, exegesis, though it is certainly important, should always have the function of service to an overall objective.

In 1787, Johann Philipp Gabler claimed that ‘biblical theology’ had to be separated from ‘dogmatic theology’.³⁰ Since then, the exegesis of bibli-

²⁶ See also Thomas Schirrmacher, “Plädoyer für eine alternative Ausbildung von Missionaren und Pastoren”, pp. 145–163 in: Thomas Mayer, Thomas Schirrmacher (eds.), *Europa Hoffnung geben: Dokumentation*, VTR: Nürnberg, 2004.

²⁷ Especially also John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, op. cit., pp. 206–214.

²⁸ “Educational Provincialism”, Paul A. Beals, *A People for His Name: A Church-Based Missions Strategy*, William Carey Library: Pasadena (CA), 1995², p. 200.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 201–202.

³⁰ Johann Philipp Gabler, “De iusto discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus”, Inauguralrede an der Universität Altdorf, Altdorf, 1787; comp. to Gabler: Otto Merk, “Anfänge neutestamentlicher Wissenschaft im 18. Jahrhundert”, pp. 37–59 in: Georg Schwaiger (ed.), *Historische Kritik in der Theologie*, Studien zur Theologie- und Geistesgeschichte des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts 32, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980, here p. 57. However, this separation was primed in the Lu-

cal texts and the presentation of the contents of the Christian faith have increasingly grown apart. Modern, critical theology would be unthinkable without this separation.

Evangelical educational facilities were often started in conscious opposition to historical-critical educational institutions; this was certainly the case in my home country of Germany. Evangelical educational establishments have, however, left the canon of disciplines and the subjects' independent existence untouched. Hence, they have adopted one of the significant consequences of historical-critical theology instead of introducing a revolution that delineates and makes clear the path from interpretation of the Word of God, via systematic theology and dogmatics, ethics, and apologetics, all the way to practical theology, counseling, and missions.

John M. Frame has rightly reacted against the view emanating from philosophy that the division of knowledge and scientific disciplines stands at the beginning of science or at least is of central importance.³¹ For him, the division is a question of pure utility. In the process, he also speaks out against otherwise very revered Reformed thinkers from the Netherlands, Abraham Kuyper and Hermann Dooyeweerd, for whom the division of sciences and the correct classification of theology were preconditions for the correct understanding of this world.

*Missions should be an important part of basic courses on the faith as well as in theological curriculums, and an orientation toward building a church and world missions should pervade every institution of Christian and theological education.*³²

Every subject should contribute to strengthening the church and missions and should convey to learners the fascination of being allowed to participate in the building of God's great work domestically and internation-

theran realm. From Robert Scharlemann, "Theology in Church and University: The Post-Reformation Development", *Church History* 33 (1964) 23 ff. Melancthon already differentiated between academic theology, which works historically, and kerygmatic theology, which is preached by the present-day church and which Lutheran orthodoxy built upon, e. g., B. Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), (comp. *ibid.*). In contrast, Reformed theology, based on the model of John Calvin, kept academic exegesis and preaching more strictly together and more significantly united for a longer period of time (so also in E. K. Karl Müller, *Symbolik*, A. Deichert: Erlangen, 1896, pp. 340–343+389+454–463).

³¹ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, op. cit., pp. 91–92.

³² See in part. Lois McKinney, "Why Renewal Is Needed in Theological Education", *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 18 (April 1982) 93–94 and the collective volumed Harvie M. Conn, Samuel F. Rowen (eds.), *Missions and Theological Education*, op. cit., part. therein David Bosch, "Missions in Theological Education", pp. xiv–xlii and Horst Engelmann, *Mobilmachung für die Mission: Wie können Mitarbeiter für den Missionsdienst gewonnen werden?* Missionshaus Bibelschule Wiedenest: Wiedenest, without year (approx. 1983) 60 p.

ally. “Independent of his special academic discipline, every faculty member of a theological school should give class instruction with a view to the mission of the church.”³³ The late, esteemed South African missiologist David Bosch saw the role of the missiologist primarily in a critical function relative to all other subjects, and in a way that should penetrate all other subjects like leaven.³⁴ However, he also critically observed, “It is a significant problem that the present division of theological subjects was canonized at a time when the church in Europe was completely introverted.”³⁵

The following illustration³⁶ should make it clear that missions should actually provide orientation and motivation to all other disciplines.



Illustration 1: Thinking about missions should motivate and determine theological work in other areas of studies.

³³ Paul A. Beals, *A People for His Name*, op. cit., p. 199.

³⁴ David Bosch, “Missions in Theological Education”, op. cit., pp. xxxi–xxxii.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. xxx–xxxi.

³⁶ Following Paul A. Beals, *A People for His Name*, op. cit., p. 201.

Reaching the unreached

Having looked at the significance of the Old Testament in the letter to the Romans, I will turn to my second point enumerated above, which remains to be addressed: the purpose of world missions is to reach the unreached – which is the major objective of the letter.

It was not just any type of mission work that prompted Paul to write Romans. For Paul, ‘mission’ meant his pioneering efforts aimed at unreached territories and peoples. Naturally, there were full-time workers on Paul’s team who looked after new churches, such as Apollos and Timothy, while others, such as Timothy and Titus, themselves had to move from place to place in due course (2 Timothy 4:21; cf. Titus 1:5; 3:13). Needless to say, there were also local evangelists. However, missionaries and apostles³⁷ did not limit themselves to local evangelization in their own area. Rather, they moved on and continued to plant, as long as there were still areas without their own Christian churches where work was to be done.

When Paul writes in Romans 15:19 that “from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ,” he does not mean that he proclaimed the gospel to every single individual. Rather, he means that he has founded churches in all the strategically important locations. The same applies to the statement that “there is no more place for me to work in these regions” (Romans 15:23). For that reason, Paul does not seek to go to areas where Christ is known and where preaching is occurring (Romans 15:20). Rather, he wishes to go where no one has yet proclaimed the gospel and no indigenous church exists.³⁸

Paul does not have people in existing churches in mind when it comes to his area of interest. Rather, he thinks about people who can be reached only if a missionary goes there: “It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known” (Romans 15:20). Paul likewise confirms the primacy of missions to unreached areas by reference to the Old Testament: “Rather, as it is written: ‘Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand’” (Romans 15:21, from Isaiah 52:15).

Paul calls upon the church in Rome “to join me in my struggle” (Romans 15:30) and reach the inhabitants of the world who are outside the range of existing churches.

³⁷ The word ‘Missionar’ (English: ‘missionary’) is known to be the Germanization of the Latin; ‘Apostel’ (English: ‘apostle’) is the Germanization of the Greek word for “Gesandter” (English: ‘envoy’).

³⁸ Comp. L. Grant McClung, “An Urban Cross-cultural Role Model: Paul’s Self-image in Romans”, *Global Church Growth* (Corunna/USA) 26 (1989) 1: 5–8.

Apparently, the best way of calling upon churches to collaborate is to thoroughly demonstrate from the Old and New Testaments that the expansion of the gospel to the far reaches of the earth belongs to the essence of Jesus Christ's church.

If mission work had more closely considered Paul as a role model, the spiritual map would doubtless look different nowadays. Fortunately, since the International Congress on World Evangelization (Lausanne 1974) and the World Consultation on Frontier Missions (Edinburgh 1980), mission work has more strongly moved into the central focus of Evangelicals.³⁹

In evangelical missiology, a people group is understood to be an ethnic or sociological unit of individuals that is comprehensive enough to view itself as a group and that possesses a sense of belonging on the basis of linguistic, religious, economic, geographic, or other factors. From an evangelical point of view, it is the largest respective group within which the gospel can expand as a movement of church planting without running up against a wall of misunderstanding or lack of acceptance.⁴⁰

I do not mean to imply that Paul had modern missiological or cultural-anthropological definitions in the back of his mind. However, I am convinced that today Pauline principles have well been cast into modern into what are nowadays manageable forms through these definitions.

The enormously rapid expansion of Jesus' church at the time of the apostles can only be explained if one takes the Pauline guidelines noted above into consideration. After all, by 65 A. D., what was then the known world had been reached by the apostles and other Christians. Had the apostles remained in the churches they planted or if they had blanketed their own provinces with evangelization, they would never have made it "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The churches were rather called on to send workers as mission teams ("representatives of the churches", 2 Corinthians 8:23) and to complete the work of the apostles in their surroundings. Paul communicated the same message to the Thessalonians. It was Paul's primary mission strategy to start churches in centrally located cit-

³⁹ Comp. Thomas Schirrmacher, "Mission unter unerreichten Volksgruppen", pp. 23–26 and "Vorwort", pp. 11–12 in: Patrick Johnstone, *Gebet für die Welt*, Hänssler: Holzgerlingen, 2003⁵ (also in all earlier editions beginning with the 2nd edition), This handbook also contains detailed information about unreached people groups in all the countries of the world. See Thomas Schirrmacher (ed.), *Gospel Recordings Language List: Liste der Sprachaufnahmen in 4273 Sprachen*, Missiologica Evangelica 4, Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft: Bonn, 1992 and later online editions "GRID".

⁴⁰ This paragraph corresponds to a definition that leading Evangelical mission leaders and missiologists produced at a conference of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization in March 1982.

ies, to install elders trained by him at an early stage, and then to travel on. The more complete penetration of a region with the gospel was something that he left to a metropolitan church. As he told the church in Thessalonica, “And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it.” (1 Thessalonians 1:7–8)

The relationship between the church and missions in the Romans: Paul seeks the church’s support for world mission by appealing to teachings and doctrine⁴¹

What does the letter to the Romans have to do with the topic of the local church and world missions? Whoever consults a concordance or conventional commentaries will surely not find anything immediately. At first glance, Romans, as an instructional letter, has a lot to do with what the church believes and what missions should proclaim – i. e., the gospel – but ostensibly little to do with the practical relationship between the church and missions. But in actuality, this apparent absence is related to the one-sided interpretation of Romans that has already been mentioned as an aspect of church history.

Whoever knows Paul’s missions strategy knows what we have already seen above with respect to Romans 15–16: Paul wanted to plant churches in strategic locations, and they in turn were to attend to the further tasks of evangelization and planting churches in their regions. Years after he had moved on, Paul wrote the following to the Thessalonians, who lived on the border between two Roman provinces: “The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere” (1 Thessalonians 1:8).

After the churches were already in existence, Paul said, “But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions” (Romans 15:23). On his way to Spain, he wanted to be strengthened by the church in Rome. Paul and his team had made mission plans, but he sought support from the churches, beginning with evangelization in Rome and extending to the additional missions in new regions. He knows that as a missionary he has something to offer the church.

⁴¹ The following text is a reworking of my “Gemeinde und Mission im Römerbrief”, *transparent* (SMD) 2/1999: 6 = *Evangelikale Missiologie* 16 (2000) 3: 109–110 = *Sounds* (ISM) Oct 2002: 1–2.

Paul was thus apparently of the opinion that he could gain broad support from the church in Rome for his mission work in Spain, just as he had received support from the church in Antioch for his earlier mission activity. In seeking this support, he broadly and systematically presents the gospel and demonstrates that it was in line with scriptural revelation up to that point.

Even nowadays, it has never harmed a church to allow missionaries to bring a “spiritual gift” (see Romans 1:11). Missionaries have knowledge and experience to contribute that we do not have – how they have experienced God where new churches emerge, where impossible situations are forced open, but also the challenges, the uncomfortable situations, and the reminders of persecution.

Paul does not, however, only want to bring the church something spiritual (Romans 1:11), and he does not only want to receive spiritual care or encouragement from the church (Romans 1:12). As a missionary, he expects not just logistical but also financial backing from the church. His goal is that the church may become an ingredient in missions, in that it makes the work of missions its personal issue. Even if it is unable to be geographically or culturally present where a missionary is active, the church can place itself spiritually in the center of mission efforts. It is for this purpose that Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, explaining in great detail that the proclamation of the gospel among all Gentiles is not to be a peripheral matter of faith and theology. Rather, mission work is to be at the church’s center and indeed its legitimization.

Summary

What was the objective of the letter to the Romans and its detailed and systematic theology? Paul calls on the church in Rome “to join me in my struggle” (Romans 15:30) and reach the inhabitants of the world who are outside the range of existing churches.

Romans demonstrates that the best way to call churches to collaboration is to thoroughly demonstrate from the Old and New Testaments that world missions and the expansion of the gospel to the far corners of the earth belong to the essence of Jesus’ church.

3 THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS PROMOTES MISSION: ON THE HISTORY OF THE “MISSION THESIS”

With numerous relevant, longer quotations

“The Epistle to the Romans is the most important enunciation of the chief missionary of the Christian Church.”⁴²

“What is the Letter to the Romans about? It’s about God’s plan for the world and how Paul’s Gentile mission fits into that plan.”⁴³

“The Letter to the Romans is ... primarily a mission document, and in this context also chapters 9–11 are to be understood.”⁴⁴

Introduction

What is the “mission thesis” about?

In various short essays⁴⁵ and finally in my book *The Epistle to the Romans* (1994, 2001), I have argued the thesis that Paul wrote his epistle to the Ro-

⁴² Gottlob Schrenk, “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument”, pp. 81–106 in: Gottlob Schrenk, *Studien zu Paulus, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 26, Zwingli-Verlag: Zurich, 1954, p. 81.

⁴³ Krister Stendahl, *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden: Anfragen an das abendländische Christentum*, Chr. Kaiser: München, 1978, p. 42.

⁴⁴ Werner Georg Kümmel, “Die Probleme von Römer 9–11 in der gegenwärtigen Forschungslage”, pp. 13–32 in: Lorenzo Delorenzi (ed.), *Die Israelfrage nach Röm 9–11*, Rom: Abtei von St. Paul vor den Mauern, 1977, esp. pp. 26–33, p. 28.

⁴⁵ “The Book of Romans and the Missional Mandate: Why Mission and Theology Must Go Together”, pp. 48–63 in: Samuel T. Logan (ed.), *Reformed Means Missional*, Greensboro (NC): New Growth Press, 2013; “Der Römerbrief als Charta der Weltmission”, *Evangelikale Missiologie* 14 (1998) 1: 2–8; “Mission im Römerbrief: Biblische Texte zur Mission 1”, *Evangelikale Missiologie* 8 (1992) 3: 59; “Paulus – Theologe und Missionar: Gedanken anhand des Römerbriefes”, *Evangelikale Missiologie* 27 (2011) 1: 3–20; “Der Römerbrief als Charta der Weltmission”, *Bibel und Gemeinde* 96 (1996) 1: 56–64; “Gemeinde und Mission im Römerbrief”, *transparent (SMD)* 2/1999: 6 = *Evangelikale Missiologie* 16 (2000) 3: 109–110; “Romans as a Charter of World Mission: A Lesson in the Relation of Systematic Theology and Missiology”, *Reflection: An International Reformed Review of Missiology* 4 (1993/94) 1/2 (Sept–Nov): 34–39 =

mans as a missionary and on the occasion of his planned mission trip to Spain in order to win the Roman Christians' support for mission in general as well as for his work specifically.

His argument was also designed to establish a basis for mission from the Old Testament and to show it to be in harmony with Israel's role in the history of salvation (in the following I will refer to this as the "mission thesis"). The "framing" passages of the Romans on Paul's mission plans and goals (the first half of Romans 1 and the second half of Romans 15) thus not only describe the reason for writing the epistle, but also describe its content.

In 2011, Richard N. Longenecker wrote about Romans, "The most common position today is to view the letter as a 'missions document' that was written in order to solicit support from the Christians at Rome for the apostle's anticipated mission to Spain."⁴⁶

In 1991, L. Ann Jervis presented the most thorough analysis of what interpreters and New Testament scholars regard as the cause and intention of the letter.⁴⁷ She groups the proposals of the different authors into three basic categories of Pauline intentions: "theological"⁴⁸, "missionary"⁴⁹, and "pastoral"⁵⁰. In the end, she attaches the greatest priority to the second of these purposes,⁵¹ but she goes beyond the pure preparation for the mission to Spain and phrases the purpose more fundamentally: "Paul was chiefly exercising his apostolic mandate in the letter."⁵² This statement, in my opinion, is justifiable but does not in any way contradict the thesis that Romans is a mission epistle.

Robert Jewett comments on Jervis's analysis:

Chalcedon Report No. 342 (Jan 1994): 43–47; "Römerbrief I: Gliederung des Römerbriefes", *Querschnitte* 1 (1988) 1 (Jan–Mar): p. 21; "Römerbrief II: Zur Abfassung des Römerbriefes", *Querschnitte* 1 (1988) 1 (Jan–Mar): 22–23; "Römerbrief III: Der Rahmen des Römerbriefes", *Querschnitte* 1 (1988) 1 (Jan–Mar): 24; "Einführung in den Römerbrief", *Gemeinde Konkret* No. 2/März 1983: 3; "Gemeinde und Mission im Römerbrief", *Sounds (ISM)* Oct 2002: 1–2.

⁴⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical issues in Paul's most famous letter*, Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans, 2011, pp. 109–110.

⁴⁷ L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans: A Comparative Letter Structure Investigation*, Journal of the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 55, Sheffield (GB): Sheffield Academic Press, 1991.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–18.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–22 with a good representation of various representatives.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–26.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵² *Ibid.*

“Jervis’s summary is still appropriate, except that she overlooks the noninterference clause in the final sentence: ... the establishment of an apostolic relationship with the Roman readers is an important function of this letter. Some of the terms of the relationship that it is this letter’s function to establish seem to be: (1) the Roman Christians’ acceptance of Paul’s self-presentation as one with a particular God-given mission to evangelize Gentiles; (2) the reader’s understanding that the mission Paul preaches is in accordance with what the faithful in Rome believe; and (3) the readers’ recognition that Paul regards all Gentiles, even those in Rome, as falling under his leadership. The leadership Paul wishes to exercise is to lead the mission to Spain, not to establish Pauline congregations in Rome. This is why he explains his principle of noninterference in 15:20, and the Spanish mission hypothesis is the only one that takes this with full seriousness. But it should be clear in the light of the Information now available about Spain that he needed the full resources of many of the congregations in Rome, none of which was accessible to him except through the ministrations of the woman who had agreed to be his patron.”⁵³

If this is so, why then is this purpose reflected so little in the existing commentaries on the Letters to the Romans?

Many authors are wrongly listed as representatives of the mission letter thesis

Again and again, authors are listed as holding to this thesis⁵⁴ who, to be sure, mention the occasion on which Paul wrote Romans but who do not actually see it as a letter substantiating mission.⁵⁵

Others do indeed point out the framing passages of Romans and their mission theme, but do not then apply this fact to the exegesis of the 14 chapters that lie in between.⁵⁶

⁵³ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, loc. cit., p. 89.

⁵⁴ L. Ann Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans*, loc. cit., pp. 19–22 lists in very broad strokes who actually or supposedly has represented the “mission thesis,” whereby she does not so much understand mission to be the content of the letter to the Romans but, rather, describes it as a “letter of self-introduction” (p. 19).

⁵⁵ E. g. Richard Adelbert Lipsius, *Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, zweite Abtheilung, Die Briefe an die Galater, Römer, Philipper, Mohr: Freiburg, 1891-1, pp. 70–73; Bruce N. Kaye, “To the Romans and Others: Revisited”, *Novum Testamentum* 18 (1976) p. 37–77; Karl Hermann Schelkle, *Das Neue Testament*, Butzon & Bercker: Keveaer, 1964, p. 155 (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, Mercier: Cork, 1969, p. 141).

⁵⁶ E. g. Bent Noack, “Current and Backwater in the Epistle to the Romans”, *Studio Theologica* 19 (1965), pp. 155–166; pp. 160–162; Sam K. Williams, “The ‘Righteousness of God’ in Romans”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980) p. 241–290: 245.

Still other authors concede that, on the occasion of Paul's mission, a self-introduction was necessary, but then they do not further pursue the topic of mission⁵⁷ or see it as only one among several reasons for the letter.⁵⁸

Mostly, the mission thesis is not even mentioned

Surprisingly, the mission thesis often remains unmentioned in books and studies of all kinds, where it would almost inevitably be expected. Thus in the first edition of *The Romans Debate*, which presents the most important positions on the letter to the Romans and includes contributions by major interpreters, it is not mentioned at all, and only casually in the second edition.⁵⁹

In his classic *Paul in the Light of Today's Gentile Mission*, which is still worth reading, Johannes Warneck does not even once mention the view of his father Gustav Warneck, amply documented below, about Paul's reason for writing Romans.⁶⁰

Philipp Steyne, in his book *Keeping Pace with the God of the Nations*, examines the Bible chronologically for its statements on mission. In his long section on mission in Paul's epistles,⁶¹ the reason for writing Romans is not discussed. The same applies to Eckhard Schnabel's excellent monumental exegetical research on mission in the New Testament,⁶² which discusses central mission texts within Romans, but not the reason for writing this epistle.

⁵⁷ E. g. A. F. J. Klijn, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Brill: Leiden, 1967, p. 77.

⁵⁸ E. g. Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Purpose of Romans", pp. 231–244 in: Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Edinburgh (GB): T&T Clark, 1991 or Klaus Haacker, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer*, Ev. Verlagsanstalt: Leipzig, 1999, 2006, pp. 12–13; Donald A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Brunnen: Gießen, 2010, p. 490: "This wish, however, cannot be the sole reason for writing the letter to the Romans". (*An Introduction to the New Testament*, Zondervan: Grand Rapids (MI), 2005).

⁵⁹ Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Augsburg Publ.: Minneapolis (MN), 1977; Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Edinburgh (GB): T & T Clark, 1991.

⁶⁰ Johannes Warneck, *Paulus im Lichte der heutigen Heidenmission*, Berlin, 1913.

⁶¹ Philipp Steyne, *Schritt halten mit dem Gott der Völker*, VKW: Bonn, 1998 = 2004, pp. 249–267.

⁶² Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Urchristliche Mission*, R. Brockhaus: Wuppertal, 2002, pp. 930–938.

Chronology of the “Mission Thesis” on the Letter to the Romans

1863: Colenso was not the first one

According to Jewett,⁶³ allegedly the African missionary and, for a short time, bishop of Natal, John William Colenso,⁶⁴ was the first person, in his 1863 commentary on Romans,⁶⁵ to understand the epistle as a mission document. To me, that’s not quite plausible. The thesis appears only in the introduction and is not applied in the commentary.⁶⁶ Since Colenso equates faith with trusting hope⁶⁷ but does not associate it with a soteriology, and since as a universalist he rejected the idea of conversion, he may, to be sure, place Paul’s projected trip to Spain in the center, but without highlighting anything associated with mission.⁶⁸

1881: Weiss

Bernhard Weiss, in two shorter sections in the introduction to his commentary on Romans, saw the occasion of the letter to the Romans very clearly in the context of the Pauline mission.⁶⁹ But again, this observation did not leave any traces in his commentary itself.

1892: Warneck

The first consistent advocate of the view that Romans was written above all because Paul wanted to provide reasons to the congregation in Rome for his missionary work, in order to win their support for the Spanish mis-

⁶³ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, loc. cit., p. xv.

⁶⁴ Biography: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Colenso.

⁶⁵ J. W. Colenso, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Newly Translated*, Natal: Ekukanyeni, 1863; reprint: J. W. Colenso, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans*, edited, with an Introduction by Jonathan A. Draper, Pietermaritzburg (SA): Cluster Publications, 2003.

⁶⁶ J. W. Colenso, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: Newly Translated*, Natal: Ekukanyeni, 1863, “Introduction”, pp. ix–xxxvii.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xxvii.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xxxi. His liberal view of the Old Testament also played a role., ebd. S. xxvii. Colenso was excommunicated because he rejected the doctrine of the atonement.

⁶⁹ Bernhard Weiss, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament IV. 9, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1881; 1899; pp. 23–24, 31–32.

sion, was none other than the “father of German missiology”⁷⁰ Gustav Warneck in his major work, *The Evangelical Doctrine of Mission*.

Warneck finds the central explanatory grounds for mission in the epistle to the Romans, which he interprets in detail as a letter intended to motivate a church to mission work (section 12.1).⁷¹ Since Warneck’s chapters are, to my knowledge, the oldest detailed justification of the mission thesis, I will quote several pages of his work here (my translation):

“This compelling chain inference ([chap.] 14–15) contains the most brilliant justification of mission as a properly organized sending from the evangelical basic article of justifying faith, a justification which imposes the apostolic seal on the whole organic foundation of mission, as we have tried to present it more fundamentally in chap. 8–11. There is no other mediation of salvation to faith than the proclaimed Word; but if salvation is universal and faith the only way of salvation, then the proclamation of salvation must also be a universal order, i. e. world mission must be a divine order. The main part of the proof consists in the dogmatic foundation of the premises; once this is established, the mission itself is the result, translated into action, of a simple, logical chain inference.”⁷²

“The Pauline epistles are all missionary letters, not only because they are addressed by a missionary to mission churches, or because they concern themselves with the conditions in mission churches and deal with theoretical and practical missionary issues, but also because the apostle to the Gentiles in them praises, legitimizes and justifies his ministry, both as a ministry personally entrusted to him and as a ministry objectively grounded in the divine revelation of the Old and New Covenants.

Every one of his epistles is rife with missionary relationships, except that these relationships in the various letters go in different directions and are sometimes more personal, practical, casual, at other times more objective, theoretical, general in nature. As far as the actual justification of mission is concerned, the three letters mentioned above come into question.

⁷⁰ Cf. Thomas Schirrmacher, *Theodor Christlieb und seine Missionswissenschaft*, Wuppertal: EGfD, 1985, pp. 215–219, 229–230, 238, 156–159, 185–187.

⁷¹ Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre: ein missionstheoretischer Versuch* / by G. Warneck, Abt. 1, *Die Begründung der Sendung*, Perthes: Gotha, 1892: “Die Missions-theologie des Paulus”, pp. 194–251, esp. therein: “Der Römerbrief” pp. 195–216; 1897: “Die Missionstheologie des Paulus”, pp. 189–239, esp. therein “Der Römerbrief”, pp. 190–193, Neuausgabe VKW: Bonn, 2015: “Die Missionstheologie des Paulus”, pp. 149–188, esp. therein “Der Römerbrief”, pp. 150–164, New edition in one volume: Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre*, VKW: Bonn, 2015.

⁷² Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre*, op. cit., p. 211 [new edition p. 161]. For this and the following quotations the following applies: *Spaced out printing omitted, Greek script in simplified transcription, taken from the modernised version of 2015.*

Paul, who had been called to be an apostle to the nations, had all the more reason to be concerned scientifically, as we say today, with the missionary calling entrusted to him because he was a man thoroughly predisposed to systematic thinking. Well might the command received have been sufficient for the disciple of Christ to make him obedient, but the theologian further needed a dogmatic and soteriological understanding of the same. The apostle seeks and finds this theological understanding in the intrinsic life context of mission with the basic existence of the evangelical truth of salvation as well as with the divine salvation event in history. In the three letters mentioned, he now gives his theological reasons for mission under different leading aspects, everywhere going back to the original reasons and arguing from principle in the deepest sense, in the Letter to the Romans most fundamentally and comprehensively, in essence didactically, without polemics. The concern here is to objectively utilize the soteriological universalism of Christianity, in its natural rootedness with doctrine and salvation history, as the basis and the prerequisite for the universal preaching of salvation, to highlight the gospel of Christ as being by its very nature free of both Jewish or pagan particularism, and thus to prove the New Testament covenant religion as the world religion encompassing Jews and Christians.”⁷³

“The Epistle to the Romans”⁷⁴

Paul writes this letter with explicit reference to his pagan apostolate (1:5, 14f.; 11:13; 15:16; 16:25f.). Due to his position as an apostle to the nations, he feels all the more obliged to enter into correspondence with the Christian congregation in the capital of the world, since he had not been granted the privilege of visiting Rome personally (1:5–13). His apostolate to the nations makes him a debtor to the Gentile world without distinction of nationalities and cultural and educational levels (1:14). This missionary sense of duty is rooted not only in the certainty of his personal calling as an apostle to the Gentiles, but also in the realization that God’s revelation of salvation in Christ has the character of a global rescue operation. For the gospel which to proclaim he received the commission is “the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile” (1:16). This causal relationship between the Gentile-apostolic service obligation and the nature of the Gospel of Christ is of the most fundamental importance for an adequate understanding of the Epistle to the Romans.

Paul makes a threefold statement about the Gospel:

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 149f.

⁷⁴ Footnote in Warneck’s *Missionslehre*: Beck, *Erklärung des Briefes Pauli an die Römer*, Gütersloh, 1884.

1. that it is the power of God unto salvation;
2. that this saving power of God on the part of man is linked to faith, and
3. that this faith is the general condition of salvation for everyone – for the Jew and also for the Gentile.

The power of God is the gospel, i. e., a *dynamis* immanent in it and emanating from God, not a powerless word, but a life-giving word full of power for actual salvation. In fact, it brings a comprehensive salvation, not only according to the negative side of liberation from death in sin and punishment of sin, but also according to the positive side of transfer into a new life; *soteria* is salvation from sin by forgiveness and by endowment with a life of regeneration. The appropriation of this *soteria* is accomplished through faith. Faith is the indispensable subjective condition of the appropriation of the salvation objectively presented in the gospel; it is the human organ for the reception of the salvific gift of God. What is faith? It is man's receptive behavior – such an internal process, such a personal attitude, which seizes the salvation offered in the Gospel in thought and will, appropriates it, surrenders to it and becomes obedient to it; it is conviction, trust and obedience in one. This remedy of faith is the way of salvation for everyone; this does not only imply that there is no other way, but also that it is open to everyone, it is generally accessible; the salvation offered in the divine power of the gospel is universal, it is the salvation of the world. The apostle says emphatically *panti to pisteuonti*, not merely *to pisteuonti*, in order to expressly preclude any particularistic limitation, in so far as it extends to differences of nationality, culture, etc. The communication of salvation is not bound to such differences among men, but only to faith, and faith is a general human organ. For this reason, the Jew is equal with the Greek with regard to participation in salvation. There is certainly a salvific priority for the Jews (*ioudaio proton*), but there is no such preference for salvation which really discriminates against the non-Israelites. The Jews have covenant advantages (3:2; 9:4 f.; 11:24; John 4:22), and therefore the gospel had to be preached to them first (Acts 13:46), but they have no salvation privilege in the sense of an actual setback of the Gentiles (*te - kai*; Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27 f.).

In this presentation of the fundamental ideas mentioned in 1:16, we have the course of development of the whole Epistle to the Romans *in nuce*. This is the apostle's lively, intertwined demonstration in this great epistle that the quality of the saving revelation in Christ absolutely coincides with the universality of the same, and that he continues to justify the one through the other, so that the one stands and falls with the other. Christianity is a world religion because its universality results from the nature of the gospel as a saving power of God (not man) as well as from the nature of the salvific way which corresponds to God's salvation, namely faith.

The further development directly ties in with verse 17, where the healing power of the gospel is established in greater detail for the faith. For in

this power of God, the gospel, “the righteousness of God is revealed – a righteousness that is by faith from first to last: the righteous will live by faith”. The gospel is therefore a revelation; it reveals something previously hidden. And what? From the start, not, as in Ephesians, the mystery of the incorporation of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God, hidden from the ages in the Creator God. In the Epistle to the Romans, the apostle arrives at this revelation only by a devious route. Rather, it is the righteousness of God that is revealed through spiritual enlightenment and the teaching of knowledge and through experience. Only to faith this revelation becomes an inner spiritual development; it presupposes faith (*ek pisteos*). Without faith, God’s righteousness becomes neither a revelation nor a divine power. And it goes into faith (*eis pistin*); it becomes something inward to it, its property. But what is the righteousness of God? Nothing other than the effect of the divine power of the gospel in the believer, so that salvation actually brings about its rescuing power in him and man is alive as a result of it in the same real sense as previously he was dead in sin. The divine righteousness revealed in the gospel brings about such a salvific effect in the believer that he is not only freed from the divine judgment of wrath, declared just, but is also transferred from the sphere of unrighteousness into a new sphere of life. This gift of salvation is called the righteousness of God, insofar as it emanates from God and is valid before God as righteousness in the face of all insufficient righteousness which man works out of himself, because it clothes the believer with a righteousness which in its basic nature is similar to the righteousness which God Himself has. Thus the righteousness of God becomes a power of life, for “the righteous shall live by faith”. For this way of salvation by God’s revelation was already laid out in the Old Covenant; prophetic Scripture confirms the apostolic statement; the gospel reveals and fulfills only what is already indicated in the general outline of the prophetic spirit. There is a continuity in the history of salvation between the old and the new covenant with regard to the mediation of righteousness, the objective presentation of salvation and the subjective appropriation of salvation.

These basic ideas now form the subject of the entire following line of argument. It is sufficient for our purpose to lucidly characterize them in broad outlines.”⁷⁵

In my opinion, Gustav Warneck proves to be the father of missiology also in his understanding of Romans.⁷⁶ He successfully draws together the rea-

⁷⁵ Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre*, op. cit., pp. 194–199 [new edition p. 149 ff.].

⁷⁶ Cf. Thomas Schirrmacher, *Theodor Christlieb und seine Missionstheologie*, Telos: Wuppertal, 1985, pp. 215–219, 229–230, 238, 156–159, 185–187; Thomas Schirrmacher, “Einleitung: Die Aktualität von Gustav Warnecks Missionslehre als Fluchtpunkt

son for writing the Epistle to the Romans in Paul's mission projects with the systematic presentation of the gospel as a message of mission and with all the themes of the Epistle to the Romans and avoids any "either/or" dichotomy. Unfortunately, his contribution to the doctrine of mission was ignored by later exegetical work.

1905: Weber

In 1905 Emil Weber asked what Paul's missionary sermons might have been like.⁷⁷ He thought that one could glean the answer from Romans 1–3. "It is from the standpoint of the missionary that Paul is talking here. From the experiences of the missionary his statements are born"⁷⁸, even if Romans 1–3 is not a "short reproduction of the missionary sermon of the apostle". Weber, for instance, wants to show "that Paul in his missionary work was time and again faced with the influence of a popular philosophy"⁷⁹ and therefore takes up this issue in Rom 2:1 ff.⁸⁰

Weber, however, did not specifically discuss the question of why Paul wrote Romans.

1936: Feine/Behm

Johannes Behm, to be sure, sees the immediate reason for the epistle in Paul's mission plans, but in the end he thinks that the issues themselves must have deeper theological reasons, thereby implying that, in his view, mission itself would not be a theological issue⁸¹ – typical Western distinction. He writes:

"The situation and plans of the apostle give rise to the cause and purpose of the Epistle to the Romans. Paul does not yet know the Christians of Rome

für evangelische Gemeinsamkeit", pp. xxiii–xliii in: Gustav Warneck, *Evangelische Missionslehre: ein missionstheoretischer Versuch*, New edition in two volumes, VKW: Bonn, 2015.

⁷⁷ Emil Weber, *Die Beziehungen von Röm. 1–3 zur Missionspraxis des Paulus*, Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie 9 (1905) Booklet 4, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1905.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 71–73.

⁸¹ Paul Feine, Johannes Behm, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Quelle & Meyer: Leipzig, 1936, pp. 166–168. Paul Feine, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Leipzig: Quelle & Meyer, 1913 contains nothing of the like, so the 1936 reference goes back to Brehm.

personally, and through the letter he seeks to gain contact with them. Considering what he is planning, it is almost a missionary command for him to connect with the congregation of the imperial capital. He needs them as an operational base for his further work. He comes to Rome to the foreign congregation not as their missionary; he respects as always, faithful to the agreements of the apostles' convention, someone else's field of work. As a passing guest, he is also ready to serve them with the gospel, but above all he wants to seek their fraternal help for the implementation of his plans. A motive of mission strategy gives Paul the impulse to write to the Roman Christians. Here in Rome, it becomes particularly clear that the letters of Paul are missionary writings, not only a substitute for the missionary word and advice, but also a means of his missionary strategies to conquer the world for the Lord Christ. But with the announcement of his visit, the presentation of his intentions and the solicitation for the consent and help of the Christians in Rome for the mission goals which he pursues, only the external cause and proximate purpose of the epistle are explained. The broad theological discussion and the confrontation with Judaism that permeates the letter must have other, deeper reasons."⁸²

But then, Behm relates Paul's great theological commitment to mission:

"If Paul, in the interest of his future missionary work, seeks communion with the Roman Christians, it is natural given that he introduces himself to them and tells them what the essence of Christianity and the content of the gospel, which he proclaims as an apostle to the Gentiles, is to him. Even the only passage which deals with a concrete situation in the Roman congregation and which indisputably shows that Paul is also aware of the life and thinking of the congregation and takes the opportunity to help and advise it (chapters 14–15) ultimately serves the same chief purpose as the rest of the letter, namely to convey to the congregation a living and true picture of the apostle and his conception of the gospel. The desire to introduce himself to the Christians of Rome, to tell them who he is and what he preaches, gives Paul the opportunity to speak about the fundamental truths of Christianity as he sees and teaches them. Here is (with B. Weiss, V. Dobschütz, J. Weiss) the starting point for determining the cause and purpose of the Roman epistle. The Roman epistle is Paul's theological self-commitment, which arose in a concrete situation of his missionary work. But he had become a Christian theologian through a hard, involuntary break with his Jewish rabbinical past."⁸³

⁸² Paul Feine, Johannes Behm, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Quelle & Meyer: Leipzig, 1936, p. 166.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

I wish Behm had said it more clearly: This “self-commitment” is precisely the commitment to mission.

Behm – unfortunately – adds in an excursus that in his opinion the content of the Epistle to the Romans is incompatible with its concern. Thus the “mission thesis” falls apart. As he writes:

“The fact that the Letter to the Romans pursues polemical intentions towards its readers, be it against their Jewish Christianity (Tubingen school, Mangold), be it against their faith as determined or threatened by Judaism (Weizsaecker, Graefe, partly also Zahn, Kuehl), be it against their legal conception of Christianity grown out of traditional Roman thinking (F. Barth), be it against their arrogant and rejecting attitude towards Judaism and the synagogue (Feine, 7th ed.), is psychologically incompatible with the apostle’s desire to win the congregation over to his far-reaching mission goals, quite apart from the fact that each of these theories misrepresents the image of the congregation. Neither may the letter – with its special address according to Rom 17:15, which is missing only in some late texts – be understood as a planned doctrinal representation of the Christian faith (church fathers, reformers etc., see Melanchthon: *doctrinae Christianae compendium*), or as the dogmatic and moral catechism of the apostle (Godet). Important pieces of Pauline doctrine, such as Christology and eschatology, are not fully brought to bear; the Lord’s Supper is not touched at all. And why Paul gives his portrayal in constant opposition to the Jewish point of view is a mystery.”⁸⁴

Behm is refuted by plenty of other authors introduced later in this article. In my opinion, all the themes of the epistle to the Romans fit in logically with the mission thesis and the situation in which Paul had to explain and defend his view of the gospel.

1953/1963: Wikenhauser

Alfred Wikenhauser writes in in his introduction to the New Testament (1953/1963):

“According to Rom 1:10–15; 15:14–33 the letter serves the purpose of announcing and preparing the apostle’s forthcoming visit to the Roman congregation. As the apostle to the Gentiles, Paul feels obliged to ‘call all the Gentiles to the obedience of faith’ for Christ’s name’s sake (1:5). Having completed his missionary work in the East, he now wants to look for a new field of work in Spain and, on his journey there, carry out his long-cherished plan

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 166–167.

to visit the Roman congregation. But since it is his principle not to build on another's soil, i. e., to proclaim the gospel only where the name of Christ is not yet known, he only wants to proclaim the gospel in Rome 'as if he were passing through' and let the Roman congregation give him the escort to Spain. For the planned mission to Spain, Rome is absolutely necessary for him as a base. That is why he must win the goodwill and support of the Roman congregation, which he had never known before. For this purpose, he writes them the letter."⁸⁵

Now, proceeding from this historic occasion, Wikenhauser also considers the content to be influenced by the Pauline missionary intentions:

"But that's merely the proximate reason for the letter. The Roman epistle is Paul's most extensive and theologically significant, most tightly disposed and most carefully elaborated letter. In a calm and detailed account, hardly weighed down by polemics, he here presents his gospel, especially the relationship between faith and works, the contrast between the righteousness given by God and the righteousness acquired by man. How does the apostle come to this detailed epistle, which is more like a theological treatise than a letter? This question has been much discussed since Marcion and has not yet been fully clarified. The question arises as to whether the internal circumstances and conditions of the Roman congregation or the present situation of the apostle have determined the subject and content of the letter."⁸⁶

For the moment Wikenhauser rejects other theories:

"It is unlikely that Paul (as claimed by Augustine, Hieronymus and the old prologues) will settle the disputes of the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Completely excluded is the view held until recently that the letter was directed against Judaizing agitators who invaded the congregation, indeed against a Judaizing activity of Peter himself in Rome. For the epistle to the Romans does not fight against Judaizing propaganda among Christians, who were without the law, but argues with Judaism about the relationship between law and righteousness. Certain conditions within the Roman congregation are, as far as is clearly discernible, only referred to in the letter in 14:1 to 15:13, where the 'strong' are obliged to consider the 'weak.' But this is not a fundamental issue."⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Alfred Wikenhauser, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Herder: Freiburg, 1953 (1963), p. 290, read pp. 290–292.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 291.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

That leads him to this conclusion:

“Therefore, the real reason for dealing with the questions discussed in the epistle to the Romans seems to be the specific situation of the apostle and his work. Paul couldn’t introduce himself better to the church unknown to him than by way of a detailed presentation of his gospel. The Romans have certainly already heard of him and his work; according to 16:3 ff. many acquaintances of the apostle are living in Rome. However, Paul was well justified to question whether the Roman Christians had been truthfully informed about him, since everywhere he experienced opposition on the part of the Jews and the Judaizers. Moreover, Paul now stood at the close of the first great phase of his missionary activity, its special note being the battle against Judaism and unbelieving Jewry. Thus it suggested itself that he, looking in retrospect on past struggles, would present the issue – so important for his entire work – of the relationship between law and faith and of the fate of the Jewish people, who had remained unbelieving for the most part.”⁸⁸

Unfortunately, Wikenhauser stopped with these good inferences. As far as I know, Wikenhauser nowhere drew out and verified this line of argument while dealing with the actual text of Romans.

1954: Schrenk

A turning point for the whole discussion of the topic was presented by Gottlob Schrenk’s 1954 essay “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument” (The Letter to the Romans as a Mission Document). Schrenk begins by saying, “The epistle to the Romans is the most important manifestation of the leading missionary of the Christian Church.”⁸⁹ Therefore the “agenda is set from the beginning by the cause itself. In order to show the peculiar character of the mission document one could choose the starting point in the epistle’s missionary self-statements”. In no other letter, according to Schrenk, does the “priest who prepares the sacrifice of obedience of faith come before us so powerfully – this debtor who knows no favoritism or partiality and therefore does not stop at any national traditions”⁹⁰.

Alongside this goes a second argument: “The authoritative and solemn character of these self-statements is, however, not little enhanced by the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Gottlob Schrenk, “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument”, pp. 81–106 in: Gottlob Schrenk, *Studien zu Paulus, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 26, Zwingli-Verlag: Zürich, 1954, p. 81.

⁹⁰ All *ibid.*

unique situation from which the document originated.”⁹¹ That Paul considers his previous task fulfilled conveys to him “a sense of the windup of an epoch,” and for Paul “the need for clarification and summarization” arises with this “turning point in his work”. The comparatively peaceful period of three months in Greece at the end of AD 57 and the first part of AD 58, before his last journey to Jerusalem, made this possible.

Schrenk continues:

“No fear of ‘historicism’ should keep us from first grasping the epistle as a word occasioned by a specific historical situation. After all, today’s mission church remains actively fruitful and capable of its task only by carefully listening to God’s will to send within history. Paul writes at a point of time when he sees anchor points for the progress of the message created everywhere in the east and can therefore regard his mission there as accomplished. This leaves him with a sense of the windup of an epoch. At this turning point the need for clarification and summarization arises. No doubt, now, in view of the new phase of his life’s work, he wants to present a comprehensive statement of the gospel. ... But the central motif pointing to the future is not yet mentioned: his gaze now goes to Spain; to the Western *oikomene*. Rome alone can serve as a station of passage and a base. The Roman congregation is the co-worker. The epistle to the Romans is all about equipping a vital working team. One can easily understand why this deeply meditated, strictly elaborated, mature statement, this missionary account of his overall view of the message, his spiritual testament at the turning point of his working life, is coming to fruition at this point of time.”⁹²

The missionary account is thus – as Schrenk aptly says – embedded in a wide-ranging practical mission program; theory and practice cannot be separated:

“Already the reeling up of this situation shows us immediately basic focal points in the apostle’s view of mission. The issue is primarily the total capturing of the *oikomene*. Paul thinks universally – in terms of nations and peoples. Both, the capital at the heart of the world and the far western fringe, are calling for the fulfilment of the debtor’s obligation. But, nevertheless, this is not a case of urging missionary strategy hardly concealing religious dominion plans. In a fraternal spirit of bearing fruit, he seeks co-operation as a servant of the community. If he were merely a missionary politician, it might suffice to spark a propaganda spirit. But mission is not a special feature. It is simply the *euangelion* and this is always at the same time the total-

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83, Greek scripture replaced by simplified transcription.

ity aspect of service to the world of nations. And further: How is the mission church equipped? Outside, the waves of the wide world are surging. Shouldn't we hastily hurry, instead of bothering with our personal consolidation? No, mission centers arise only from the fact that they themselves take the message very seriously. But this also requires sharp, deepened work of gaining knowledge."⁹³

Schrenk aptly writes on the first chapters of the Romans:

"Was it not an advance then when B. Weiss occasionally hinted at the significance of Rom. 1-3 as a propaedeutic missionary speech, in the sense that Paul here, as he had been accustomed to doing in missionary work, dialectically set forth the presuppositions of his message? One could also, even more pinnacled to the Romans, take the view that, by hastening to their aid in their debate with Jews and Gentiles, he wanted to show them how to do missionary work. Now, it can certainly not be denied that here indeed all the wealth of experience from the Pauline work has advedcted, and that therefore conclusions may also be drawn from these chapters with regard to the manner of Pauline missionary preaching. E. Weber has done this extensively and successfully. It is also true that it is not irrelevant for the congregation on the battlefield if Paul shows them how he proclaims repentance and grace. But if this were the only or even the primary aspect aimed at here, then this sermon of repentance would retain a fatal indirectness. Even more so would the notion have to be emphatically rejected from the letter itself, that Paul's intention was to hold an exemplary catechetical session on mission for uninvolved readers. He does not just bring to bay a fictitious Jew and Gentile; he does not only create a dramatic dialogue before the passive Romans. Rather, in every word he conducts a dialogue also with the Romans themselves, who are now God's beloved and appointed saints. He speaks not only from the mission window to the outside, but to all members of the mission church sitting in the house. Why is everything here highly topical for the individual believer? It deals with the past of the congregation, which has a lasting effect and projects into their status as Christians. But then everything he says to the Gentiles and Jews is at the same time a sermon of repentance to Christians for their purification and preparation. It therefore begins with the past, because there is no grace without judgment, no present and no future without purification of the past. The foundations have to be displayed again and again. That is why one begins with the past. Understood in this way, the mission document at this point gives us a glance into a central truth: Only such a church remains a missionary church, which is time and again captured in a missionary way herself, and, being in conflict

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 82-83, Greek scripture replaced by simplified transcription.

with her own past, seizes always afresh the unity of judgment and grace, continuously experiences the whole dynamic of the mission struggle in herself, and again and again places herself wholly personally into the mission horizon in such a way that she walks together with all others on the path of insight into the natural subjection to wrath. Mission is not something that happens apart from the church, but a process that the state of the church implicitly embraces, unless she is forgetful of her own past. When she is affected, she knows that she is being led to the Jew and the Gentile. If these are affected, then every member of the indebted and witnessing church feels addressed at the same time as those. Only a group of Christians who repentantly look back and time and again detach themselves from their own past is a suitable co-worker in reaching out to enslaved humanity.”⁹⁴

Schrenk proceed to take the reader through the chapters or Romans.⁹⁵ I will quote four representative passage.

On Romans 1–3, Schrenk writes:

“If someone asks: What is the missiological meaning of this message, which believably goes beyond the rule of the wrathful judgement of God? – then the answer must be: this message is just wholly and solely ‘mission,’ and only because it is there, we may ask about missionary significance at all. Here salvific universalism is proclaimed without legal conditions, but in such a way that the whole demand for the law is invested and incorporated into the intrinsic content of the new faith. Here indeed, as Wrede has said, we are faced with a missionary doctrine of struggle, only that he is wrong in saying that it is not bearing Paul’s entire thinking and will, and also his entire ‘piety.’ This gift not only satisfies the need for consolation, but also truly fulfils all the demands of conscience and ethos; it corresponds, witnessed by the law and the prophets, to the legitimate Jewish desire for continuity with the covenant of promise, but at the same time it creates a completely new solidarity of humanity. For this reason alone this *nuni de* of God’s righteousness is the great signal for the mission to the nations. Mission preaching is the call of this divine saving action, universal, valid for all time. It is a manifestation in which God himself bears witness to his active revelation. Thus it becomes clear to us that the whole basic structure of Romans 1–3 is solely determined by the mission aspect: God and humanity. That remains the main theme in chapters 4 and 5 also.”⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 86–87.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 90–102.

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 93, Greek scripture replaced by simplified transcription.

On Romans 12 and following, Schrenk writes:

“The ethical part of the epistle which brings the application of the basic positions to the life of the community, and which refers even more obviously to the Roman conditions, is significant for mission precisely through the commitment to the practical equipping of the working community, which, notwithstanding all mission to distant countries, has to be serious about the gift of life, and, above all, about love.”⁹⁷

On the promise for Israel and for the Gentiles (*ethne*) and especially on Romans 9–11, Schrenk writes:

“Both groups are destined to unity through Christ’s saving work. So once again, in solemn closing words, he deduces from Scripture the deepest foundation of his mission to the Gentiles, which expresses God’s will of unity for mankind.”⁹⁸

And on chapters 14–15, Schrenk writes, “In the end the missionary to the Gentiles has once more compiled a whole series of scriptures from Deuteronomy, Psalms and Isaiah.”⁹⁹

Schrenk is, in my opinion, the first author to return to the intellectual height of Gustav Warneck in 1892 regarding the mission thesis.

1955: Müller

Karl Müller remains quite general on the question of the reason for the composition of Romans.¹⁰⁰ The epistle is a “vocational letter of the apostle to the nations”¹⁰¹. “Paul’s missionary thought”¹⁰² and the universalism of the epistle inform the passages about Israel. “Paul’s whole thinking revolved around the calling of the Christ-less world.”¹⁰³ “Rom 16:25 ff. considers the mission work to be the radiation of the eternal divine redemption plan.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 106.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 106.

¹⁰⁰ Karl Müller, “Das universale Heilsdenken des Völkerapostels nach dem Galater- und Römerbrief”, *Studia Missionalia* 9 (1955/56): pp. 5–33.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 25–33.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 27.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

1965: Eichholz

Georg Eichholz showed in 1965, especially with regard to the second half of Romans, that the themes accrued from Paul's missionary concern.¹⁰⁵ He also directly takes up the consequences of Paul's commitment to win the Romans for mission: "Through the missionary proclamation the ecumenical church grows!"¹⁰⁶

1971: Minear

Paul S. Minear wrote a book on the purpose of Romans, which contains an appendix concerning the theme of mission.¹⁰⁷ For him, the obligation to mission in Rom 1:14 is central, although at the same time mission takes place as a sign of gratitude.¹⁰⁸ "To Paul, one's status as a debtor is immediately and totally translated into missionary motivation. ... Missionary motivation, consequently, is not intrinsically different from the motivation expected of all slaves of Christ."¹⁰⁹

Despite these comments, Minear unfortunately does not implement his views as expressed in the appendix in the rest of the book. And he gives no reason for not doing so.

1971: Stendahl

Embedded in his general thesis that the doctrine of justification is a Western misunderstanding of Romans, Krister Stendahl writes, "What is at issue in the epistle to the Romans? It is God's plan for the world and how Paul's Gentile mission fits in with that plan."¹¹⁰ He therefore considers Romans 9–11 to be the center of the epistle.¹¹¹ However, he does not expand upon the mission theme in more detail.

¹⁰⁵ Georg Eichholz, "Der ökumenische und missionarische Horizont der Kirche: Eine exegetische Studie zu Röm. 8–15", pp. 85–98 in: idem., *Tradition und Interpretation, Theologische Bücherei* 29, München: Kaiser, 1965, here pp. 95–97.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁰⁷ Paul S. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purpose of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans*, Studies in Biblical Theology 2/19, SCM Press: London, 1971, herein esp. the two appendices on mission pp. 91–110 "Appendix 2: Gratitude and Mission in the Epistle to the Romans".

¹⁰⁸ Esp. the final sentence Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 109.

¹¹⁰ Krister Stendahl, *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden: Anfragen an das abendländische Christentum*, Chr. Kaiser: München, 1978, p. 42.

¹¹¹ Ibid., pp. 43–49.

1973: Zeller

Dieter Zeller first argued in *Jews and Gentiles in the Mission of Paul: Studies on the Epistle to the Romans* that the reason for writing and the theme of Romans belong together.¹¹² Paul sees “Rome as an intermediate station,”¹¹³ which raises the question, “What does the frame of the letter say about the purpose of the Epistle to the Romans?”¹¹⁴ He comes to this conclusion: “Theory and practice of mission play a decisive role in the epistle to the Romans.”¹¹⁵ And this also applies to the sections on the Jews, for “thus also the problem of ‘Jew-Gentile’ appears from the missionary point of view”¹¹⁶.

In his commentary on Romans, Zeller explained and elaborated this line of argument more precisely from the text.¹¹⁷ Through his commentary he wants to “show a link between cause and topic”¹¹⁸. However, the commentary concentrates above all on the individual verses and sectional analysis and actually demonstrates the link only very reservedly, albeit convincingly. The following section is particularly articulate:

“The defence against Judaistic suspicions in Jerusalem or even in Rome is certainly a precondition of the foray to the west. But perhaps it will be possible to establish an even more direct link between this project and the concern of the epistle. If Paul introduces himself at the beginning and at the end of the letter with his tremendously important apostolate for all Gentile peoples, then he certainly must have in mind the further mission starting out from Rome. The gospel he proclaims is not his hobby. Rather, the cause that motivates him should become the cause of the Romans, too. He already indicates this by using the inclusive pronoun ‘we,’ which appears at the highlights of the letter. Also, the gospel is not really open to debate as to its contentuality, which is described in 1:3ff with a Christological formula perhaps also known to the Romans. That the gospel centers on the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus is put on record in the course of the letter by way of traditional formulations (3:24b–26a; 4:25; 6:3; 8:34; 14:9a). But this should be no novelty to the readers. It

¹¹² Dieter Zeller, *Juden und Heiden in der Mission des Paulus: Studien zum Römerbrief*, Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1973, pp. 38–39, 45–77.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–72 (title).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–77 (title).

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹¹⁷ Dieter Zeller, *Der Brief an die Römer*, Regensburger Neues Testament, Regensburg: Pustet, 1985, esp. pp. 17–18 and on the frame pp. 33–50, pp. 234–236.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

should rather convince them of the fact that the gospel's universal saving efficacy (cf. 1:16) is founded therein only if it is accepted by faith. The theme is not the gospel as a dogmatic entity, but its necessity and its wealth for all mankind; it is intended for the Jews first but also for the Gentiles, who live within the apostle's direction of outreach. May it not therefore be assumed that the apostle's *carte de visite* will eventually be an impressive treatise, because the Roman Christians will have to support the missionary spread of the gospel through him, as it finally turns out in 15:24? This suggestion is primarily made by G. Schrenk and taken up by D. Zeller, 'Juden' p. 45–76 (cf. now also W. G. Kümmel, in: L. de Lorenzi [ed.], *Israel Question* p. 26ff). What the Romans have by grace experienced in themselves and what Paul brings back to their memory, they are to pass on to others through the missionary to the nations. He is interested in equipping a vital working community, a *koinonia eis to euangelion*¹¹⁹ like the one he praises the Philippians for being (Phil 1:5; cf. 1:7); it is not confined to material help. This conception tries to do justice to the positive tenor of the letter's essence; it is supported by the rhetorical analysis of the main transitional parts (see W. Wuellner, in: K. P. Donfried [ed.], *Debate* p. 152–174).¹²⁰

Zeller deals in detail with the closing part of the letter.¹²¹ "The already flourishing community is meant to be the bridgehead for his trip to Spain," he says.¹²²

1975: Vielhauer

Peter Vielhauer notes in his introduction to the New Testament, "To the main purpose of preparing the mission to Spain we owe the *fact that* the Epistle to the Romans was written; to the indispensable precondition for this, the fight against misinterpretations of the Pauline message, we owe the way the letter was written."¹²³

It is noteworthy how Vielhauer renders *propempsesthai* in Romans 15:24, namely "to be escorted there" or "to be supported by them in the mission"¹²⁴.

¹¹⁹ In the original in Greek.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 234–248.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 239–240.

¹²³ Peter Vielhauer, *Geschichte der urchristlichen Literatur?*, de Gruyter: Berlin, 1975, p. 184, see altogether pp. 175–186.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Romans 15:20 and 1 Corinthians 3:10–15 are for him “factually and formally”¹²⁵ connected, because *oikodomein* is to be understood as “evangelizing”¹²⁶.

1972/1977: Kümmel

Werner Georg Kümmel writes in his introduction to the New Testament, “Considering what he is planning, it is almost a necessity for him to establish relationships with the congregation in Rome, because he needs them as helpers for his further work.”¹²⁷ “The Epistle to the Romans is ... primarily a mission document, and in this context chapters 9–11 are to be understood as well.”¹²⁸

If Jews and Gentiles are to be saved on equal terms by the gospel of justification, the question must be discussed as to how the promise and the actual state of Israel are to be reconciled.

1977: Dahl

Nils Alstrup Dahl writes in his groundbreaking essay “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans”: “Paul has been acclaimed as the first Christian theologian and as the greatest Christian missionary of all time. Scholars have, however, often failed to realize how closely these two aspects are interrelated.”¹²⁹ “Paul wrote his letter to the Romans at a turning point of his career,”¹³⁰ which is why he sets out his thoughts in more detail and why they are of special significance to us.

Dahl particularly emphasizes the unity of theory and practice, as the following four quotations prove:

“His theology and his missionary activity were inseparable from one another. ... This modern separation between theology and mission has had a

¹²⁵ Peter Vielhauer, “Oikodome” (1939), pp. 1–168 in: idem., *Oikodome: Aufsätze zum Neuen Testament*, vol. 2, Chr. Kaiser: München, 1979, p. 82.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 82–83.

¹²⁷ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1980²⁰, pp. 272–273 (new was 17th ed. 1972), p. 272.

¹²⁸ Werner Georg Kümmel, “Die Probleme von Römer 9–11 in der gegenwärtigen Forschungslage”, pp. 13–32 in: Lorenzo Delorenzi (ed.), *Die Israelfrage nach Röm 9–11*, Rom: Abtei von St. Paul vor den Mauern, 1977, esp. pp. 26–33, p. 28.

¹²⁹ Nils Alstrup Dahl, “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans”, pp. 70–94 in: Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission*, Augsburg Publ.: Minneapolis (MN), 1977, p. 70.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 76–77.

great impact on the image of Paul. Many scholars have described his theology as a dogmatic system without much inner relationship to his missionary work.”¹³¹

“Paul does not stand outside the history of salvation and reflect on it. ... He argues theologically in order to make the missionary congregations understand their own place within the divine economy.”¹³²

“It is only when we are aware of the various aspects of Paul’s ministry that we can fully understand how intimately his theology is bound up with his missionary activity.”¹³³

“The relationship between theology and missionary activity is as intimate in Romans as in any of Paul’s letters, but the perspective is different”¹³⁴, since the church in Rome was not founded by him.

Oddly, Dahl then adds this qualifying statement: “It would be one-sided to see Paul’s theology mainly as a rationale for his Gentile mission and as a defense of its results.”¹³⁵ Why this sharp turnaround, especially if he doesn’t want to separate theory and practice? As with other authors, Dahl seems to shy away from the final consequence of his thesis for exegesis.

Dahl’s argumentation includes a presentation of the framework of Romans¹³⁶ and a walk through the chapters.¹³⁷

1979: Kettunen/Stuhlmacher

In his dissertation “The Purpose of the Letter to the Romans”, Markku Kettunen considers the reason for writing the letter to the Romans to be the justification of the mission to Spain at a turning point of the Pauline mission.¹³⁸

On the basis of Romans 15:23–24, he takes the view that only the planned journey to Spain provides the motive for the visit to Rome and for

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 70.

¹³² Ibid., p. 71.

¹³³ Ibid., p. 72.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp. 77–78.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

¹³⁶ Ibid., pp. 74–76.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp. 79–88.

¹³⁸ Markku Kettunen, *Der Abfassungszweck des Römerbriefes, Dissertationes Humanarum Litterarum* 18, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia: Helsinki, 1979, esp. pp. 138–141, 151, 167–169. His doctoral supervisor Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Purpose of Romans”, pp. 231–244 in: Karl P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition*, Edinburgh (GB): T & T Clark, 1991² only hints at the mission thesis.

the letter.¹³⁹ Paul assumes that the churches founded in the east are sufficiently independent to continue to exist by themselves and that he can now think about a new phase of mission, to the west. From his exegesis of all the passages in which Paul speaks about the congregation(s) in Rome and about himself, Kettunen assumes that here three components inseparably belong together: “the famed faith of the Romans (esp. 1:7, 8; 15:14), which however needs to be strengthened by chapters 12–15, the Gentile apostolate of Paul (1:5, 9, 13–15; 15:15–22) and then the intention of the letter (esp. 1:11 f.; 15:15). In the foreground is Paul’s worldwide task of mission and now, after his journey to Jerusalem, the commission of the apostle to the Gentiles, to do mission work in Spain. For this task and at this point of time, the Romans are so important to the apostle that they receive from him a long, doctrinal letter”¹⁴⁰.

Paul does not directly ask for material support, although the word “escorting” (*propempein*) in Romans 15:24, as also in Paul’s other writings in 1 Corinthians 16:6, 11 and 2 Corinthians 1:16; as well as Acts 1:3, Titus 3:13, and 3 John 6, does not mean only farewell with prayer, but probably also an equipping for the journey.¹⁴¹ Paul normally did not ask for material goods (cf. 1 Thess 2:5, 9; 2 Cor 11:20; Phil 2:21), even though, in principle, he could accept them, as from the Philippians, if this was not an obstacle to his work (cf. 1 Cor 9:12–14). But Paul – says Kettunen – thinks at least as much, be it by intimation only, not just about the approval and ecclesiastical support for his mission, but also about the Roman contacts to and in Spain.¹⁴²

Moreover, Paul also defends his apostolate, as in several of his other epistles (1 Thess 2:1–12; 1 Cor 9; 2 Cor 10–13; Gal 1:13–2:21), but in Romans he most often speaks of himself as “I” and defends the cause in much greater detail. This includes not only Romans 1–8 but also Romans 9–11, for without understanding the role of the Jews and the Gentiles in God’s mission plan, one cannot understand the apostle to the Gentiles either.¹⁴³

1988: Russell

Walter B. Russell III shows in a short essay, by means of the commentaries of C. K. Barrett, C. E. B. Cranfield, Ernst Käsemann and John Mur-

¹³⁹ Ibid., p. 138.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 138–139.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 167–168.

¹⁴² Ibid., pp. 168–169.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 192.

ray, that apart from Cranfield nobody takes the frame of the Roman epistle seriously and that Cranfield sees it only as an occasion for writing, not as determining the contents.¹⁴⁴ Russell refers to Stendahl, saying that the letter to the Romans has been read too much from a Western point of view.¹⁴⁵

As a “purpose statement” of Romans, Russell proposes the following: Paul wants, by reference to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, to motivate the congregation in Rome to participate in God’s harvest, that is, to share in God’s eternal plan to justify all peoples by faith.¹⁴⁶

1991: Jervis

The work of L. Ann Jervis has already been described in the introduction to this paper.

1989–2000

In the last decade of the 20th century, numerous short contributions were published that argued that the themes of the letter to the Romans were derived from Paul’s mission plans.¹⁴⁷

1993: Fitzmyer

After having discussed the introductory questions regarding Romans, Joseph A. Fitzmyer writes: “Hence Paul writes of ad hoc purposes: a letter to introduce himself to the Roman community, to seek support and aid from it for his projected trip to Spain, to ask for prayers and perhaps intercession of the Roman Christians with their colleagues in Jerusa-

¹⁴⁴ Walter B. Russell III., “An Alternative Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans”, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): pp. 174–184, here pp. 174–176.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 177–180.

¹⁴⁶ Very briefly the framing passages of the letter to the Romans, chapter 1 und chapter 16, are juxtaposed in *ibid.*, p. 183.

¹⁴⁷ E. g. L. Grant McClung, “An Urban Cross-cultural Role Model: Paul’s Self-image in Romans”, *Global Church Growth* (Corunna/USA) 26 (1989) 1: pp. 5–8; Charles Van Engen, “The Effect of Universalism on Mission Effort”, pp. 183–194 in: William V. Crockett, James G. Sigountos, *Through No Fault of Their Own?*, Baker Book House: Grand Rapids (MI), 1993 (reprint from 1991), pp. 191–193 (very good); Chris Schlect, “Romans as a Missionary Support Letter”, *Credenda Agenda* 6 (1994) 3: p. 9; Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission*, Peter Lang: Frankfurt a. M., 1999, pp. 103–107; Robert L. Reymond, *Paul: Missionary Theologian*, Geanies House (GB): Christian Focus Publ., 2000, pp. 208–213.

lem.”¹⁴⁸ In the commentary itself, however, this point is hardly elaborated any further.

2011: Longenecker

Richard N. Longenecker writes as follows in his book dedicated exclusively to the introductory questions of the Epistle to the Romans:

“Of major importance are two primary purposes that are stated in the epistolary frame of the letter and then explicated throughout the letter’s large body middle (i. e., throughout 1:16–15:13). These two purposes are related to the occasion for his writing and must be seen to have stemmed from his own missionary consciousness and future ministry plan. They are:

1. to give to the Christians at Rome what he calls in 1:11 a “spiritual gift,” ... which he thought of as something uniquely his (cf. his reference to “my gospel” in 16:25; also see 2:16), felt they needed if they were to “mutually encourage” one another (1:11–12), and evidently wanted them to know in order that they might understand accurately and more appreciatively what he was proclaiming in his mission to Gentiles;

2. to seek the assistance of the Christians at Rome for the extension of his Gentile mission to Spain (cf. 1:13; 15:24), which should probably be understood as including their financial support and their willingness to be used as a base for his outreach to the western regions of the Roman empire, just as the Christians at Antioch of Syria had assisted him and served as the base for his outreach to the eastern regions of the empire.”¹⁴⁹

In addition, Longenecker sees further, less important, reasons for writing Romans, which are not so much explicitly mentioned but rather implicitly hinted at:

“3. to defend himself against certain criticisms of his person and various misrepresentations of his message, with the intent that Christians at Rome would properly understand his person, ministry and message and thus happily assist him in his Gentile mission.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans*, The Anchor Yale Bible, Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 1993, p. 79.

¹⁴⁹ Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical issues in Paul’s most famous letter*, Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans, 2011, p. 158.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

Two further “subsidiary purposes”¹⁵¹ “must also be included in any listing of Paul’s reasons for writing Romans. ... But they do not go through the whole letter and carry a much lesser degree of probability”:

“4. to counsel regarding a dispute that had arisen among Christians who called themselves ‘the strong’ and other Christians who were designated ‘the weak,’ either within or between various house churches at Rome, as he does in 14:1–15:13 (and seems to recall in the further admonitions given in 16:17–20a);

5. to counsel regarding the relation of Christians at Rome to the city’s governmental authorities and their responsibilities in paying legitimate taxes and revenues, as he does in 13:1–7.”¹⁵²

In my opinion, these secondary reasons can be effectively connected with the mission thesis, since they are questions that arise almost automatically in mission work and in newly emerging churches.

1982, 1988, 2007: Jewett

Initially in essays¹⁵³ written in 1982 and 1988 and also in a relatively short commentary on Romans¹⁵⁴ in 1988, Robert Jewett advocated the theses that Romans is above all a letter that:

- [first thesis] calls on the church in Rome to support the Pauline mission, and that
- [second thesis] Paul needs the support of the church in Rome, since the culture and thinking of the people in Spain were foreign to him, but that
- [third thesis] he at the same time wants to prevent the devastating Roman thinking about shame and honor from being exported to Spain.

In a large-format, narrowly printed work of 1,144 pages, Robert Jewett then meticulously underpinned a two-part thesis on Romans,¹⁵⁵ from

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹⁵³ Robert Jewett, “Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter”, *Interpretation* 36 (1982): pp. 5–20; Robert Jewett, “Paul, Phoebe, and the Spanish Mission”, pp. 144–164 in: Peder Borgen (ed.), *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism: Essays in Tribute to Howard Clark Kee*, Philadelphia (PA): Fortress Press, 1988.

¹⁵⁴ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Cokesbury Basic Bible Commentary 22, Nashville (TN): Graded Press, 1988.

which, with the author's permission, I may reproduce a few longer sections here. His two-part thesis can be summarized as follows: (first thesis) Each verse and each paragraph reflect the demand for support of the mission, whereby (second thesis) throughout the shameful cross challenges the system of honor in the Greek-Roman world and in Judaism.¹⁵⁶

I agree with Jewett's view on the first thesis, and he provides very good arguments in his entire detailed commentary on Romans for this thesis. More controversial, however, is his second thesis. Jewett writes about it:

"Since Stuhlmacher and Kettunen take no account of the cultural situation in Spain, however, it remains unclear why Paul would have needed help from the congregations in Rome to missionize there. ... the lack of Jewish population in Spain would have provided serious impediments to Paul's previous missionary strategy. He could not expect to find synagogues there to provide the initial basis for the messianic proclamation, to recruit converts and patrons, and also to make the business contacts that were necessary for a self-supporting mission supported by his own handwork. Even more serious were the linguistic barriers against missionizing in Koine Greek, the language of Paul's oral and written discourse and of the entire missional form of Christianity in the first generation, because Greek was not widely known in Spain. (Alternatively: Even more serious were the linguistic barriers that made missionizing in Koine largely impossible. Although the Greek common language was the language used by Paul in his spoken and written presentations, and also represented the only form in which the mission of Christianity had been spread in the first generation, Greek was largely unknown in Spain.) The language of the Roman conquerors was used in the large urban areas, but the Celt-Iberian and other languages continued to be spoken by most of the population. For the first time in Christian history, as far as we know, a two-step process of translation was required: from Greek to Latin and then into the various local languages. These financial and cultural barriers required the assistance of Roman congregations that had contacts with immigrants from Spain and with Roman bureaucrats charged with responsibilities there. To elicit this support, Paul needed to introduce his theology of mission, to dispel misunderstandings and allegations against his proclamation of the gospel, and to encourage the Roman congregations to overcome their imperialistic behavior towards one another, because it discredited the gospel of the impartial righteousness of God."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible*, Minneapolis (MN): Fortress Press, 2007, 1144 p., esp. pp. 1, 80, 83-91; on shame and honor esp. pp. 46-53, on the house churches pp. 64-69, on Spain, pp. 74-79.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, op. cit., p. 88.

Jewett has a very specific view on the role of Spain in Paul's letter:

“The references to Spain are intentionally vague because the complication of the Spanish cultural situation required delicate negotiations that Phoebe could do only in person. Since a mission to those perceived to be ‘barbarians’ in Spain would be jeopardized if the congregations in Rome continue to act in imperialistic ways toward one another, a resolution of the tensions between Gentile and Jewish Christians is essential.”¹⁵⁸

Jewett then relates his controversial second thesis, on shame and honor, specifically to the entire structure of Romans:

“If the Gentile and Jewish Christians continued to shame each other, they would carry a gospel to the barbarians in Spain that would continue the distorted system of honor on which the exploitative empire rested. Since the population in Spain continued to resist imperial exploitation, such a gospel would have no chance of success there. Therefore Paul attacked the distorted systems of honor by dispelling the idea that some persons and groups are inherently righteous and by proclaiming the message that God honors sinners of every culture in an impartial manner through Christ. Paul's indebtedness to ‘Greeks and barbarians, educated and uneducated’ (1:14) led him to proclaim the boundless mercy of the one God of all peoples (3:29–30; 15:9–13), who alone is capable of evoking reconciliation and harmony in a world torn by exploitation and conflict (5:10–11; 15:5–6). This is why Romans 9–11 is crucial for the Spanish mission, because God does not abandon people even when they reject impartial righteousness (10:2–3), and in the end Paul's gospel proclaims that the Spaniards who are treated as shameful barbarians will stand alongside the Jews and every other nation in the recognition that ‘God has consigned all persons in disobedience that he might have mercy on all’ (11:32). The climax of the letter is reached in the exhortation concerning mutual welcome between previously competitive groups (15:7; 16:3–16, 21–23) and the holy kiss that honors ethnic diversity within the new family of God (16:16). If the Roman house and tenement churches can overcome their conflicts and accept one another as honorable servants of the same master (14:4), they would be able to participate in a credible manner in the mission to extend the gospel to the end of the known world.”¹⁵⁹

Jewett continues: “Christians of various orientations would have had reason to question the advisability of working with Paul. Conservative, Jewish Christians would have known him as a radical advocate of the Gentile mis-

¹⁵⁸ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, op. cit., p. 89.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, op. cit., p. 88.

sion and a chief Opponent of the Judaizers. They would have heard reports of Paul's harsh encounter with Peter at Antioch, in which Paul had denounced him as hypocritical for refusing to eat with Gentiles. They would have been suspicious of Paul's strategy of acting like a Jew to the Jews and a Gentile to the Gentiles, wondering if Paul was reliable. The house churches close to Roman governmental circles (Rom 16:10–11) would have been concerned about Paul's history of difficulties with provincial authorities: his repeated imprisonments and the involvements with riots and other public disturbances in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Philippi, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus. Cooperation with a controversial troublemaker might threaten the safety of the house churches in Rome or undermine the relationship of some of their leaders with other Roman authorities. These considerations would be particularly relevant in light of the crucial importance of Spain for imperial finances and the elements of resistance against Roman civilization in two of the three Spanish provinces. Although the repercussions about Sponsoring subversive activities would have been felt most directly by Christians among the Narcissiani and the Aristobuliani who were administering imperial affairs in places like Spain, leaders of the other house churches in Rome would also have understood the risk."¹⁶⁰

This is drawing a lot from a few words, and Jewett's interpretive approach is even more so when he speaks about the role of Phoebe, whom he sees as being essential for Paul's letter. On Phoebe's commission, Jewett writes:

“Provide her whatever she needs in the matter, for she herself has been a patron to many and to myself as well’ (16:2): The ‘matter’ is her missionary patronage, which she has provided for many others and now is providing for Paul, and this help is what Paul requests from the Roman congregations. In view of the practice of Greco-Roman epistolography, it is clear that the choice of a letter bearer was sometimes as crucial as the content of the letter. A trusted messenger would fill in the sensitive details and carry out the tasks envisioned in the letter. It is widely assumed that Phoebe was the bearer of Paul's letter to the Romans. Phoebe's primary task would thus be to present the letter to the various congregations in Rome and discuss its contents and implications with church leaders. Her scribe Tertius, who had written the letter, would read it on her behalf. As was customary for letter bearers, she would then attempt to achieve the aims of the letter, namely the unification of the Roman house churches so that they would be able to cooperate in the support of the Spanish mission. Given the diversity of the congregations alluded to in chapter 16, this would have required formidable political skills on Phoebe's part. In view of the complexity of the argument

¹⁶⁰ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, op. cit., p. 90.

of the letter, it would have also required substantial interpretive skills. Convincing the independent house churches that Paul was a trustworthy partner for the Spanish mission project would not have been easy, given his previous involvement in controversial projects and conflicts."¹⁶¹

Later, Jewett explains this point in still further detail:

“Paul’s sponsorship by an upper-class patroness like Phoebe would have gone far to answer the inevitable questions concerning Paul’s reliability. Her wealth, social prestige, and legal status would serve as a kind of guarantee that his actions would remain within responsible limits and would afford him and the Roman church a measure of protection if he got into trouble. The churches at Rome could thus cooperate in the mission without undertaking its patronage, which meant that they would not become liable if Paul’s history repeated itself. An additional mitigating factor that Phoebe would likely have pointed out was that the controversies related to Paul had largely been fomented by radical Jewish opposition to his mission, and the absence of a Jewish population in Spain might allow a less disruptive missional enterprise. If Phoebe could succeed in the first two tasks, she would solicit the advice and counsel of the Roman house churches to find suitable resources for the mission in Spain. This would involve providing bases of operation in each of the three provinces for Paul and his missionary colleagues, finding logistical support for their travels and lodging, and recruiting translators capable of moving from Greek to Latin as well as other languages. The most crucial decision, of course, would be the selection of the right contacts in Spain, because the lack of synagogues made it impossible for Paul to get acquainted with circles of Gentile God-fearers before recruiting appropriate patrons for house churches and leaders for tenement churches. In the Spanish context, the decisions would have to be made ahead of time and negotiations would be required to prepare the way before the arrival of Paul and his coworkers. If inappropriate local patrons were chosen, the entire mission would be jeopardized. These reflections about the practical exigencies of the Spanish mission are crucial for understanding the letter as a whole.”¹⁶²

I will close with a few comments on Jewett’s perspective. The issue of shame and guilt orientation is a theme present throughout the whole of Scripture, and one that I have dealt with elsewhere in detail.¹⁶³ To see it as

¹⁶¹ Robert Jewett, *Romans*, op. cit., p. 90.

¹⁶² Robert Jewett, *Romans*, op. cit., pp. 90–91.

¹⁶³ See Thomas Schirrmacher, *Scham- oder Schuldgefühl? Die christliche Botschaft angesichts von schuld- und schamorientierten Gewissen und Kulturen*, VKW: Bonn, 2005; English: *Culture of Shame / Culture of Guilt*, World of Theology Series 6, Bonn: VKW, 2013; idem., “Die christliche Botschaft angesichts von schuld- und scham-

the background of the epistle to the Romans, especially since terms such as “shame” and “honor” play an important role in it, is obvious. But in my opinion, Jewett’s burdening of the fundamental (and correct) mission thesis of Romans by making incredibly detailed speculations related to shame and honor does not do justice to the few verses that expressly speak about Spain or Phoebe. Jewett claims that Paul deliberately did not address all this and that Phoebe had to explain it all orally, but how then does he claim to know in detail what Phoebe should say and what Paul actually wanted to achieve? In Jewett’s case, many different possibilities, which are then combined with each other, ultimately become a claim to a comprehensive, detailed and fixed knowledge of what it really was like at the time.

This goes far beyond the sparse information we receive at the end of Romans (not to mention the limited historical sources outside the New Testament). From some short lines, Jewett draws a whole dissertation. His overall picture seems to be impressive, but all too often it remains speculative, as there is no evidence that this description is the only one possible.

With reference to Thomas Schreiner, Dane Ortlund aptly summarizes my view of Jewett’s monumental work:

“I continue to consult and profit from Robert Jewett’s 2007 Romans commentary (Hermeneia), which is especially illuminating in its interaction with Greco-Roman sources contemporary to Paul (though ‘illuminating’ easily becomes ‘controlling’). But my sense is that Tom Schreiner’s recent *Bulletin for Biblical Research* (BBR) review of Jewett hits the nail right on the head. Dr. Schreiner calls Jewett’s work ‘a stunning achievement’ for various reasons, but concludes: ‘Jewett’s microscopic reconstruction of the Roman situation fails to convince. It seems to betray an almost modernist confidence in determining the historical circumstances of the letter, and he fails to heed cautions that have been raised about reconstructing the situation in NT epistles. Jewett’s commentary is full of insight and helpful discussions of individual verses. Still, it is doubtful that the fundamental contribution of the commentary will be considered to be anything other than a period piece, reflecting a particular kind of historical-critical scholarship at this juncture in history.’”¹⁶⁴

orientierten Gewissen”, pp. 237–300 in: Thomas Schirrmacher, Klaus W. Müller (ed.), *Scham- und Schuldorientierung in der Diskussion: Kulturanthropologische, missiologische und theologische Einsichten*, VKW: Bonn & VTR: Nürnberg, 2006.

¹⁶⁴ Thomas Schreiner, *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19 (2009): p. 448, cited by Dane Ortlund in <http://dogmadoxa.blogspot.de/2009/11/schreiner-on-jewetts-romans.html>. Most detailed on Jewett’s critique see Richard N. Longenecker, *Introducing Romans: Critical issues in Paul’s most famous letter*, Grand Rapids (MI): Eerdmans, 2011, pp. 105–111.

4 INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS

I. The Significance of the Letter to the Romans

“The English poet Coleridge declared the Epistle to the Romans to be the ‘most profound of all existing writings’. Chrysostom had it read to him twice a week. Luther said in his famous preface, ‘This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian’s while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. ... The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes.’ In order to make it completely his own, Melanchthon copied it twice in its entirety.”¹⁶⁵

At around 7,100 words, the letter to the Romans is the longest letter in the New Testament¹⁶⁶ and the only one that presents the Old and New Testament gospel in a systematic way. This alone secures its pre-eminent position in the presentation of the Christian faith. It is no wonder that its interpretation has often played a dominant role in church history.¹⁶⁷ Erich Schnepel wrote, “The letter to the Romans has had a profound influence on the course of human history.”¹⁶⁸ The epoch-making insights into the letter to the Romans by Martin Luther,¹⁶⁹ the Pauline turning point in the

¹⁶⁵ Frederic Godet. *Kommentar zu dem Brief an die Römer*. 2 vol. Verlag C. Meyer: Hannover, 1892 und 1893 (reprint of 1881/1882), vol. 1, p. 1.

¹⁶⁶ By way of comparison, the number of words in the remaining Pauline letters is as follows: 1 Corinthians: 6,800 words; 2 Corinthians: 4,600; Galatians: 2,300; Ephesians: 2,400; Colossians: 1,750; Philippians: 1,700; 1 Thessalonians: 1,550; 2 Thessalonians: 850. The letters to individuals are even shorter. Data according to Cornelis VanderWaal. *Search the Scriptures, Vol. 8: John - Romans*. Paideia Press: St. Catharines (Canada), 1978, p. 81.

¹⁶⁷ *The British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books: to 1955. Vol. 18*. British Museum: London, 1965. Col. 1900-1922 provides a good overview – also of the substantial older literature in English, which is often overlooked by German-speaking theologians. Cols. 1900-1922.

¹⁶⁸ Erich Schnepel. *Jesus Christus, die Lösung der Probleme unseres Lebens: Römerbrief, Kapitel 5*. Verlag Junge Gemeinde: Stuttgart, 1961. p. 7.

¹⁶⁹ See Martin Luther. *Römerbrief-Vorlesung 1515-16*. Martin Luther: Ausgewählte Werke 2. Chr. Kaiser: München, 1965⁵ (Nachdruck von 1927); Martin Luther. *Vorlesungen über den Römerbrief: Lateinisch-Deutsch*. Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft:

life of the church father St. Augustine, and the *Institutio* by John Calvin,¹⁷⁰ which is strongly based on the letter to the Romans and systematically presents the Christian faith, are just as much examples of this as Karl Barth's unconventional interpretation of the letter.¹⁷¹ Anyone who wants to get to know the foundations of the Christian faith systematically will find an excellent starting point and teacher in the letter to the Romans.

In 1787, Johann Philipp Gabler demanded that 'biblical theology' be separated from 'dogmatic theology'.¹⁷² Since then, the exegesis (precise in-

Darmstadt, 1960; Martin Luther. *Luthers Epistel-Auslegung. Bd. 1: Römerbrief*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1963; Martin Luther. *Vorrede zum Römerbrief*. Übersetzt von Winfried Küttner. Zahrenholzer Reihe 15. Verlag der Lutherischen Buchhandlung: Groß Oesingen, 1990.

¹⁷⁰ John Calvin. *Unterricht in der christlichen Religion: Institutio Christianae Religionis*. Neukirchener Verlag: Neukirchen, 1988⁵.

¹⁷¹ This does not apply to the first edition of 1919 (Karl Barth. *Der Römerbrief 1919*. Karl Barth Gesamtausgabe: Theologischer Verlag: Zürich, 1985) but only to the completely revised second edition (Karl Barth. *Der Römerbrief*. Evangelischer Verlag: Zollikon [Switzerland], 1947; on the difference between the two editions, see the preface, *ibid.*, pp. 6-18). For criticism of Barth's interpretation of Romans, see C. E. B. Cranfield. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. 2 Bde. The International Critical Commentary 11. T & T Clark: Edinburgh, 1989 (Überarb. Nachdruck von 1979). Vol. 1, pp. 41-42; John Murray. *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 384-390; John Murray. *Collected Writings. Vol 4*. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1982: 316-321. In my opinion, the best appreciation and critique of Barth's theology can be found in Georg Huntemann. "Ideological infiltration of theology? The example of Karl Barth." *Fundamentum* 1/1987: 18-36 (also reprinted in Georg Huntemann. *Ideologische Unterwanderung in Gemeinde, Theologie und Bekenntnis*. VLM: Bad Liebenzell, 1985), in Cornelius van Til. *Christianity and Barthianism*. Presbyterian and Reformed: Phillipsburg (New Jersey, USA), 1962 and in Klaus Bockmühl. *Atheismus in der Christenheit*. Brunnen Verlag: Giessen, 1969.

¹⁷² Johann Philipp Gabler. "De iusto discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus." Inaugural address at the University of Altdorf. Altdorf, 1787; cf. on Gabler: Otto Merk. "Beginnings of New Testament scholarship in the 18th century." Pp. 37-59 in: Georg Schwaiger (ed.). *Historical Criticism in Theology. Studien zur Theologie- und Geistesgeschichte des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* 32. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980, here p. 57. However, this separation finds its precursor in the Lutheran sphere. According to Robert Scharlemann. "Theology in Church and University: The Post-Reformation Development." *Church History* 33 (1964) 23ff. Melancthon already distinguished between academic theology, which works historically, and kerygmatic theology, which preaches to today's church. This is a distinction that Lutheran orthodoxy, e. g., Johann Gerhard (1582-1637), further developed (cf. *ibid.*). For Reformed theology, on the other hand, following the example of John Calvin, scholarly exegesis and preaching remained a

terpretation) of biblical texts and the presentation of ‘Christian’ beliefs have become increasingly divergent. Modern critical theology would be inconceivable without this separation. In this course on the letter to the Romans, however, the student should be introduced simultaneously to ‘biblical theology,’ in this case a precise grasp of the text and the concerns of the letter to the Romans, and to ‘dogmatic theology,’ in this case the systematic discussion and presentation of central truths of faith addressed in the letter. It is for this reason that in many lessons, after the interpretation of the text, there is a more fundamental presentation of the relevant topic.

2. The Drafting of the Letter to the Romans¹⁷³

A. The Author: Paul

The author of the letter to the Romans is undisputedly the apostle Paul. He speaks about himself personally in numerous places (Romans 1:1-16; 2:16; 7:7-25; 8:18; 9:1-4; 10:1-2; 11:1-2; 11:11-14; 11:25; 12:1, 3; 15:8; 15:14-33; 16:1-24). In contrast to most other Pauline letters, the Pauline authorship of the letter to the Romans is not doubted today, even by representatives of historical-critical methods.

C. E. B. Cranfield wrote, “The denial of Pauline authorship by such critics as E. Evanson, B. Bauer, A. D. Loman, and R. Steck is today rightly relegated to the curiosities of New Testament research. Today no responsible critic disputes his Pauline authorship.”¹⁷⁴ Even Rudolf Bultmann’s and others’ assumption that there are glosses (later additions) by other authors in the letter is hardly supported today.¹⁷⁵ However, a number of critical authors consider Romans 16 a later addition, even if their arguments are clearly refuted by other theologians working in the field of historical criticism.¹⁷⁶ (Rom 16:22 was certainly written by the scribe of the letter, “Tertius”.)

stronger and much longer unity (see also E. K. Karl Müller. *Symbolism*. A. Deichert: Erlangen, 1896, pp. 340-343, 389, 454-463).

¹⁷³ These paragraphs are partly based on my remarks “Zur Abfassung des Römerbriefes.” *Querschnitte 1* (1988): 1: 21-24.

¹⁷⁴ C. E. B. Cranfield. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, p.1-2.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 5-6.

¹⁷⁶ See the presentation of the problem and the arguments for the unity of the letter in *ibid.* vol. 1, p. 5-11; from a biblical perspective: John Murray. *The Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 2, pp. 262-268.

B. Time and Place of Composition: 57 A. D. in Corinth (Acts 20:3)

Paul has just completed the great collection for the church in Jerusalem (Romans 15:26-28). He now wants to travel from the place where the letter to the Romans was written via Jerusalem and Rome to Spain (Romans 15:27-31). He has previously worked in Macedonia and Achaia (Romans 15:26), is living in the house of Gaius (Romans 16:23), the Corinthian (1 Corinthians 1:14), and recommends Phoebe from Cenchreae, the port of Corinth (Romans 16:1). She possibly delivered the letter to the Romans, as she is mentioned first in Romans 16 at the beginning of the list of greetings to the church in Rome and is recommended for a warm welcome. All this suggests that Paul dictated the letter to the Romans in Corinth or Cenchreae to his scribe Tertius (Romans 16:22) and gave it to Phoebe.

According to Acts 19:21, Paul planned to pass through Macedonia and Achaia and then travel to Rome via Jerusalem. In Acts 20:2, he traveled through Achaia and Macedonia – probably as part of the collection trip – which is consistent with Romans 15:26. Paul probably wrote the letter in the three months in Greece mentioned in Acts 20:3 before traveling to Jerusalem. The letter would therefore have been written at the end of the collection and shortly before Paul's journey to Jerusalem, i. e., around the year 57 AD.

Adolf Schlatter confirmed through numerous parallels between the letter to the Romans and the two letters to the Corinthians that Romans was written at the end of and against the background of the conflict between Paul and the church in Corinth.¹⁷⁷

C. The Recipients: The History of the Church in Rome

Paul did not know the church in Rome personally, but from reports provided by others such as Aquila and Priscilla, who were among his closest coworkers (Romans 16:3; Acts 18:2; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19). It is not known who founded the church in Rome. Jews from Rome were already present in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:10); some of them may have been among the 3,000 who were converted at Pentecost (Acts 2:41). Merchants such as Aquila and Priscilla may also have brought the gospel to Rome. However, based on the information provided by the church fa-

¹⁷⁷ Adolf Schlatter. *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief*. Calwer Verlag: Stuttgart, 1975, pp. 9–16.

thers, Peter may also have worked in Rome after his flight from Jerusalem (Acts 12:17) in 42-45 A. D., which is why he did not necessarily have to have founded the church, even if he certainly played a decisive role in shaping it later on. Peter probably returned to Rome in 58 A. D. and was executed by Nero in 67 A. D., around the same time as Paul.¹⁷⁸ It is therefore understandable why Paul, in Romans 15:15-26, does not include Italy among the areas in which he could have worked without encroaching on the territory of another apostle.¹⁷⁹

In 49 A. D. Emperor Claudius had all Jews expelled from Rome (Acts 18:2). For this reason, Aquila and Priscilla also left Rome and met Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1-2). They were almost certainly already Christians in Rome at this point (cf. Acts 18:2, 18, 26). A statement by the Roman writer Suetonius suggests that there were also Jewish Christians among the expelled Jews or that the Jewish Christians were the reason for the expulsion in the first place:¹⁸⁰ “He [Emperor Claudius] expelled the Jews from Rome who were constantly causing unrest at the instigation of a certain Chrestus” (Vita Claudia 25). The order was later revoked or no longer observed, such that Priscilla and Aquila were also able to return to Rome.

Even though Paul did not know the church in Rome through his own experience, he prayed for them constantly (Romans 1:9-10) and longed to get to know them (Romans 1:10, 13; 15:22-23). He sent greetings to many coworkers and acquaintances who had come to live in Rome at the time (Romans 16:3-15). He also greeted the house church of Aquila and Priscilla (Romans 16:4; possibly also other house churches in 16:10-11).

¹⁷⁸ On the reason and relationship of St. Peter to Rome, see Stanislas Dockx. “Chronologie zum Leben des heiligen Petrus.” Pp. 85–108 in: Carsten Peter Thiede, *Das Petrusbild in der neueren Forschung*. R. Brockhaus: Wuppertal 1987 and the entire book; on Nero, see Kenneth L. Gentry. *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*. ICE: Tyler (Texas, USA), 1989 and Kenneth L. Gentry. *The Beast of Revelation*. ICE: Tyler (Texas, USA), 1989 (Gentry argues that Revelation was written before 70 AD and that Nero was the Antichrist).

¹⁷⁹ See the comments on Romans 15 in Lesson 28. Others such as Joseph R. Balyeat. *Babylon: The Great City of Revelation*. Onward Press: Sevierville (Tennessee, USA), 1991, pp. 87-92, however, assume that Romans 15 speaks precisely to the fact that Peter had never been to Rome before because Paul wanted to work only where no other apostle had laid the foundation and still wanted to come to Rome.

¹⁸⁰ According to C. E. B. Cranfield. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 16-17, who also sees here an impressive confirmation of Acts 18:2 and the fact that Acts 18:2 took place before Acts 18:12ff (Paul before Gallio).

It is striking that Paul nowhere refers to the Christians in Rome as “the church in Rome.” Of course, it is possible that he did this for no particular reason and simply used different terms. Others have referred to the house churches mentioned and concluded either that the church in Rome existed underground and therefore did not come together as a whole church or, conversely, that it was so large that it consisted of several congregations (which was also the case with the “church in Jerusalem”; Acts 8:1; similarly Acts 11:22; 15:4; 18:22).

The much-discussed question of whether the church in Rome consisted predominantly of Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians is pointless,¹⁸¹ even if there are more weighty reasons for the latter. In his letter, Paul addresses Jewish Christians at one point, Gentile Christians at another, and sometimes even Gentiles and then Jews in general. Otto Michel aptly wrote:

“The Roman church consisted of a Gentile Christian majority and a small Jewish-Christian group (cf. Romans 14:1-15:13), which, however, was constantly receiving new members from outside (Romans 14:1; 16:3ff). ... Paul frequently changes the form of address in the letter: he sometimes addresses the Jews, sometimes the Gentiles, and quite correspondingly sometimes the Jewish-Christians, sometimes the Gentile Christians as dialogical interlocutors.”¹⁸²

The large number of Gentile Christians in the Roman church is also not contradicted by the prominent role played by the Old Testament in the Letter to the Romans. C. E. B. Cranfield has written:

“Neither the constant use of the OT, which is found throughout the letter, nor the use of the words ‘I am speaking to men who know the law’ in 7:1, prove that Paul was writing to a predominantly Jewish Christian church, for the OT was as much the Bible of the Gentile Christians as of the Jewish Christians, and it is significant that Paul presupposes familiarity with and reverence for the OT in his letters to the Galatians and the Corinthians as well.”¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ See the presentation of the theories in William Hendriksen. *Romans*. New Testament Commentary. op. cit., The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1980, p. 20-23.

¹⁸² Otto Michel. *Der Brief an die Römer*. Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament 4¹⁴. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978⁵, p. 35-36; similar to John Murray. *The Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, p. XX; William Hendriksen. *Romans*. op. cit., p. 23.

¹⁸³ C. E. B. Cranfield. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, p. 18-19; similar to Otto Michel. *Der Brief an die Römer*. op. cit., p. 36; John Murray. *The Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, p. XX.

Paul was imprisoned in Jerusalem soon after writing the letter to the Romans and, as he had appealed to the emperor as a Roman citizen, was transferred to Rome (Acts 21-28). There he had to appear before the emperor and initially preached unhindered from his home (Acts 28:30-31). However, Paul was then fully imprisoned and finally executed, presumably around 67 A. D.¹⁸⁴ or approximately 10 years after the letter to the Romans was written.

Rome was the high point of Peter and Paul's ministry. The Gospel of Mark (Mark was Peter's interpreter), the Gospel of Luke along with the Acts of the Apostles (cf. its conclusion, Acts 28:30-31) and other Pauline letters were probably written in Rome. The fact cannot be denied that the church in Rome, whose faith radiated to the whole world (Romans 1:8; 16:19), played a central role in the spread of Christianity, even in view of its later abuse by the popes. (Of course, this applies all the more to the time after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A. D., when Jerusalem ceased to be the center of the church).

Werner Eschner¹⁸⁵ seeks to revolutionize the interpretation of Romans. He believes that the letter to the Romans is not addressed to Christians, neither Jewish nor Gentile Christians, but to the Jews of the synagogue in Rome.¹⁸⁶ Now, it is certainly not acceptable to reject this depiction simply because it is unfamiliar or sounds unbelievable. Yet even an in-depth study of the thesis cannot shake the view held up to now. Above all, however, it proves ill-fated that Eschner's commentary ends with Romans 11. This is because Romans 12-16 supposedly contributes nothing to the matter, whereas it is precisely in Romans 12-16 that it becomes clear that an existing church is being addressed, especially in Romans 12 and 14:1-15:13. Moreover, Eschner cannot avoid the exception of assuming, at least for Romans 11, that Gentiles are now being addressed, although for him it can of course only be proselytes.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ I follow the chronology of Stanislas Dockx. "Chronologie zum Leben des heiligen Petrus." op. cit., who compiles the reasons for the deaths of Peter and Paul in the year 67 A. D.

¹⁸⁵ Werner Eschner. *Der Römerbrief: An die Juden der Synagoge in Rom? Ein exegetischer Versuch und die Bestimmung des Bedeutungsinhaltes von 'dikaioun' im Neuen Testament*. 2 Vols. and a short overview. Self-published: Hannover 1981, pp. 668+31; also in abridged form: Werner Eschner. "Der Römerbrief - An die Juden der Synagogen in Rom?". *Friede über Israel: Zeitschrift für Kirche und Judentum* 66 (1983) 4: 146-160.

¹⁸⁶ At the same time as Eschner, J. Christiaan Beker argued that the letter to the Romans was written to the Jews in Rome; see the presentation and interpretation in Leon Morris. *The Epistle to the Romans*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (MI), 1988, p. 16.

¹⁸⁷ Proselytes are Gentiles who have converted to Judaism.

We can learn two things from Eschner without adopting the entire thesis: (1) Unbelievers and Jews read the letter, and their objections are taken into account by Paul; indeed, it sometimes seems in Romans – but only sometimes – as if Paul had in mind when writing that unbelievers could also be among the readers. It is not for nothing that the letter to the Romans often seems so evangelistic. (2) The central concepts of the letter to the Romans are not determined by Greek or Roman thinking but rather by the Old Testament. Eschner demonstrates this important statement using the terms ‘faith’ and ‘righteousness’. This often takes too much of a back seat in commentaries on Romans but cannot justify Eschner’s thesis, as Paul always thought in terms of the Old Testament – even towards Gentile Christians. This also invalidates the conclusion that Jews who do not believe in the Messiah are nevertheless already brothers of Christians or belong to the church of Jesus. In addition, Eschner forgets that all statements in the letter to the Romans about the Jews would also apply if the letter had been addressed directly to them, including the statement that there is no salvation for the Jews without Christ (e. g., Romans 3).

3. The Letter to the Romans as a Document Regarding Paul’s Missionary Practice

“What is the letter to the Romans about? It is about God’s plan for the world and how Paul’s mission to the Gentiles fits into this plan.”¹⁸⁸

This close relationship between the letter to the Romans and Paul’s missionary practice has too rarely been taken into account by commentators. In his important contribution *Die Beziehung von Rom. 1-3 zur Missionspraxis des Paulus* (translation of the title: *The Relationship of Romans 1-3 to Paul’s Missionary Practice*),¹⁸⁹ Emil Weber unfortunately did not go beyond Romans 3; other authors have only sketchily addressed the topic.¹⁹⁰ Nils Alstrup has written:

¹⁸⁸ Krister Stendahl. *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden: Anfragen an das abendländische Christentum*. Chr. Kaiser: München, 1978, p. 42; Stendahl, *ibid.*, p. 43–49, therefore considers Romans 9–11 to be the center of the letter, see the introduction to Romans 9 in Lesson 18.

¹⁸⁹ Emil Weber. *Die Beziehungen von Röm. 1–3 zur Missionspraxis des Paulus*. Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie 9 Heft 4 (1905), Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1905.

¹⁹⁰ E. g. Walter B. Russell III. “An Alternative Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (1988): 174–184; Paul S. Minear. *The Obedience of Faith: The Purpose of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans*. *Studies in Biblical Theology* 2/19. SCM Press: London, 1971, in particular the two appendices on mission, pp. 91–110; Nils Alstrup. “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans.” Pp. 70–94 in: Nils

“Paul has been called the first Christian theologian and the greatest Christian missionary of all time. However, scholars have often failed to realize how closely these two aspects are related.”¹⁹¹

At the same time, however, texts from the letter to the Romans play a major role in missionary history.¹⁹² For example, Romans 10:14ff. was one of the most popular texts for missionary preaching for several centuries.¹⁹³ Among the Calvinist Puritans of Great Britain and the USA in the 15th to 18th centuries, to whom the majority of modern Protestant world mission can be traced back,¹⁹⁴ the concerns of these mission sermons also found their way into the exegesis of the letter to the Romans. Otherwise, however, the exegesis of the letter remained mostly untouched by the intensive promotion of world mission.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul says that he seeks to preach the gospel to all people without exception, regardless of language, culture, and race (“*Greeks and non-Greeks*,” Romans 1:14) and education and social class (“*the wise and the foolish*,” Romans 1:14) and therefore comes to Rome (Romans 1:15). From this practical missionary concern, Paul moves directly to the ‘actual’ topic. In the famous verses of Romans 1:16-17, Paul begins his teachings with “*For ...*”. He therefore ‘only’ explains doctrinally what he wants to do practically according to Romans 1:8-15.

We find the same thing at the end of the actual teaching section. In Romans 15:14, Paul leads seamlessly and directly from the Old Testament quotations about the nations of the world back to his practical missionary plans and repeats much of what he had already said in the introduction.

This becomes even clearer if we place the entire final section, Romans 15:14-16:27, alongside the introduction, Romans 1:1-15. This **framework** of the letter to the Romans explains the current occasion of the letter and at

Alstrup. *Studies in Paul: Theology for the Early Christian Mission*. Augsburg Publ.: Minneapolis (Minnesota, USA), 1977; Krister Stendahl. *Der Jude Paulus und wir Heiden*. op. cit.; L. Grant McClung. “An Urban Cross-cultural Role Model: Paul’s Self-image in Romans.” *Global Church Growth (Corunna/USA)* 26 (1989): 1: 5–8.

¹⁹¹ Nils Alstrup. “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans.” op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁹² Documented in A. F. Walls. “The First Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans and the Modern Missionary Movement.” Pp. 346–357 in: W. Ward Gasque, Ralph P. Martin (eds.). *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday*. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (Michigan, USA), 1970.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 346–347.

¹⁹⁴ See Iain Murray. *The Puritan Hope: Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy*. Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1971 and Thomas Schirrmacher (ed.). “Die Zeit für die Bekehrung der Welt ist reif”: *Rufus Anderson und die Selbständigkeit der Kirche als Ziel der Mission. edition afem - mission scripts* 3. Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft: Bonn, 1993, pp. 31+35.

the same time states the theme of the letter in the first and last verses (Romans 1:1-6; 16:25-27): The “*obedience of faith*” must be proclaimed and planted among all peoples, as the Old Testament foretold (cf. e. g., on Romans 15:21; Isaiah 52:15 and the context of Isaiah 52:5-15, from which Paul quotes more frequently in Romans). The parallels between Romans 1:1-15 and 15:14-16:27 show that throughout the entire letter Paul does not lose sight of his practical missionary purpose.

On the framework of the letter to the Romans: Parallels between 1:1-15 and 15:14-16:27		
1:1-6	The gospel was foretold in the Old Testament.	16:25-27
1:5	The obedience that comes from faith has to be proclaimed to all nations.	16:26; 15:18
1:7	Grace and peace to you ...	16:20
1:8	The faith of the Roman Christians is known throughout the whole world.	16:19
1:8-13	Travel plans to Rome via Jerusalem.	15:22-29
1:11-12	Paul seeks to be spiritually encouraged by the Christians in Rome.	15:24+14
1:13	In spite of his wishes, Paul was prevented from traveling to Rome up to this time.	15:22
1:13-15	The gospel has to be proclaimed to all peoples.	15:14-29; cf. 16:26

Too often, the letter to the Romans has been interpreted as a purely doctrinal letter without this parenthesis:

“Most authors actually ignore the introductory and concluding statements of purpose and concentrate on the theological interpretation of the inner part of the letter.”¹⁹⁵

Certainly Paul, the academic among the apostles, wrote the most, longest and most complicated letters in the New Testament, and he presents the gospel most systematically in the letter to the Romans. At the same time, however, the letter was written out of concrete missionary work and com-

¹⁹⁵ Walter B. Russell III. “An Alternative Suggestion for the Purpose of Romans.” op. cit., p. 175.

prehensively justifies the justification and necessity of mission. We can draw the following conclusions:

Anyone who only pragmatically pursues ‘mission’ and therefore wants to do without ‘doctrine’ is ultimately pursuing a mission on their own behalf and does not care about *what* God has said and written about mission.

Anyone who teaches a ‘dogmatics’ that does not focus on ‘mission’ and does not lead to practical missionary work represents a doctrine on their own behalf and disregards *why* God has said and written something.

Biblical mission will always begin with sound, thorough teaching, and sound, thorough teaching will always lead to mission.

The same comparison could also be applied to ‘doctrine’ and ‘life,’ which are just as inseparable in the letter to the Romans.¹⁹⁶ Those who piously invoke one against the other ultimately destroy both.

4. Topics and Structure of the Letter to the Romans

A. Main Themes of the Letter to the Romans¹⁹⁷

A number of themes and focal points run so strongly through the letter to the Romans that it is impossible to identify the dominant theme per se and to derive a universally valid structure from it. We have already become acquainted with mission in Romans. Two other such focal points should be mentioned.

God in the Letter to the Romans

Leon Morris has pointed out that the most frequent word in Romans (after particles such as the article, ‘and,’ ‘in,’ and ‘himself’) is the word “God” (153 times). Then comes “Christ” 65 times and “Lord” 43 times. Every 46th word in Romans is “God”; in Acts, which ranks second in frequency among the New Testament books, the word “God” appears only once in every 110 words.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ See Section A. in Lesson 23 on Romans 12:1-8 in my German commentary “Der Römerbrief”, of which this chapter is the introduction.

¹⁹⁷ See in particular on the thematic intention of the Letter to the Romans L. Ann Jervis. *The Purpose of Romans. Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 55*. Sheffield Academic Press: Sheffield (Great Britain), 1991 and Karl Wieseler. *Zur Geschichte der neutestamentlichen Schriften und des Christentums*. J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung: Leipzig, 1880, pp. 54–107.

¹⁹⁸ Leon Morris. “The Theme of Romans.” Pp. 249–263 in: W. Ward Gasque, Ralph P. Martin (ed.). *Apostolic History and the Gospel: Biblical and Historical Essays Presented to*

“It is obvious that Paul speaks of God so often in Romans that no other topic even comes close.”¹⁹⁹

B. The Pauline Gospel is in Harmony with the Old Testament

The placement of the New Testament gospel in the history of salvation and thus the relationship of the New Testament church to the Old Testament, to the law, and to Israel plays an essential role, as the countless quotations and allusions from the Old Testament in the letter to the Romans show.²⁰⁰

The overview below contains the quotations²⁰¹ (in straight type) and the most important allusions²⁰² (in italics).

C. Regarding Outlines

The letter to the Romans can be outlined in different ways. The different outlines are not mutually exclusive. Rather, each one emphasizes a different thematic focus of the letter.

However, all of the following outlines, as well as the entire course, are based on the conviction that the letter to the Romans is a complete draft, i. e., that it was conceived from beginning to end as a thematic whole in which simply no part could simply be missing.

The structure of the letter to the Romans is therefore more than an overview of what Paul deals with in it. Over the course of the interpretation (especially at the beginning of chapter 5, chapter 9, and chapter 12),

F. F. Bruce on his 60th Birthday. Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids (Michigan), 1970, here pp. 250–252+263.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 250.

²⁰⁰ In my opinion, the best brief descriptions of this can be found in Hermann Friedrich Kohlbrügge. *Das Alte Testament nach seinem wahren Sinne gewürdigt aus den Schriften der Evangelisten und Apostel. Wozu das Alte Testament Bd. 1.* W. Hassel: Elberfeld, 1855, pp. 107–113 and in C. E. B. Cranfield. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans.* op. cit., vol. 2, p. 862–870. Extensive literature on Old Testament quotations in Romans can be found in *ibid.* p. 863, Note 1.

²⁰¹ Compiled on the basis of Otto Michel. *Paulus und seine Bibel. Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie. 2. Reihe. Bd. 18.* C. Bertelsmann: Gütersloh, 1929 and Gleason L. Archer, Gregory Chirichigno. *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament.* Moody Press: Chicago, 1983 (Hebrew and Greek from the Old Testament and Greek text from the New Testament side by side); Crawford Howell Toy. *Quotations in the New Testament.* Charles Scribner’s Sons: New York, 1884 (English text with commentary on the Hebrew and Greek texts).

²⁰² Based on Wilhelm Dittmar. *Vetus Testamentum in Novo: Die alttestamentlichen Parallelen des Neuen Testamentes im Wortlaut der Urtexte und der Septuaginta. Bd. 2.* Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1903.

we will repeatedly confront the view that the actual doctrinal part of the letter to the Romans constitutes only part of the Letter. In contrast, we agree with C. E. B. Cranfield, who has written:

“After years of trying again and again to follow Paul’s train of thought in Romans – with a few adjustments – we can only confess our overwhelming and ever-increasing impression of the unity of the letter and of 1:16b-15:13 in particular. Each time we reread it, we are impressed by the unity of the structure of the great central mass of the epistle to the Romans, by its order in detail and by its reasonable persuasiveness. ... We are more and more convinced that 1:16b-15:13 is a theological whole from which nothing essential can be removed without achieving a certain degree of disorder or destruction.”²⁰³

In the following, two important outlines will first be explained, as both of them describe essential themes of the Letter to the Romans. This is followed by the outlines and overviews on which this course is based.

Quotations from the Old Testament in the Letter to the Romans
For Table see pp. 21ff

a. Outline based on the expression ‘By no means’ and the significance of the law

In an excellent study, Wilhelm Lütgert²⁰⁴ drew attention to the fact that the letter to the Romans fends off many misunderstandings that Gentile Christians may have about the Old Testament and Israel. Otto Michel briefly summarizes Lütgert’s concerns:

“According to W. Lütgert ... it is incorrect to understand the Letter to the Romans solely in an anti-Judaistic²⁰⁵ sense. Many statements (e. g., Ro-

²⁰³ C. E. B. Cranfield. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, p. 819.

²⁰⁴ Wilhelm Lütgert. *Der Römerbrief als historisches Phänomen*. Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie 7 (1913) Heft 2. Bertelsmann: Gütersloh, 1913.

²⁰⁵ ‘Anti-Judaic,’ from the Greek ‘anti’ = against and ‘Judaizers,’ an expression for Jewish Christians who wanted to obligate the Gentile Christians to the ceremonial law of the Old Testament. That the letter to the Romans does not contain any anti-Judaism is demonstrated by Romans 14-15, where Paul tolerates Jewish ceremonies since the Jewish Christians did not declare them to be the way of salvation, as the explanations in Lesson 27 in my German commentary “Der Römerbrief”, of which this chapter is the introduction, show.

mans 3:31; 8:4; 13:8-10) teach a positive evaluation of the law and appear completely inexplicable in an anti-Judaistic sense. It is more likely that Paul must be speaking against a Gentile-Christian antinomianism. Indeed, the apostle himself is suspected of being involved in the rise of this antinomianism²⁰⁶ (Romans 3:1-8). It is generally admitted that Romans 6 is directed against libertine²⁰⁷ tendencies. Romans 9-11 also takes on a much more vivid picture if one understands this passage historically and assumes an anti-Semitic Christianity that indulges in arrogant contempt for Israel."²⁰⁸

Lütgert himself summarizes the results of his study as follows:

“The letter to the Romans is intended to protect the predominantly Gentile Christian community in Rome from an antinomian Christianity, which is combined with a contempt for Israel and a Judaeo-Christian lack of freedom and at the same time nourishes revolutionary tendencies in the community. This Christianity is spreading in the Gentile Christian communities, initially referring to Paul, but is already beginning to oppose him. Paul therefore has reason to distinguish his own gospel from this, to warn the Roman church against it and thus to secure the kind of reception that was necessary for his effectiveness in the Roman church. This explains why he expresses his positive position on the law so emphatically in his letter to the Romans and why he gives his doctrine of grace the form of the doctrine of justification, for with that his positive relationship to the law is thus included in his doctrine of grace. ... Paul is compelled to take on the law and Jewish Christianity against the Gentile Christians.”²⁰⁹

The best proof of Lütgert’s approach, that Paul in Romans is primarily opposed to the contempt of the law (antinomianism²¹⁰) and the contempt of Israel (anti-Semitism²¹¹), is certainly Ray R. Sutton’s suggested structure

²⁰⁶ ‘Antinomianism,’ ‘antinomian’ from Greek ‘anti’ = against; ‘nomos’ = law; thus a doctrine directed against the validity of the law. The term originates from the period of the Reformation. Cf. ‘autonomy’ from ‘autos’ = self; ‘nomos’ = law, i. e., ‘to be a law unto oneself.’ In contrast, ‘theonomy’ (from the Greek ‘theos’ = God and ‘nomos’ = law) refers to the view that the moral law of the Old Testament is still in force today. In the USA, ‘theonomy’ refers to a movement that considers Old Testament constitutional law to still be valid.

²⁰⁷ From the Latin *libertas*, ‘freedom.’ This refers to a permissive Christianity that gets by without God’s commandments and prohibitions.

²⁰⁸ Otto Michel. *Der Brief an die Römer*. op. cit., p. 40.

²⁰⁹ Wilhelm Lütgert. *Der Römerbrief als historisches Problem*. op. cit., pp. 111–112.

²¹⁰ Esp. *ibid.*, pp. 69–79.

²¹¹ Esp. *ibid.*, pp. 79–90.

for Romans 3-11,²¹² as it forms the basis of the overview below. Sutton assumes that Paul follows the Old Testament covenant scheme²¹³ in Romans and goes through it twice in an inverted manner, as can be seen from the distribution of the tenfold “May it never be!” (Greek *me genoito*, more literally “*may it not happen*”) after 10 critical questions to Paul. On one hand, Israel is called before the court because the New Testament gospel is in harmony with the Old Testament law. At the same time, however, Gentile Christians are also denied the right to simply dismiss Israel, the Old Testament, and the law.

The Old Testament covenantal scheme, which has striking similarities with Near Eastern feudal contracts, begins with the invocation and representation of God (transcendence), names the relationship of dependence (hierarchy), the covenant conditions (ethics), describes the conclusion of the covenant (oath) and explains the extent to which the covenant applies to subsequent generations or successors (succession).²¹⁴

Sutton’s thesis that the letter to the Romans is based on the covenant scheme is supported by the facts that a covenant could only be made by oath and that the expression “May it never be!” in Romans 3:4, 6, 31; 6:2, 15; 7:7, 13; 9:14; 11:1, 11 (otherwise in Luke 20:16; 1 Corinthians 6:15; Galatians 2:17; 3:21; 6:14) is a rendering of the Old Testament oath formula “*Far be it from me*” (you, us, etc.).²¹⁵

In 1 Sam 14:45 we find the formula “Far from it!” (or “may it not happen”) together with the oath formula “as the Lord lives.”²¹⁶ In Joshua 22:29 (covenant witnesses in Joshua 22:27) and 24:16 (conclusion of the covenant in Joshua 22:25), the formula has to do with concluding the covenant. In 1 Samuel 2:30, God himself uses it for his oath.

²¹² Ray R. Sutton. “Does Israel Have a Future?” *Covenant Renewal* (Tyler, Texas USA) 2 (1988) 12 (Dec): 1–4.

²¹³ Ray R. Sutton. *That You May Prosper: Dominion by Covenant*. Institute for Christian Economics: Tyler (TX), 1987; 1992². Pp. 246-252 proposes further nested covenantal schemes in the Letter to the Romans.

²¹⁴ See the latter book and the detailed justification in Lessons 10 and 13 in Thomas Schirrmacher. *Ethik*. 2 Vols. Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1994. Vol. 2.

²¹⁵ For the oath formulas, see lesson 29 “Das Schwören” in *ibid*.

²¹⁶ For the oath formulas, see lesson 29, “Das Schwören,” in *ibid*. In 1 Samuel 14:25 the oath of the people “replaces” the oath of Saul in 1 Samuel 14:24.

**The letter to the Romans as a mirror image of the covenant structure
Outline based on the expression “by no means!” (and the like)**

A. Transcendence (Romans 3:1-4)

“What if some did not have faith? Will their lack of faith nullify God’s faithfulness? **By no means!** Let God be true, and every man a liar. As it is written: ‘So that you may be proved right when you speak and prevail when you judge’” (3:3-4).

B. Hierarchy (Romans 3:5-30)

“But if our unrighteousness brings out God’s righteousness more clearly, what shall we say? That God is unjust in bringing his wrath on us? (I am using a human argument.) **By no means!** If that were so, how could God judge the world?” (3:5-6).

C. Ethics (Romans 3:31-5:21)

“Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? **By no means!** Rather, we uphold the law.” (3:31).

D. Oaths (Romans 6:1-14)

“What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? **By no means!** We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” (6:1-3).

E. Succession (Romans 6:15-7:6)

“What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? **By no means!** Do you not know that when you present yourselves to someone as slaves for obedience, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin resulting in death, or of obedience resulting in righteousness?” (6:15-16).

Beginning of the second, mirror-image segment

E’. Succession (Romans 7:7-12)

“What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? **By no means!** Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’” (7:7).

D’. Oaths/Sanctions (Romans 7:12-9:13)

“So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. Did that which is good, then, become death to me? **By no means!** But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful. We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.” (7:12-14).

C’. Ethics (Romans 9:14-10:21)

“What then shall we say? Is God unjust? **By no means!** For he says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.’” (9:14-15).

B’. Hierarchy (Romans 11:1-10)

“I ask then: Did God reject his people? **By no means!** I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew.” (11:1-2).

A'. Succession/Transcendence (Romans 11:11-36)

“Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? **By no means!** Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.” (11:11).

The fact that the Pauline formula *me genoito* (here translated by no means!) corresponds to the Old Testament formula “*Far be it from me!*” (Hebrew *halila*)²¹⁷ also reflects the Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint), which uses “*far be it*” in Genesis 44:7, 17; Joshua 22:29; 24:26 and 1 Kings 21:3 (Septuagint 20:3) with *me genoito* (otherwise with *medamos*, “by no means” etc.), as well as the oath formula “*amen*” in Psalm 72:19 with ‘*genoito, genoito*’ (Septuagint Psalm 71:19). The Hebrew expression is derived from “desecration” and means something like “may there be desecration for me before God if ...”²¹⁸

b. Outline based on Romans 1:17 and Habakkuk 2:4

In Romans 1:17, Paul contrasts his understanding of Habakkuk 2:4 (“*the righteous will live by faith*”) with the Pharisaic understanding (“the one who is righteous [by keeping the law] will live by faith”), as will be shown below with regard to Romans 1:17. A look at the structure of the letter shows that **Habakkuk 2:4 is the topic**, indeed **the heading** of the letter to the Romans – in the very order, to be sure, as suggested by Paul’s interpretation.

Chapters 1-4 deal with the question of how to be justified by faith, first negatively (1:18-3:20) and then positively (3:21-4:25). In chapters 1-4, “faith” occurs over 25 times, but “live” only twice. In 5:1, Paul then says “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith ...” Chapters 5-8 deal with the “life” of the righteous by faith. This is why “believe” hardly appears any more, whereas “live” appears over 25 times.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ So Otto Michel. *Der Brief an die Römer*. op. cit., p. 138, Note 6; John Murray. *The Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, p. 94, Note 1 and Friedrich Blass et. al. *Grammatik des neutestamentlichen Griechisch*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1979¹⁵, p. 311, Note 2 (see Paul Billerbeck. *Die Briefe des Neuen Testaments und die Offenbarung Johannis erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch. Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* 3. Eds. Hermann L. Strack, Paul Billerbeck. C. H. Beck: München, 1926, p. 133); limiting: C. E. B. Cranfield. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. op. cit., vol. 1, p. 181.

²¹⁸ Georg Giesen. *Die Wurzel sb’ “schwören”: Eine semasiologische Studie zum Eid im Alten Testament*. Bonner Biblische Beiträge 56. Peter Hanstein: Königstein, 1981. S. 43.

²¹⁹ Anders Nygren. *Der Römerbrief*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1965 (besprochen in John Murray. *Collected Writings*. Bd. 3. The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh, 1982. S. 350-355), pp. 66-72 in particular has pointed this out.

Chapters 9-11 are a continuation of chapters 1-4 and pose the question of how the history of Israel is to be categorized in this righteousness by faith. Chapters 12-15 are a continuation of chapters 5-8 and draw from them the practical consequences for the “life” of those righteous by faith. This proves once again that doctrine and life belong inseparably together in the letter to the Romans and thus for every Christian!

“It is important that a scriptural quotation is included in 1:17 (Habakkuk 2:4 = 1:17b) and exegeted by the Pauline thesis. This scriptural quotation is so important that it determines the structure of the first two main sections (chapters 1-4 and 5-8). The first main part unfolds the understanding of eschatological justice ... negatively (1:18-3:20) and positively (3:21-4:25), while the second unfolds the meaning of eschatological life. ... At the same time, a stylistic peculiarity should be noted here: the first main section speaks consistently indicatively in a doctrinal style (with the exception of 3:8), while the second main section alternates between indicative²²⁰ doctrinal sections (such as 5:12-21) and ‘we’ sections (5:1ff.; 6:1ff.) or later ‘you’ addresses (6:16ff.; 7:1ff.). This stylistic difference confirms the break between chapter 4 as the conclusion and chapter 5 as the beginning of a main section.”²²¹

Romans 1:17 and Habakkuk 2:4 as well as the aforementioned word statistics result in the following structure of the letter to the Romans:

Outline in brief for memorization

(on the basis of Habakkuk 2:4 and Romans 1:17):

	(Framework Ch. 1:	The missionary occasion)
I.	Ch. 1–4:	“ <i>The righteous by faith</i> ”
II.	Ch. 5–8:	“ <i>will live</i> ”
III.	Ch. 9–11:	“ <i>The righteous by faith</i> ” and Israel
IV.	Ch. 12–15:	“ <i>will live</i> ” in practice
	(Framework Ch. 15–16:	The missionary occasion)

c. Overall structure of the letter to the Romans utilized

The overall outline on which the course is based is derived from the brief outline based on Romans 1:17 and Habakkuk 2:4.²²² In this outline, the key words of the above brief outline have also been inserted in their own font style.

²²⁰ ‘Indicative’ is the propositional form (e. g. ‘you are good’) in contrast to the ‘imperative,’ the command form (e. g. ‘be good’).

²²¹ Otto Michel. *Der Brief an die Römer*. op. cit., p. 43.

²²² See a similar classification in Anders Nygren. *Der Römerbrief*. op. cit., pp. 36-37.

Detailed outline of the letter to the Romans

I. Introduction to the letter: The missionary occasion (1:1–15)

II. Righteousness by faith (1:16–15:13)

“The righteous by faith”

A. The topic (1:16–17)

B. God’s wrath is revealed (1:18–3:20)

- a. The Gentiles are guilty (1:18–32)
- b. Jews and Greeks are guilty (2:1–16)
- c. The Jews are guilty (2,17–29)
- d. The Jews are guilty despite the law (3:1–8)
- e. All people are guilty (3:9–20)

C. God’s righteousness is revealed (3:21–4:25)

- a. Righteousness through faith and not the law (3:21–31)
- b. Abraham’s righteousness through faith (4:1–25)
- [c. God’s love and peace in tribulation (5:1–11)]
- [d. Adam and Christ (5:12–21)]

“will live”

D. The freedom of the life of the righteous (5:1–8:39)

- a. FREE FROM ADAM AND ORIGINAL SIN (5:1–21)
- b. FREE FROM SPECIFIC SINS (6:1–23)
- c. FREE FROM THE LAW (7:1–25)
- d. FREE FROM THE FLESH (8:1–17)
- e. FREE FROM HOPELESSNESS (8:18–39)

“The righteous by faith” and “Israel”

E. God’s righteousness and Israel (9:1–11:36)

- a. God’s election by grace: predestination (9:1–33)
- b. Israel is partly hardened (10:1–11:10)
- c. The Gentiles are grafted in (11:11–21)
- d. Hope for Israel (11:22–36)

“will live” in practice

F. Exhortations for the life of the righteous (12:1–15:13)

- a. Life as perpetual service (12:1–2)
- b. Life in the congregation: the gifts of grace (12:3–8)
- c. Life in love (12:9–21)
- d. Life with state authority (13:1–7)

- e. Life in love and hope: the commandments (13:8–14)
 f. Life in the church: the weak (14:1–15:13)

III. Conclusion of the letter: The missionary concern (15:14–16:27)

d. *Brief outline based on the keyword 'salvation'*

Outline in brief for memorization

(Framework Ch. 1:	The missionary motive)
I. Ch. 1–3:	The WHY of SALVATION
II. Ch. 4–5:	The HOW of SALVATION
III. Ch. 6–8:	The WHEREFORE of SALVATION
IV. Ch. 9–11:	Israel's SALVATION
V. Ch. 12–15:	LIFE coming from SALVATION
(Framework Ch. 15–16:	The missionary motive)

e. *Six central themes in the letter to the Romans*

To summarize, it is important to pay attention to the main topics listed in the next box when studying the letter to the Romans.

Six central themes in the letter to the Romans

- God's nature and actions in grace and wrath, love and holiness
- God's righteousness, which is given by grace to all people, not just the Jews
- The harmony of the New Testament gospel with the Old Testament
- The relationship of the New Testament church to believing and unbelieving Jews
- The significance of the Old Testament law for the righteousness of God and the life of the righteous
- The world mission that without exception seeks to and should proclaim all this to all people without exception

5 On Romans 15:8-33

Text of Romans 15:8-33

Because I say

that Christ has become a servant to the circumcision

on behalf of the truth of God

to confirm the promises *given* to the fathers

9 **and for** the Gentiles to glorify God

for His mercy;

as it is written [*Samuel 22:50; Psalm 18,50*]:

“Therefore I will give praise

to You among the Gentiles

and I will sing to Your name.”

10 Again he says [*Deuteronomy 32:43*]:

“Rejoice, O Gentiles,

with His people.”

11 And again [*Psalm 117,1*]:

“Praise the Lord all you Gentiles,

and let all the peoples praise Him.”

12 Again Isaiah says [*Isaiah 11:10*]:

“There shall come the root of Jesse,

and He who arises,

to rule over the Gentiles, -

in Him shall the Gentiles hope.”

13 Now may the God of hope fill you

with all joy

and peace

in believing,

so that you will abound

in hope

by the power of the Holy Spirit.

14 And concerning you, my brethren,

I myself also am convinced

that you yourselves

are full of goodness,

filled with all knowledge

and able also to admonish one another.

15 But I have written very boldly to you on some points

- 16 **so** as to remind you again,
 because of the grace that was given me from God,
 to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles,
 ministering as a priest the gospel of God
 so that
 my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable,
 sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
- 17 Therefore in Christ Jesus
 I have found¹ reason for boasting in things pertaining to God.
- 18 **For** I will not presume
 to speak of anything
 except what Christ has accomplished through me,
 resulting in the obedience of the Gentiles
 by word and deed,
 19 in the power of signs and wonders,
 in the power of the Spirit;
 so that from Jerusalem
 and round about as far as Illyricum
 I have fully preached
 the gospel of Christ.
- 20 And thus I aspired
 to preach the gospel,
 not where Christ was *already* named,
 so that I would not build
 on another man's foundation;
- 21 but as it is written, [*Isaiah 52:15*]:
 "*They who had no news of Him,*
 shall see,
 and they who have not heard
 shall understand."
- 22 **For this reason** I have often been prevented
 from coming to you;
- 23 but now,
 with no further place for me in these regions,
 and since I have had for many years a longing
 to come to you
- 24 whenever I go to Spain, –
 for I hope
 to see you
 in passing
 –, and to be helped on my way there by you,

- when I have
 first enjoyed your company for a while –
 25 but now, I am going to Jerusalem
 serving the saints,
 26 **For** Macedonia and Achaia
 have been pleased
 to make a contribution
 for the poor among the saints
 in Jerusalem.
 27 Yes, they were pleased to *do so*,
 and they are indebted to them.
For if the Gentiles
 have shared
 in their **spiritual** things,
 they are indebted.
 to minister to them
 also in **material** things.
 28 Therefore, when I have finished this,
 and have put my seal on²²³ this fruit of theirs,
 I will go on by way of you to Spain.
 29 I know that
 When I come to you,
 I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.
 30 Now I urge you, brethren,
 by our Lord Jesus Christ and
 by the love of the Spirit,
 to strive together with me
 in your prayers
 to God for me,
 31 **that** I may be rescued
 from those who are disobedient in Judea,
 and **that** my service for Jerusalem
 may prove acceptable to the saints;
 32 **so that** I may come to you
 in joy by the will of God
 and find *refreshing* rest in your company.
 33 Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

²²³ Or: sealed.

A. V. 8-13: All Nations glorify God

Paul reminded the “strong” Gentile Christians “*that Christ had become a servant of the circumcision*” (v. 8), that is, he had submitted to the law, especially the Jewish ceremonial law. Thus he became a servant of the circumcision in order to “*confirm the promises given to the fathers*” (v. 8). Surprisingly, Paul immediately moves from the “*promises to the fathers*”, which refer to the Jewishness of the Messiah, to the “*promises to the fathers*”, which refer to the Gentiles. In doing so, he reminds the Gentile Christians of Romans 9-11, where he already made it clear that the Gentiles owe their salvation to the work of Christ and the history of Israel.

The Old Testament is full of promises that the nations of the earth will worship the God of Israel. Therefore, before Paul returns directly to his practical concerns about a visit to Rome and world mission, he lists a number of Old Testament prophecies that the Jewish Messiah will also be the Lord of all nations. Adolf Schlatter writes the following about the individual Old Testament quotations in vv. 9-13:

“The common praise of God, in which all nations participate, is the goal of God proclaimed in Scripture. In 2 Samuel 22:50, Paul probably heard Christ speak of confessing God among the nations and singing praises to His name. It is the work of Christ that the Church does this. Deuteronomy 32:43 is quoted because it calls the nations to join Israel in the common praise of God. Psalm. 117:1 proclaims without distinction or exception that all nations are invited to the praise of God. Isaiah 11:1,10 explains that the worship of the nations is due to their being under the Lordship of Christ. ... Paul bases his intercession on the promise of Scripture.”²²⁴

These and subsequent Old Testament passages also refute the theory that the Old Testament prophets were unaware of the New Testament Church, since they also foretell the New Testament ministry of the Church coming from all nations. In any case, the apostles, like Paul, relate Old Testament promises directly to their present. In fact, his missionary work was based on the fact that the Old Testament foretold and confirmed his and the New Testament’s missionary work.²²⁵

²²⁴ Adolf Schlatter, *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief*, Calwer Verlag: Stuttgart, 1975⁵, 383.

²²⁵ Cf. the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, which Fritz Weber cites as evidence for this. “Did the Prophets of the Old Testament Foresee the Church Age?”. *Bibel und Gemeinde* 90(1990) 4: 409-432.

“And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth’” (Revelation 5: 9-10).

B. Topic: The Old Testament Rationale for New Testament Mission

The question has often been asked why Jesus’ mission command (**Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16**) is not quoted again by the apostles after Pentecost, even though Jesus’ “command” is mentioned several times in relation to the mission command (e. g. Acts 1:2; 10:42). Was mission to all peoples never controversial in the New Testament community, making the reference to Jesus’ command superfluous? On the contrary, mission to the Gentiles began slowly and was very controversial for a long time.

However, when we look at the New Testament discussions of the justification for mission, we are surprised to find that where we would have quoted Jesus’ Great Commission, the Old Testament is almost always quoted. The Great Commission is the fulfilment of the Old Testament. It was, so to speak, the starting signal that what had long been announced and prepared was finally to be set in motion. Romans, and especially Romans 15, is an obvious example of this.

The promise to the patriarchs that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through them (Genesis 12:3; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4; 28:14) is repeatedly used to justify mission to the Gentiles (Luke 1:54-55, 72; Acts 3:25-26; Romans 4:13-25; Ephesians 3:3-4; Galatians 3:7-9, 14; Hebrews 6:13-20; 11:12).

A few other examples should emphasize that New Testament mission has an Old Testament foundation.

Acts 13:46-49 reports that **Paul** and Barnabas were rejected by the Jews and therefore explain why they are now addressing the Gentiles in Antioch. They quote **Isaiah 49:6** (= **Acts 13:47**): *“For this is what the Lord has commanded us: ‘I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.’”*²²⁶ The context of the text in Isaiah makes it clear that at this point the Apostles are taking up an Old Testament missionary command: *“It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth.” (Isaiah 49:6).*

²²⁶ Cf. regarding these verses, *ibid.*, pp. 424-425.

In his closing address to the Apostles' Council in **Acts 15:13-21**, **James** justifies Paul's right to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles with **Amos 9:11-12** (similar to Isaiah 61:4; Psalm 22:27-28; Zechariah 8:22), where the rebuilding of the Tabernacle of David – for James, therefore, for the congregation – brings together the remnant of the Jews with the Gentiles who have joined them (“*and all the Gentiles*”).²²⁷

As a rationale for preaching the Gospel to the Gentile Cornelius, **Peter** links Jesus' Great Commission with a reference to the Old Testament: “*He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name*” (**Acts 10:42-43**).

So it is not surprising that Jesus' Great Commission in the Gospel of Luke takes a completely different form than in Matthew and Mark, and that the mission is derived directly from the entire Old Testament. In **Luke 24:43-49**: Jesus says to his disciples: “*This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.*’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, “**This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.** You are witnesses of these things. I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

Thus, according to Jesus, all parts of the Old Testament speak not only of his coming, cross and resurrection, but also explicitly of the global mission: forgiveness must be proclaimed to all nations.

C. V. 14-33: The Apostle as Missionary

Paul assumes that all Christians are “*full of goodness*” and “*complete in knowledge*” and that they are therefore “*competent*” to “*instruct one another*” (v.14). If he nevertheless wrote them such a detailed letter, it was because of his “*grace God gave*” (v.15). That “*grace*” can refer to a spiritual gift (gift of grace) was already made clear in Romans 12:3-8.²²⁸

Here “*grace*” refers to Paul's call to be an apostle (cf. Romans 1:1), which gives him the right and the duty to teach other Christians with absolute authority, as is the case in Romans. For Paul, his apostolate was first and

²²⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 425-430.

²²⁸ Cf. on this in Section D. and Section E. in Unit 23 of my German Commentary to the Romans.

foremost a ministry “to the Gentiles” (Romans 15:16). God had not only called him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles at the time of his conversion. The other apostles also agreed with Paul that they, especially Peter, would be apostles to the ‘circumcised’ or “Jews,” but Paul would be an apostle to the “uncircumcised,” the “Gentiles” (Galatians 2:6-9), because the other apostles, according to Paul, “*recognized the grace that was given to me*” (Galatians 2:9).

He was certified by God for this apostolate “*by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit*” (Romans 15:19). In **2 Corinthians 12:12** it is stated accordingly: “*The things that mark an apostle - signs, wonders and miracles - were done among you with great perseverance.*” So at this point we are not talking about signs and wonders in general. Rather, it is a question of those which the first witnesses of the gospel confirmed, as is clearly stated in **Hebrews 2:3-4**: Salvation “*was first announced by the Lord [Jesus], was confirmed to us by those who heard it. God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.*”

When Paul describes his missionary work here and does not want to preach the gospel where other apostles have already worked and churches already exist (Romans 15:19-21,23), the question arises whether we can apply his special mission as an apostle to our time. Are there still apostles today to whom what Paul said here applies? Some say yes, others say no. I believe that both sides are right in a sense. This can be seen when we look at all the references to the word “apostle” in the New Testament and who was called an “apostle”.

D. Topic: The dual Apostle Concept

On the basis of the documentary evidence in the New Testament, I assume that **fundamental apostles such as Paul or Peter** (“**Apostles of Jesus Christ**”), whom God fully confirmed by signs and wonders and whose teaching was absolutely binding on the churches, no longer exist today. Alongside them, however, **there was and still is the gift of grace and the office of apostle in the general sense** (“**apostles of the churches**”). These apostles, sent out by the Church, were and are missionaries who have the special gift of preaching the Gospel in areas where there are no Christians and no Church.

All instances of the word “**apostle**” in the New Testament²²⁹

1. Apostle = Jesus in the Letter to the Hebrews
 - Hebrews 3:1: “... *fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess.*”
2. Apostles = the 12 Apostles in the gospels
 - Matthew 10:2; Mark 3:14; 6:30; Luke 9:10; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10
3. Apostles = Messengers in the Gospels
 - Luke 11:49: “*Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’*”
 - John 13:16: “*I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.*”
4. Apostles = the 12 Apostles in the Acts of the Apostles
 - Acts 1:2; 1:26; 2:37+42+43; 4:33+35+37; 5:12+29+40; 6:6; 8:1+14+18; 9:27; 11:1; among them the following are to be mentioned in particular:
 - Acts 2:43; 5:12 “... *wonders and signs were done by the apostles.*” (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:12 under 7.)
 - Acts 2:42: “*They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching ...*”
 - Acts 11:1: “*The apostles and the brothers ...*”
 - Acts 15:2+4+6+22+23; 16:4: “... *the apostles and elders ...*”
5. Apostle = Peter in the opening verse of Peter’s letters
 - 1 Peter 1:1; 2 Peter 1:1
6. Apostle = Paul in the opening verse of the Pauline letters
 - Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:1; Colossians 1,1; 1 Timothy 1:1; 2 Timothy 1:1; Titus 1:1 (Texts see partly under 8.)
7. Apostle = the 12 apostles and Paul in the Pauline Epistles
 - 1 Corinthians 4:9: “*For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men.*”

²²⁹ An older version appeared as “The Word Apostle in the New Testament.” Querschmitte 3 (1990) 4: 5-7.

- 1 Corinthians 9:5: *“Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?”*
 - 1 Corinthians 15:9: *“For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.”*
 - 2 Corinthians 11:5: *“But I do not think I am in the least inferior to those ‘super-apostles’.”*
 - 2 Corinthians 12:12: *“The things that mark an apostle--signs, wonders and miracles--were done among you with great perseverance.”*
 - Galatians 1:17: *“nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was ...”*
 - Galatians 1:19: *“I saw none of the other apostles--only James ...”*
8. Apostle = Paul in the Pauline letters
- Romans 1:1: *“Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God ...”*
 - Romans 11:13: *“Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry.”*
 - 1 Corinthians 1:1: *“Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God ...”*
 - 1 Corinthians 9:1: *“Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord?”*
 - 1 Corinthians 9:2: *“Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you!” (v. 2b see under 9.).*
 - 2 Corinthians 1:1 = Ephesians 1:1 = Colossians 1:1: *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God ...”*
 - 2 Corinthians 12:12: *“The things that mark an apostle – signs, wonders and miracles – were done among you with great perseverance.”*
 - Galatians 1:1: *“Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father ...”*
 - Galatians 2:8: *“For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.”*
 - 1 Timothy 1:1: *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope ...”*
 - 1 Timothy 2:7: *“And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle – I am telling the truth, I am not lying – and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles.”*
 - 2 Timothy 1:1: *“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus ...”*

- 2 Timothy 1:11: *“And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.”*
9. “Apostleship”
- Acts 1:25: *“to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs. Then they cast lots ...”* (special election of Matthias, cf. v. 24+26).
 - Galatians 2:8: see under 8.
 - Romans 1:5: *“Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”*
 - 1 Corinthians 9:2: *“For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.”* (v.2a see under 8.).
10. Words of the Apostles
- 2 Peter 3:2: *“I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.”*
 - Judas 17: *“... remember what the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ foretold.”*
11. Apostle = the 12 apostles in the Revelation of John
- Revelation 18:20: *“Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!”*
 - Revelation 21:14: *“The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”*
12. “Apostles and Prophets”
- 1 Corinthians 12:28: *“And in the church God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then ...”*
 - 1 Corinthians 12:29: *“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers?”*
 - Ephesians 2:20: *“... you are ... built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.”*
 - Ephesians 3:5: (v.4: *“the mystery”*) *“... as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God’s holy apostles and prophets.”*
 - Ephesians 4:11: *“It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers ...”*
 - 2 Peter 3:2: *“I want you to recall the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets and the command given by our Lord and Savior through your apostles.”*
 - Revelation 18:20: *“Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets!”*

13. False Apostles

- 2 Corinthians 11:13: “For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ.”
Revelation 2:2: “... you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false.”²³⁰

14. Apostles = Apostles other than the 12 disciples and Paul

14.1. Leading representatives of the church in Jerusalem

- Matthias: Acts 1:25, 26a: “... to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs. Then they cast lots ...” (special selection of Matthias to replace Judas as the 12th Apostle, cf. v. 24+26).
- James and Judas: 1 Corinthians 9:5: “Don’t we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord’s brothers and Cephas?” (James and Judas are on a par with the Apostles.)
- James: Galatians 1:19: “I saw none of the other apostles--only James ...” (James is an apostle.)
- Miscellaneous: 1 Corinthians 15:7: (v. 5: Jesus appeared to Cephas Jesus and the Twelve; v. 6: he appeared to the 500 brothers) v. 7: “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles ...” (It is unclear whether James, the brother of Jesus, is seen here as an apostle or only on a par with them.)

14.2. Co-workers of the Apostle Paul

- Barnabas: Acts 14:4: “... some sided with the Jews, others with the apostles.” (Barnabas was an apostle.)
- Barnabas: Acts 14:14 “But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard ...” (Barnabas was an Apostle.)
- Andronikus und Junias: Romans 16:7: “Greet Andronicus and Junias ... They are outstanding²³¹ among the apostles²³² ...”

²³⁰ Adolf Harnack. *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*. VMA-Verlag: Wiesbaden, no year indicated (1924 reprint⁴). P. 335 rightly points out that “the polemic against pseudo-apostles and super-apostles demonstrates that the term ‘apostle’ is not a numerically closed one for Paul.”

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 335 and Cranfield 2/789-790 reject the alternative translation “outstanding among the apostles,” according to which the named would not be apostles themselves.

²³² Cf. in detail on this verse Section B. in Unit 29 of my German Commentary to the Romans.

- Epaphroditus as a messenger of the church: Philippians 2:25: “... *Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger (apostle), whom you sent to take care of my needs.*”
- Messengers of the churches in general: 2 Corinthians 8:23: “... *as for our brothers, they are representatives of the churches and an honor to Christ*” (Messengers of the churches in Paul’s missionary work are apostles.)

(Comment on the table:) First, the 12 closest followers of Jesus are called apostles (see 2. and 3.). Later, Matthias is added as a substitute for Judas (see 14.) and then Paul (see 6. to 9.). All these apostles had seen Jesus (Paul in a vision), were commissioned by Him, demonstrated their apostolate through special signs and miracles (see especially 9.) and contributed to the revelation and writing down of the New Testament message (see 10. to 12.).

Other pillars and co-founders of the New Testament church are occasionally called apostles or put on the same level with the apostles, namely the brothers of Jesus, James and Judas (see 14.), possibly also Barnabas. In the case of Barnabas, however, it could already be about the more general concept of apostle, which above all becomes clear in 2 Corinthians 8:23. Paul speaks there generally of “*representatives of the churches*” (see 14.). Here, apostles are generally co-workers sent in Paul’s missionary labor (cf. Philippians 2:25) with a leadership task that usually included several churches. They are not “*apostles of Jesus Christ,*” as apostles in the narrower sense are sometimes called, but “*apostles of the churches.*” They correspond most closely to our today’s missionaries, whereby ‘missionary’ is simply derived from the Latin translation of the Greek word ‘apostle’ (‘messenger’).

As important as this general task of the church apostle sent by the church is, it must be taken into account that wherever the words and commandments of the apostles (see 10.), the foundation of the New Testament church (see 11. and 12.), or the revelation of the Word of God are mentioned, basic apostles are meant.

It is obvious, therefore, that foundational apostles could only exist in the generation during and after Jesus’ time on earth. ‘Apostles’ in the sense of 2 Corinthians 8:23, on the other hand, still existed in the 2nd century²³³ and still exist today, although to avoid confusion it is better to speak of missionaries.²³⁴

²³³ According to Adolf Harnack. *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums ...*, op. cit., p. 361.

²³⁴ Also in the Middle Ages, the word ‘apostle’ referred to the 12 apostles of Jesus as well as to all missionaries; according to Einar Molland. “Besaß die Alte Kirche ein Missionsprogramm?” Pp. 51-76 in: Heinzgünther Frohnes, Uwe W. Knorr

Wayne A. Grudem points out a similar distinction with respect to the office of prophet²³⁵ For him, there were, on the one hand, the prophets in the Old Testament. They found their continuation in the apostles of the New Testament and literally transmitted God's word and rightly claimed absolute, divine authority. Therefore, they were also not allowed to be criticized. In addition, there are prophets in the Old and New Testaments and today who are not literally inspired. Rather, they receive a general message from God for a situation that may be examined and criticized.

E. V. 19-23: Paul's mission strategy and unreached peoples

There is, I think, some justification for transferring Paul's missionary strategy from his work as a foundational Apostle to the work of church apostles today. **Paul mostly planted churches in centrally located cities, appointed elders trained by him very early on, and soon moved on.** He then left the complete evangelistic penetration of the region with the gospel to the metropolitan church. Of the church in Thessalonica, for example, the following is stated: "*And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia - your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it ...*" (1Thessalonians 1:7-8).

When Paul wrote in Romans 15:19 that "*... from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ,*" he does not mean that he has preached the gospel to every single person. Rather, he meant that he had planted churches in all strategically important places. The same applies to the statement that "*... there is no more place for me to work in these regions*" (v. 23). Therefore, Paul did not seek out the areas "*... where Christ was already named ...*" (v.20) and where preaching was already going on (v. 21). Rather, he chose places where no one had yet preached the Gospel and no indigenous church existed.²³⁶ If mission efforts had taken this example of Paul much more into account, the spiritual map would probably look different today.

(eds.). *Die Alte Kirche. Kirchengeschichte als Missionsgeschichte* 1. Chr. Kaiser: Munich, 1974. P. 57.

²³⁵ Cf. Section D. in Unit 23 of my German Commentary to the Romans on Romans 12:1-8 regarding the spiritual gifts.

²³⁶ Cf. L. Grant McClung. "An Urban Cross-cultural Role Model: Paul's Self-image in Romans." *Global Church Growth (Corunna/USA)* 26 (1989) 1: 5-8.

Based on this text, I believe that we should make a clear distinction between two types of missionaries and not simply lump all Christians who work abroad into the same category.

On the one hand, there are **missionaries** just described **in the proper or narrower sense**, who “*would not be building on someone else’s foundation*” that is to say, preaching in places where the gospel has never been preached (both v.20).

On the other hand, there are Christians who contribute their profession, their gifts, and their commitment to communities and ministries that lie outside their own cultural sphere. Without wishing to diminish the sacrifices they have made, they serve using gifts that they could have and should have contributed in their own country, and they come across a local church to which they should, if at all possible, submitted themselves, which unfortunately too often does not occur.

Why it is essential to have a distinction between missionaries in the true sense and Christians who work evangelistically abroad becomes clear when one asks what percentage of all Evangelical missionaries worldwide fall into each category. Of course, statistics should always be used with caution. Depending on the definition of “peoples,” “unreached,” etc., and depending on whether the total number of Christian, Protestant, or Evangelical missionaries is taken as a basis, one arrives at very different figures. However, the trend is always more or less the same for our line of questioning. Let us take two examples.

[Note from 2024: The following section contains outdated data from 1989, the latest data available at the time the original was written. However, the arguments are still valid]

Of the 150,000 Protestant missionaries in the world in **1989** (85,000 of them from the USA!), 90% work among peoples reached by the gospel. (The ratios apply to Evangelical missionaries.) The remaining **10%** work among peoples where there is not yet a major indigenous church. However, these unreached peoples comprise 2.2 billion people! Of these 10%, 60% work among so-called tribal peoples, who have a total of only 14 million members. Thus, **4% of the missionaries remain for over 2 billion people**. For certain groups, the ratio is even worse. For example, only 0.5% of all missionaries work among unreached Muslim peoples, who comprise a total of 860 million people.

Another statistic asks how many millions of certain parts of humanity belong to unreached peoples and how many Evangelical missionaries in total are working in those cultural realms.

The statistics²³⁷ make it clear that even those missionaries who work entirely among unreached peoples are concentrated in certain cultural realms.

Can anyone explain how you can reach 700 million Muslim people with the Gospel when you have only 700 full-time missionaries available?

How many missionaries are working among which unreached peoples? peoples? (1989)		
Cultural group	Millions belonging to unreached people groups	Missionaries in this cultural group
Western world	100 Million	30.000 Missionaries
Tribal groups	130 Million	10.000 Missionaries
Chinese	400 Million	2.500 Missionaries
Hindus	500 Million	1.900 Missionaries
Muslims	700 Million	700 Missionaries

The corresponding ratio of people to be reached per missionary (1989)		
Western world	3.300 people	per 1 missionary
Tribal groups	13.000 people	per 1 missionary
Chinese	16.000 people	per 1 missionary
Hindus	263.000 people	per 1 missionary
Muslims	1.000.000 people	per 1 missionary

The difference in numbers is due to the narrower definition of “unreached” and the underlying number of Evangelical missionaries. However, the trend is unmistakably the same. **The mass of missionaries do not work where the urgent task of mission lies.**

F. Topic: Mission among unreached people groups.²³⁸

When it comes to a theological justification of mission among unreached people groups, the first question to be asked is, of course, what relation-

²³⁷ The original English graphic can be found in *Querschnitte* (Bonn) 1 (1989) 3: 8.

²³⁸ This section corresponds to my introduction to Patrick J. Johnstone. *Gebet für die Welt: Handbuch für Weltmission*. Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1988⁴, 1990⁵ (there pp. 24-28) and 1994⁶ (there pp. 18-21); it is a source of information about unreached peoples

ship the gospel has to the various peoples and people groups according to the Bible. That the gospel is valid for the whole world is emphasized in numerous passages of the Old and New Testaments. Since it is certain that all people are sinners and cannot stand before God (Romans 3:9-20+22-23 with Old Testament justification!), God sent his Son into the world so that all who believe in him and his work of redemption on the cross will not perish but be saved (**John 3:16**). Already in the Old Testament, God repeatedly announces that he has all nations in mind with his salvation (**Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 49:6**, among others). Already in Old Testament times Jonah's missionary task exemplifies the universality of divine salvation. It is not by chance that mission in the New Testament is almost always backed up with Old Testament quotations.

Nevertheless, on the whole, Jews and Gentiles have been put on an equal footing with regard to salvation only through the saving work of Jesus Christ (**Romans 3:29-30; Matthew 12:15-21; Ephesians 3:1-13**). In particular, Paul proclaims among the nations that they can be reconciled to God according to God's unfathomable counsel (**Ephesians 3:1-13**).

In all this, however, it was too often neglected in the interpretation that in this context 'all people' is rarely what is spoken of. Much more often what is spoken of are 'all nations,' 'all peoples,' 'all islands,' etc. Although Jesus gave the command: "*Therefore go ...*," he continued: "*... and make disciples of all nations ...*" (**Matthew 28:19**). "Nations" (Greek: 'ethne,' from ethology = study of peoples) are not to be understood as different political nations or states, especially since, politically speaking, there was only the one Roman Empire but individual cultural groups. When Jesus announced the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and proclaimed it as the beginning of world mission, he asked the disciples to go and be his witnesses in "*Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (**Acts 1:8**). At this point Jesus makes not only geographical or political but also cultural distinctions here. Samaria was not much farther from Jerusalem than Judea, but culturally it was much farther.

Beside using the term 'ethne,' how important the Bible takes peoples and cultural and linguistic groups is also shown by similar terms like 'language' (Greek: 'glossa'), 'tribe' ('phyle'), 'people' ('laos') and others. All or almost all these terms stand side by side in seven places in the last book of the Bible (**Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15**). It becomes clear that even among the redeemed in the congregation, yes, even before the throne of the Lord, people can be distinguished (but not judged!) ac-

in different countries and offers the best numerical data on mission statistics (also on pp. 298-299).

ording to language and cultural or ethnological affiliation. An example may suffice: “*And they sang a new song: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God ...’*” (Revelation 5:9-10).

Thus, God saves people from all cultural and linguistic groups. However, mission does not only win people from all people groups. Rather, it also adapts its method of mission to these people groups without changing the content of the message of the crucified and risen Christ. In **1 Corinthians 9:19-23** Paul explains in detail why he became a Jew to the Jews (!) and a Greek to the Greeks. His principle was valid for all missionary undertakings: “*I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some*” (1 Corinthians 9:22).²³⁹ (Of course, this focus on target groups applies to every kind of target group, not just cultural groups.) We must learn to distinguish between the unchanging content of our message and the form of its transmission, through which we can become a hindrance to people if we do not care for them according to their situation.²⁴⁰

Paul’s missionary practice shows again and again that his goal was to establish a native church in a certain region or people group as quickly as possible and to give it the task of evangelizing the rest of their fellow people. The Thessalonians, for example, missionized the entire provinces of Achaia and Macedonia (**1 Thessalonians 1:7-9**). Paul, on the other hand, always looked to new cities, peoples and countries. At the end of the Letter to the Romans, Paul explains why he wants to come to Rome and make it the starting point for his mission to Spain: “*So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.*” (Romans 15:19). Although it could not be said that all people there had already heard the Gospel, strategically located churches had been established everywhere to continue the proclamation of the Gospel. Paul therefore continues: “*It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known ...*” (Romans 15:20). For Paul, a region or a people group was considered ‘done’ in terms of missionary work when the name of Jesus was invoked by a congregation there. Since churches were already carrying the name of Jesus everywhere where Paul had already worked, Paul could state: “*But now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions ...*” (Romans 15:23). We can see from this that the missionary and the missionary society can never settle in one area for all time. Rather, areas and peoples not yet reached by the gospel must always be sought.

²³⁹ Cf. in more detail Section D. (additionally also Section E. in Unit 27 of my German Commentary to the Romans).

²⁴⁰ See last note.

The enormously fast spread of the church of Jesus at the time of the Apostles can only be explained if this missionary principle is taken into account. After all, the Apostles and Christians had already reached the then known world by around 65 AD. If the apostles had stayed in the churches they had founded or if they had finished their mission in the provinces, they would never have reached “*the ends of the earth.*” The churches were rather called to send co-workers to the mission teams (“*apostles of the church,*” **2 Corinthians 8:23**) and to complete the work of the Apostles in their surrounding area. Thus, Paul can write to the Thessalonians: “*The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it ...*” (**1Thessalonians 1:8**).

At the International Congress on World Mission in Lausanne in 1974, Ralph Winter²⁴¹ presented a classification of the different types of missionary work, which quickly attracted international attention.²⁴² Based on the division in **Acts 1:8** (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the ends of the earth), he spoke of

- E-1-Evangelism in one’s own culture (Jerusalem/ Judea),
- E-2-evangelism in a similar culture but not one’s own culture (Samaria), and
- E-3-evangelism in a completely different culture (the ends of the earth). Later he added
- E-0-evangelism among named Christians in their own culture.

²⁴¹ Ralph Winter was director of the US Center for World Mission, the ‘mother’ of the Center for World Mission Network, to which also the Institut für Weltmission und Gemeindebau/German Center for World Mission belongs and to which Theologische Fernunterricht and Martin Bucer Seminary is traced back.

²⁴² Ralph Winter. “Evangelisation in anderen Kulturen.” Pp. 291-338 in: *Alle Welt soll sein Wort hören*. Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1974.

Evangelism type according to cultural distance	Cultural distance	Using the example of Peter	Using the example of Paul	Using the example of a German missionary
E-0	Christians by name in their own	Jews and Christians by name	Jews and Christians by name	State churches in Germany
E-1	Non-Christians in their own culture	Jews in Judea	Jews in Asia Minor	Domestic mission
E-2	Non-Christians in a similar culture	Samaria	Greeks in Greece	Austria or The Netherlands
E-3	Non-Christians in evangelism in a completely different culture	Greeks	Spaniards	Muslims in Germany or Indonesia

E-0 and E-1 evangelism can be done very well by indigenous churches. E-2 evangelism can be done well by churches unless strong prejudices between similar cultures make missionaries from completely different cultures necessary. However, E-3 evangelism can only be accomplished when missionaries proclaim the Gospel across great cultural barriers. Unfortunately, it is still the case today that the vast majority of missionaries work where there are already many churches or are involved in E-0, E-1, and E-2 evangelism. Only a fraction of missionaries work where there is no indigenous church. Therefore, there remain many people in people groups who are still waiting for the gospel beyond cultural walls. This is due to the fact that no one has learned their language, no one has visited where they dwell, and no missionary has assimilated into their cultures. This number is currently estimated at 2.45 billion people in 16,750 ethnic groups, and they are called ‘unreached peoples’ (also ‘hidden peoples’ or ‘overlooked peoples.’)

A people group is understood as a sociological unit of individuals that is large enough to consider itself a group and that has a sense of belonging based on linguistic, religious, economic, geographic, or other factors.

On this biblical background and on the background of modern missiology, three questions now frequently arise which will be briefly addressed:

1. Is the division of church and mission into cultural groups not a departure from the unity of the church of Jesus as described in Ephesians 2:11-22?

It is true that Paul repeatedly emphasizes that Jews and Greeks should not found two different churches. However, it remains open what happened when Christians spoke different languages. On the other hand, in 'doubtful issues,' i. e., issues not clearly decided upon in the Bible, Paul clearly allowed for cultural differences in the churches (Romans 14:1-15:13). He demands mutual acceptance and understanding. However, it was completely different in the mission work itself. Here, as we have just seen, Paul was completely oriented towards his target group. **We must therefore clearly distinguish between mission work aimed at different target groups and the unity of the congregations resulting from this work.**

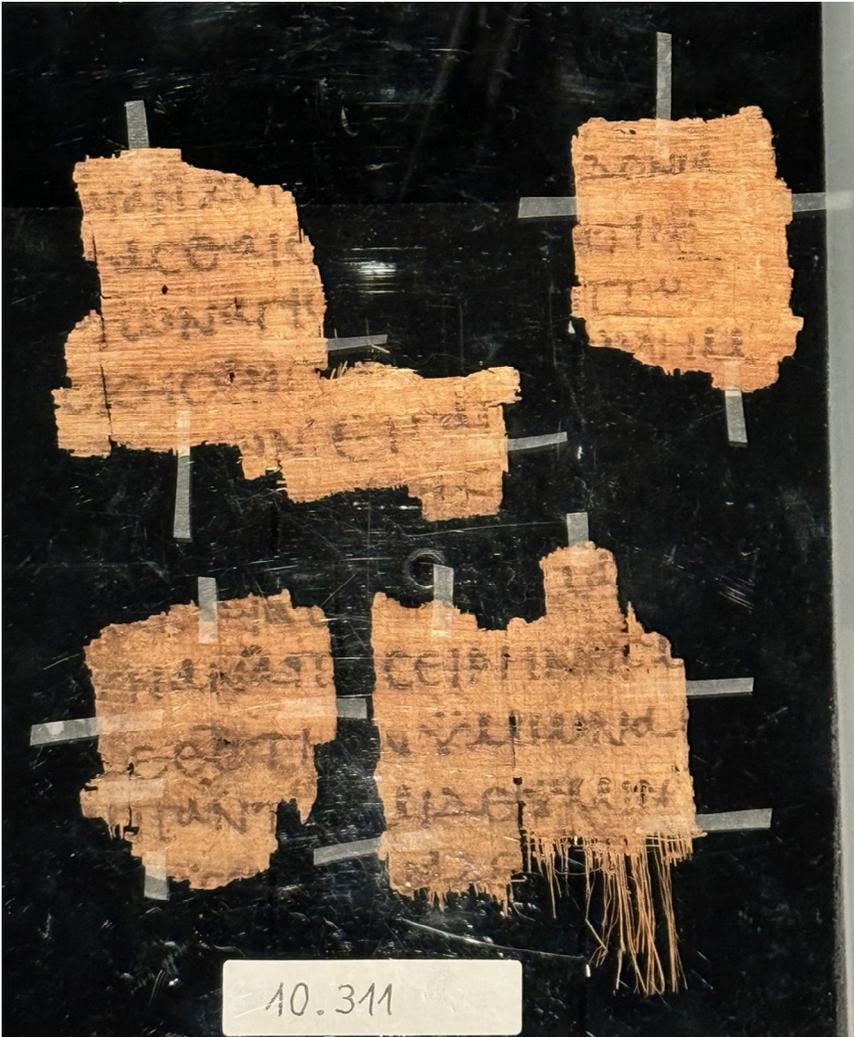
2. Is mission among unreached people groups not just one of the many new American initiatives?

There is no doubt that America plays a prominent role within the new Evangelical missionary movement. Certainly, many less than pleasant things have come about in the process. However, to distrust Americans as a whole is unbiblical, factually incorrect, and does not do justice to history. With the large number of American pioneer missionaries, intensive American missiology, and the large amount of funds made available for world missions, it was certainly no coincidence that attention was first drawn here to the enormous need of countless unreached peoples. The participation of numerous mission societies and mission leaders from the Third World in the World Mission Conference in Edinburgh in 1980, which dealt exclusively with unreached people groups, shows that with its position, America is no longer isolated.

3. Is the task of reaching all people groups not hopeless?

If the mission was ever hopeless, it was when to his eleven disciples, "some of whom doubted" (Matthew 28:17), Jesus said: "Go into all the world ..." (Matthew 28:18). However, his promise for world mission was: "For behold, I am with you to the end of the earth" (Matthew 28:20). From a human per-

spective of view, the task may seem hopeless, although it would not require an unrealistic number of missionaries. But God wants the mission and has prophesied, as we saw in the last book of the Bible, that one day people from every language, culture and nation will worship Him together. Moreover, how can we stand idly by while many people groups remain without the gospel? Don't we need to pray, give and go ourselves?



Greek papyrus P^{118} , 3rd century, University of Cologne.

One of the earliest preserved copies of the Epistle to the Romans.

Content: Romans 15:26-27, 32-33; 16:1, 4-7, 11-12.

Photographed at an exhibition of the Bible Museum of the University of Münster.

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Since 1988, Thomas Schirmacher has been arguing, first in essays and then in his commentary on Romans, that the Epistle to the Romans is primarily an attempt to establish world mission from Scripture, i.e. the Old Testament, and that Paul's theology is inseparable from his missionary practice. The introduction and conclusion of Romans do not describe the occasion of the letter, but rather indicate the central theme. Dogmatics and mission are thus two sides of the same coin. The Western Church has strongly emphasised the dogmatic character of Romans, but has all too often overlooked its missionary character.

In this volume, Schirmacher's contributions on this topic are complemented by a comprehensive history of this mission thesis from 1863 onwards.

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