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WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

*Department of Theological Concerns*

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Thomas Schirrmacher

## **The Book of Romans as a Charter for World Missions**

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*Why mission and theology have to go together – A gift from the  
Theological Commission to the Missions Commission*



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## THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER



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Thomas Schirrmacher

## **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*

*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.*

## 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.”<sup>1</sup> This close relationship between the letter to the Romans and the practice of missions has been too seldom considered by commentators.

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<sup>1</sup>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.

Emil Weber, in his important contribution entitled “The Relationship between Romans 1-3 and Paul’s Missionary Practice,”<sup>2</sup> did not get beyond Romans 3, and other authors have only sketched out the topic.<sup>3</sup> 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.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, on Robert L. Reymond calls Paul the “missionary theologian.”<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, however, texts from the letter to the Romans played a major role in the history of missions.<sup>6</sup> Thus, for several hundred years Romans 10:14 ff. was one of the favorite texts for missionary sermons.<sup>7</sup> Among Calvinist Puritans in Great Britain and the USA from the 16th to the 18th centuries, to which the great majority of modern, Protestant glob-

<sup>2</sup>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.

<sup>3</sup>Z. B. 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.

<sup>4</sup>Nils Alstrup. “The Missionary Theology in the Epistle to the Romans“. op. cit. p. 70.

<sup>5</sup>Robert L. Reymond. *Paul: Missionary Theologian*. op. cit.

<sup>6</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 346-347.

al missions efforts trace themselves back,<sup>8</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup>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.

wants to visit the church so that he can also preach in Rome, since “I am obligated both to Greeks and non-Greeks” (Romans 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.’”<sup>9</sup>

## **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

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

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.

<b>On the framework of the letter to the Romans: Parallels between Romans 1:1–15 and 15:14–16:27</b>		
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.”<sup>10</sup>

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

## 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 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."<sup>11</sup> 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."<sup>12</sup> "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

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<sup>11</sup>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.

<sup>12</sup>Gottlob Schrenk. "Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument." op. cit. p. 81.

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.”<sup>13</sup>

## 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.<sup>14</sup> 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:

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

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Schirmacher. *Der Römerbrief*. 2 vols. Hänssler: Neuhausen, 1994; RVB: Hamburg & VTR: Nürnberg, 2001<sup>2</sup>.

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.”<sup>15</sup>

## World missions: the fulfillment of the Old Testament<sup>16</sup>

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.

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

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<sup>15</sup> Gottlob Schrenk. “Der Römerbrief als Missionsdokument.” op. cit. p. 83.

<sup>16</sup> Vgl. Robert L. Reymond. *Paul: Missionary Theologian*. op. cit., pp. 373-384 “The Old Testament Roots of the Pauline Gospel.”

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.”<sup>17</sup>

The many Old Testament quotations should have not only convinced (and should still convince<sup>18</sup>) 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.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup>Adolf Schlatter. *Gottes Gerechtigkeit: Ein Kommentar zum Römerbrief*. Calwer Verlag: Stuttgart, 1975<sup>5</sup>. p. 383.

<sup>18</sup>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.

<sup>19</sup>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 similarly Otto Michel. *Der Brief an die Römer. Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament* 4 (14th edition). Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1978<sup>5</sup>. 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. yyy.



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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).

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



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

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9:15	Exodus 33:19
9:17	Exodus 9:16
9:18	Exodus 33:19
9:20–22	Jeremiah 18:3–6; <i>Isaiah 45:9; 29:16; 64:7</i>
9:22	Jeremiah 50:24; Isaiah 13:5; 54:16
9:25	Hosea 2:25; <i>1:6-9; 2:3</i>
9:26–27	Hosea 2:1
9:27–28	Isaiah 10:22–23
9:29	Isaiah 1:9
9:30–31	Isaiah 51:1
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	Deuteronomy 32:21
11:16	Numbers 15:20; Ezekiel 44:30; Leviticus 23:10 and often
11:16-17	Jeremiah 11:16; Psalm 52:10; Zechariah 4:3, 11, 12, 14

11:25	Proverbs 3:7; Isaiah 5:21
11:26–27	Isaiah 59:20–21;
11:34	Isaiah 40:13
11:35	Job 41:3
12:9	Amos 5:15; Psalm 97:10
12:14	Psalm 109:28
12:16	Proverbs 12:15; 24:12
12:16	Proverbs 3:7; Isaiah 5:21
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	Isaiah 8:14
14:20–21	Isaiah 8:14
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	Genesis 21:33

*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).<sup>20</sup> 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

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<sup>20</sup> 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.

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 various ways” (Hebrews 1:1). Whereas the Koran<sup>21</sup> 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 doc-

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<sup>21</sup> 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).

uments, descriptions of visions, historical accounts, biographies, personal and official private letters, circular letters, and comments on current situations and questions.<sup>22</sup>

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 concrete 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.

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<sup>22</sup>Comp. Thomas Schirrmacher. *Die Vielfalt biblischer Sprache: Über 100 alt- und neutestamentliche Stilarten, Ausdrucksweisen, Redeweisen und Gliederungsformen*. Bonn: VKW, 1997<sup>1</sup>; 2001<sup>2</sup>.

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.<sup>23</sup>

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 Peter writes, “Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our

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<sup>23</sup> 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.

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 Mission<sup>24</sup>**

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

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<sup>24</sup>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.

‘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 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 material<sup>25</sup> 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

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

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.

## Excursus on fragmented fields of study<sup>26</sup>

The strict separation of fields of study has greatly contributed to ‘overtheorizing’ and overspecialization within theological education and theology itself.<sup>27</sup> 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.”<sup>28</sup> From the obligation to pursue an orientation toward the church and missions, he correctly does not even make an exception for exegesis.<sup>29</sup> In many an evangelical educational institution, the sacred cow of exegesis does not have to account for itself, what end it serves,

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<sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> Especially also John M. Frame. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, op. cit., pp. 206-214.

<sup>28</sup> “Educational Provincialism,” Paul A. Beals. *A People for His Name: A Church-Based Missions Strategy*. William Carey Library: Pasadena (CA), 1995<sup>2</sup>, p. 200.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 201-202.

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.’<sup>30</sup> Since then, the exegesis of biblical 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.<sup>31</sup> 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,

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<sup>30</sup> 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 Lutheran realm. From Robert Scharlemann. “Theology in Church and University: The Post-Reformation Development.” *Church History* 33 (1964) 23ff. 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).

<sup>31</sup> John M. Frame. *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. op. cit., pp. 91-92.

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.*<sup>32</sup>

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 internationally. "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."<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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."<sup>35</sup> The following illustration<sup>36</sup> should make it clear that missions should actually provide orientation and motivation to all other disciplines.

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<sup>32</sup> See in part. Lois McKinney. "Why Renewal Is Needed in Theological Education." *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 18 (April 1982) 93-94 and the collective volume 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.

<sup>33</sup> Paul A. Beals. *A People for His Name*. op. cit., p. 199.

<sup>34</sup> David Bosch. "Missions in Theological Education." op. cit., pp. xxxi-xxxii.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xxx-xxxii.

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

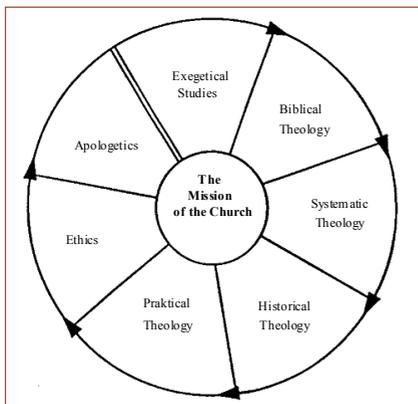


Illustration 1: Thinking about missions should motivate and determine theological work in other areas of studies.

## 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 apostles<sup>37</sup> 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,

<sup>37</sup>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’).

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.<sup>38</sup>

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.

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.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> 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.

<sup>39</sup> Comp. Thomas Schirmmacher. “Mission unter unerreichten Volksgruppen.” pp. 23-26 and “Vorwort.” pp. 11-12 in: Patrick Johnstone. *Gebet für die Welt*. Hänssler: Holzgerlingen, 2003<sup>5</sup> (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 Schirmmacher (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.”

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.<sup>40</sup>

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 cities, 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)

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<sup>40</sup> 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.

## The relationship between the church and missions in the Romans: Paul seeks the church's support for world mission by appealing to teachings and doctrine<sup>41</sup>

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.

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.

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<sup>41</sup>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.

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.



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