CHAPTER 1
OPENING PAUL'S LETTER (1:1-17)

INTRODUCTION

When one compares the opening verses in Romans with other ancient letters, its length and complexity are unmistakable. If Paul had followed the typical form for a letter where the sender and recipient knew each other, Romans would have begun as follows:

Sender: "Paul"

Recipient: "to those in Rome"

Greeting: "greetings".

Even in comparison with the other Pauline letters, the opening of Romans is considerably expanded. There are parallels in ancient diplomatic speeches and letters, where the credentials of the ambassador were laid down in the opening. The expanded address of Romans draws the audience into relationship with Paul's vocation as an ambassador of Christ, authorized to preach to the Gentiles. Many themes of the subsequent argument in the letter come to initial expression in these first verses. Since these opening verses introduce Paul's entire project, they deserve to be studied in detail.

I. THE INAUGURATION OF PAUL'S COMMUNICATION WITH BELIEVERS IN ROME

The opening words of the letter introduce the writer as "Paul, slave of Christ Jesus," which sounds rather degrading to the modern ear. However, this would have made perfect sense in a letter to Rome, where influential slaves in imperial service proudly bore the title "slave of Caesar." More than four thousand slaves and freedmen associated with Caesar's household, his personal staff, and the imperial bureaucracy have been identified through grave inscriptions with this kind of title. Their social and economic status was higher than most of the free population of the empire, with some slaves of Caesar rising to positions of immense power and wealth. Paul is therefore introducing himself with proper credentials as an agent of Christ Jesus, using the technical term for a royal official or an imperial bureaucrat. This is the same title that members of the two churches within the imperial bureaucracy identified with Narcissus and Aristobulus (Romans 16:10-11) would have proudly carried. The parallel between "slave of Caesar" and "slave of Christ Jesus" sets an agenda pursued throughout the letter concerning whose power is ultimate, whose gospel is efficacious, and whose program for global pacification and unification is finally viable.

Paul describes his authority as that of "an apostle called," implying that his role rests on divine election. The word "apostle" itself means someone sent in behalf of someone else, in this instance, in behalf of his sovereign, Christ Jesus. In early Christianity, the term "apostle" was used for those who witnessed Christ's resurrection and who had thereby been commissioned to preach the gospel. It is therefore not Paul's gospel but "God's gospel," which reflects the fundamental argument in this letter. The word "God" is the most important theological term in Romans, appearing 153 times, compared with "law" (72 times), "Christ" (65 times), "sin" (48 times), "Lord" (43 times), or "faith" (40 times). Most of Paul's statements about God in Romans were related to his effort to encourage cooperation between groups with differing views of what God required. The bearing of this theme becomes clear in 3:29-30, where Paul insists that there is one God of both Jews and Gentiles. In 14:3—15:13 he shows that both the weak and the strong act out of reverence to the same God, whose praise will one day unite all peoples when the mission is fulfilled. With reference to 1:1, therefore, only if Paul's gospel is the "gospel of God" can it find common ground between the competing house and tenement churches in Rome and lead them to cooperate in the mission plans Paul wants to propose. That this gospel had been proclaimed through the prophets, as

verse 2 asserts, provided consistency between the old and new covenants and thereby confirmed the authenticity of the gospel that Paul preaches.

A fairly wide consensus has crystallized that Paul is citing an early Christian confession in 1:3-4.[1] It appears to be a composite confession, containing elements from the Jewish-Christian as well as the Gentile-Christian branches of the early church. At the core of the original confession there is an affirmation of Jesus as the traditional Jewish Messiah, who was adopted and enthroned as the Son of God on the basis of his resurrection. This was qualified by the Gentile Christian formulas, "according to the flesh / according to the spirit." The first expression downplays the significance of the Davidic origin of the Messiah while the second implies that the redemptive power of Christ derived from his spiritual authority rather than from his Davidic origin. Since Paul is the only writer in the New Testament to employ the term *hagiōsunē* ("holiness;" 1 Thess 3:13; 2 Corinthians 7:1), it is likely that he added it to the confession to insist that the divine power celebrated in the confession entailed moral obligations. Such obligations are developed at length in Romans 5–8, which shows that the new life involves righteousness, a repudiation of fleshly passions, and walking "according to the Spirit." Paul makes plain that the "spirit" given to Christian believers is the "Holy Spirit" (5:5), and that the law remains "holy" even for members of the new age (7:12). The key to the new Christian ethic is giving oneself as a holy sacrifice for others (12:1). In this sense, the term "holiness" prepares the reader for a major emphasis in the letter.

The most significant feature of all, however, is that Paul selects a credo that bears the marks of both "the weak and the strong," the Gentile and the Jewish Christian branches of the early church. He treats both sides in an evenhanded manner, setting the tone for the letter as a whole. He is willing to cite the Jewish Christian affirmation of Jesus as coming from the "seed of David," despite his opposition to Jewish zealotism (10:1-3) and pride (2:17-24). He is willing to accept the Hellenistic Christian dialectic of flesh versus spirit, despite his subsequent effort to insist upon moral transformation (Romans 6–8) and to counter the results of spiritual arrogance (14:1—15:7). Yet none of these points is scored overtly; the credo is cited with respect, edited with skill, and framed effectively in language that various branches of the early church would have understood. The overwhelming impression one has after reflecting on the implications of Paul's use of this early Christian creed is his irenic approach. He is obviously seeking to find common ground by bringing the confession into the context of his ambassadorial strategy. As an effective ambassador, Paul seeks to find common ground. The argument for early Christian pluralism that has been detected in 14:1—15:7 is thus integral to the letter as a whole, as this introduction makes plain.

The words immediately following the creed refer to "Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship" (Romans 1:4-5). Paul thereby links both the grace he had received and his apostolic ministry to the agency of the risen Christ, who had been celebrated in the preceding confession. The plural verb, "we have received," indicates that Paul wished to convey solidarity with the other apostles who had established the churches in Rome in the decades before the writing of this letter. Whereas some of the apostles restricted their mission to the land of Israel, the missionaries who reached Rome obviously shared Paul's calling to a Gentile mission. In 16:7, for example, Paul greets a married couple currently ministering in Rome, Andronikos and Junia, who were "prominent among the apostles." Paul claims membership in that original circle of witnesses of the resurrected Jesus who thereafter had proclaimed the message that he was the expected Messiah.

The purpose of Paul's apostolic ministry is to evoke "obedience of faith among all the Gentiles." While the reference to "all" is consistent with the ecumenical reach both to the "weak" and the "strong" in Rome, the uniquely Pauline expression "obedience of faith" requires explanation. On grammatical grounds, "faith" limits the meaning of "obedience," which requires us to recognize that there were many forms of obedience, including obedience

under the law. Paul speaks here of the special sort of obedience produced by the gospel. As he argues in the subsequent sections of this letter, obedience to the gospel leads to walking by the spirit and to the fulfillment of the law's demands to love and care for the neighbor. Since "obedience" was a favored concept for Jewish theology and "faith" was a favorite shibboleth for Gentile believers in Rome (14:1, 22, 23), the coordination of these two terms conveys an interest in finding common ground. There is not a hint of polemical intent in the wording of 1:5 or in its rhetorical echo of 15:18. The expression has a straightforward, missionary relevance: "the obedience of faith means acceptance of the message of salvation" that Paul intends to advance in this letter.[2] Paul's expression addresses a central feature of the honor system in the Greco-Roman world, because obedience carried the "stigma" of slavery and even the emperor preferred to phrase his directives "as suggestions and advice."[3] As J. E. Lendon observes, "the early and high empire simply avoided hierarchies of obedience as much as possible," preferring to speak of honoring persons in authority by complying with their wishes out of respect for their honorable character.[4] Paul's qualification of "obedience" by "faith" removes the stigma of slavishness and inserts a large measure of honor, because the gospel to which one has freely responded in faith centers in the grace of God offered to the formerly shamed through Christ's death and resurrection in their behalf.

The reach of Paul's gospel to "all the Gentiles" includes the Romans, as verse 6 goes on to say. The expression, "the called of Jesus Christ," would be natural for the Gentile Christian majority in Rome. So Paul goes on in the next verse to include the minority of Jewish Christians, the so called "weak" with the address "to all God's beloved, called saints, who are in Rome." The wording is explicitly inclusive, The expression "all God's beloved" suggests the theological argument of the entire letter, namely that God's love is impartial. No person on earth, whether Greek or Jewish, deserves such love, as 1:18—3:20 argues. Nevertheless, everyone receives such love in Christ, as 3:21—4:25 so eloquently shows. God is no respecter of persons, as 2:11 insists; all have made themselves into God's enemies (5:10), but all are included in the sweep of divine love. The offering of salvation "to all who believe" epitomizes the argument of Romans (1:16; 3:22; 4:11; 10:4). In this sense, the opening address of Romans sets the tone for the entire letter, offering the most inclusive program for world unification found in the New Testament. If this gospel is understood and internalized, Paul suggests, the fragmented congregations in Rome would become unified in cooperation while preserving their distinctiveness. They would also be enabled to participate in a credible manner in completing the mission to the end of the known world, symbolized by Spain. When this unifying message is received in faith, the goal of history will be fulfilled and all the nations will praise God for God's mercy, as the climax of the formal argument in chapter 15 proclaims.

At the end of this expanded address, Paul adds his distinctive form of greeing: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and [the] Lord Jesus Christ.." Whereas the traditional Jewish blessing formula was "mercy and peace be with you," Paul appears to transform the Greco-Roman greeting with *chairein* ("greeting"), used in correspondence and in meeting friends on the street, into a distinctively Christian greeting with *charis humin* ("grace to you [plural]"). In his theology, grace has priority as the essence of what Christ provides (Galatians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 6:1): unmerited access to God for those who do not deserve it, and thereby honor to those whom the world holds to be shameful. This theme is developed throughout the letter, showing that grace stands in opposition to the performance of legal requirements as the new means of gaining honor (Romans 4:14-16; 6:14). Paul's greeting also stands in contrast to grace as defined in the Roman civic cult, which had announced an "age of grace" with world "peace" had dawned with Caesar Augustus and was being restored by Nero.[5] In Paul's thought, peace has the distinctive dimension of reconciliation with God, against whom our human enmity had risen to its climax in the crucifixion of Christ. This theme is developed in Romans 5:1, and the consequence in

Romans for those who receive the gospel is a peaceful mindset (Romans 8:6) that is capable of finding peaceful solutions to social conflicts within the congregation (15:17-19).

Another distinctive feature of Paul's blessings is that the reference to "God our Father" is always followed by "the Lord Jesus Christ," so this coordination is basic to his thought. The high christology of the confession in 1:3-4 is reflected here and brings to an appropriate close the first paragraph that establishes Paul's credentials as an apostle under the lordship of Christ.

II. THANKSGIVING AND THE PURPOSE IN WRITING THIS LETTER

In the thanksgiving of Romans 1:8-12, Paul lifts up the main purpose of writing. The subject of Paul's prayer concerning the Roman believers is that he be allowed by God to visit them (Romans 1:10), which is the fundamental reason for writing the letter. He gives thanks for "all of you" (1:7), that is, all of the converts in Rome, not just for those associated with the previous Pauline mission or for those inclined to accept his theological or cultural orientation. In view of his previously adversarial relationship with believers advocating adherence to the Jewish law (see Galatians), this is a remarkable example of giving thanks for one's opponents. That the Romans' faith "is proclaimed" to others is an unusual formulation, because Paul ordinarily speaks of the gospel or Christ himself being proclaimed (1 Cor 9:14; 11:26; Phil 1:18). The news about the creation of faith communities in Rome becomes an essential component of the triumph of the gospel "through the whole world." Although some would like to tone this down as mere hyperbole, there are many examples of events in Rome being reported throughout the empire, which in the Roman view comprised the center of the world. When one takes account of the eschatological impetus of Paul's mission and the deep sense of interconnectedness between believers, it becomes clear that one should not reduce this formulation to the status of flattery intended to gain favor with the audience. This is a missionary letter and it is therefore significant that the gospel has already been successful in the capitol of the empire.

The truthfulness of Paul's claim to be bound in prayer to the Roman believers is confirmed by the highest possible authority in Romans 1:9, that "God is my witness." As Brendan Byrne observes, Paul's oath conveys the point that this letter "is not a bolt from the blue but the expression of a long-standing sense of responsibility and desire to visit."[6] The reference to Paul's ceaseless prayers means that Paul has long felt connected with the Roman believers even though he has not seen their faces. In keeping with the correspondence between the introduction and the conclusion in a well-designed letter, Paul returns to this theme in 15:30-32, where he requests Roman intercession with regard to the dangers of his trip to Jerusalem. What Paul had regularly petitioned was that he be granted "good passage" to Rome, whereby the literal meaning of this expression was to "be on a good path," The uncertainties of travel and of God's inscrutable will are conveyed in the combined expression, "if at long last," followed by "in the will of God." The conditional expression conveys the uncertainty that is appropriate to any petition offered to the sovereign God. It is also well suited to a project that had long been delayed by adverse circumstances. Paul's formulation indicates that at long last his plan to visit Rome may now be fulfilled; the unusual formulation honors Paul's audience by conveying his long-standing desire to see them, while at the same time forestalling potential criticism for not coming sooner. That a successful passage to Rome would only be possible "by the will of God" (verse 10) is a theologically significant consideration that often recurs in Paul's letters. Paul's frequent references make plain that he understands his apostolic calling and his subsequent activities as matters of obedience to God's will. The rhetorical significance of this detail is that Paul presents himself as the servant of God whose "coming to you" will only be possible when and if God wills it, thus placing his relation to the Roman believers within the divine context with which they can

easily identify, and thus sidestepping any differences of opinion that might divide the radical "apostle to the Gentiles" from various groups in Rome.

In verse 11 Paul says "I long to see you," a formulation typical for family members and close friends. Nowhere outside early Christianity does this expression appear in reference to bonds among group members. That such passionate bonding was expected of believers who were not blood relatives is reflected in 2 Corinthians 9:14: the churches in Judea "long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God in you." It is clear that this desire for solidarity in Christ includes not just the renewal of Paul's prior acquaintances but all of the Roman believers who had been included in the formulation "for all of you" in 1:8. As Marty Reid points out, this inclusive motif is a decisive clue about the motivation and purpose of Paul's letter, as stated in this introductory prayer.[7] The importance of this personal bonding in Christ is confirmed by Paul's reiteration in 15:23, employing virtually the same language: "but having the desire to come to you for many years."

The extensive purpose clause in verse 11 introduced by "in order that" is carefully formulated so as to avoid giving offense to Roman believers while at the same time conveying the delicate matter of his real aim in visiting the Roman churches. The subjunctive verb "I might share" is appropriately careful in conveying Paul's role in a collaborative, charismatic process in which the divine Spirit remains decisive. The unprecedented expression "spiritual charisma" sounds at first redundant, since early Christians considered the gifts of divine grace and individual grace-gifts to be spiritual. Paul obviously felt the need to communicate as a charismatic with charismatics, emphasizing the spiritual bond that linked all believers together with Christ who is "the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:17). The hope that his spiritual charisma will serve "that you [plural] may be strengthened" is formulated in the passive voice, implying the anticipation that divine action would be experienced. In the next verse he qualifies this hope as being "mutually encouraged among you by each others' faith, both yours and mine." Paul hopes to receive as much encouragement as he provides. Faith involves a mutually supportive reciprocity by which Paul's faith will act on theirs and theirs on his. In the course of the chapters that follow, it will become clear that the missionary project that this letter supports would require their faithful participation as much as his.

III. THE CHALLENGE OF THE MISSION TO THE BARBARIANS IN SPAIN

In Romans 1:13-15 Paul clarifies the background for his visit to Rome, namely that he had repeatedly planned such a visit and had been hindered in carrying it out (1:13). He reiterates the scope of his mission, "among you as among the rest of the Gentiles," and then moves on to expresss his inclusive obligation "both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and foolish." This wide ranging reference picks up the theme of "obedience to the faith . . . among all the Gentiles" (1:5) and prepares the ground for the argument in the rest of Romans that the gospel is relevant for a pluralistic world.

As an outsider visiting Rome for the first time, Paul wishes to give the impression that there is nothing covert or underhanded about his project. He lays his cards on the table in addressing his audience as "brothers," the familial term for men and women belonging to the Christian movement. What Paul discloses is that "many times" he had made plans to visit Rome. His earnest desire to see them as expressed in the preceding paragraph had issued in actual travel plans and scheduling decisions, which had always been interrupted by other developments. His forthcoming embassy is therefore not a matter of recent whim but of long-standing intent and planning. It seems likely that Paul had this visit in mind ever since his first journey to Troas, the transit point for the Egnatian Way that led to Rome. Up to the time of writing Romans, however, he explains that had been "hindered" from making that trip. This verb is used elsewhere in the New Testament to refer to placing an obstacle in someone's way or to resisting God's plans (e.g., 1 Thess 2:14-16). The passive form employed here indicates

barriers imposed by outside forces and unfinished tasks that remain unspecified. Paul makes no excuses for the delays and wishes simply to convey that the hindrances no longer prevail. In cooperation with Phoebe, who brings the letter to the Roman house and tenement churches as the patron of the missionary project, his long-standing plans can now be put into effect. He boldly states his hope that "I might reap some fruit even among you just as also among the rest of the Gentiles" The most striking feature of this formulation is the first person singular, "that *I* might reap some fruit." In contrast to the mutual benefit described in 1:12, here Paul implies that he seeks something from the Romans that is directly related to his own vocation as a harvesting apostle. The use of the indefinite pronoun "some" fruit signals that ordinary evangelistic fruit is not in view, that he does not intend to win converts in Rome as he had elsewhere, but that some other kind of fruit is in view. As 15:24 and 28 go on to detail, Paul hopes to gain logistical and tactical support from Rome for his mission to Spain. The openendedness of the indefinite pronoun is diplomatically appropriate, because Paul needs to clarify the theological foundations of his mission before suggesting the nature of the desired cooperation. A difference in the kind of fruit needed is also suggested by the following words, "even among you," which cannot imply the conversion of Romans, because the audience receiving this letter is already converted. With suitable diplomatic caution, Paul is laying the groundwork for chapter 15 that invites cooperation from the Roman house and tenement churches in organizing the Spanish mission, while making it clear from the outset that he does not intend to establish congregations of his own in Rome. His calling is to extend the gospel to the "rest of the Gentiles," a stunningly sweeping scope whose rationale becomes clear when one realizes that Spain marked the end of the "circle" (Romans 15:19) of the known world that ran from Jerusalem through Illyricum and Rome to the Pillars of Hercules, the rock of Gibraltar that was considered the end of the world. The expression "the rest of the Gentiles" refers to those within that circle who still remained to be evangelized.

Although its importance has rarely been recognized, verse 14 is in several respects what Sigfred Pedersen identified as the "key to Romans" that reveals the "situation of its composition."[8] Paul employs some discriminatory language in describing his indebtedness to "Greeks and barbarians . . . wise and foolish" These terms articulate the social boundaries of Greco-Roman culture in a thoroughly abusive manner. As studies of *barbaros* by Yves Albert Dauge and other have shown,[9] this is a term of vituperation in Greco-Roman culture. When paired with its ideological opposite, "Greeks," it denotes the violent, perverse, corrupt, uncivilized realm beyond and at times within the Roman Empire that threatens peace and security. Similarly, the terms "wise" and "unwise/uneducated" depict the educational boundary between citizens of the Roman Empire and the shameful masses. The educational system in the Greco-Roman world aimed at developing virtue and excellence needed for public service with the corollary that the uncultured person was perceived to lack the capacity for either. A person called "foolish" was therefore not just unwise and irrational, but in the final analysis not fully human. To be classified as foolish in this social context is not so much a deficit that can be overcome with more education, or a matter of what we would today refer to as "intelligence," because it pertains to the shameful being of outsiders. Barbarians are viewed as innate idiots, while Greeks are innately wise. The term "foolish" shared with "barbarian" the contempt thought to be warranted for persons and groups capable of great mischief but inherently incapable of constructive contributions to the human enterprise. Moreover, since the relationship with the divine was thought to be centered in knowledge, the "foolish" were viewed as profoundly impaired in religious capacity.

It is not just Paul's use of these epithets of honor and shame that jars the reader; he undercuts the moral premise of the Greco-Roman world in proclaiming his indebtedness to the shameful as well as to the honorable representatives of the antitheses. While the ethic of reciprocity in Paul's time required obligations only to those who were perceived to have

provided benefits for others, it was a complete reversal of the system of honor and shame to feel indebtedness to barbarians and the uneducated. As Lendon explains:

> When a great aristocrat peered down into society beneath him, there was a threshold beneath which, to his mind, honour did not exist; there were people, a great many people, without honour, and best kept that way. . . . This category of persons without honour in aristocratic eyes included those defined in the law . . . as "infamous"—brothel-keepers, actors, gladiators, convicted felons—persons whose conduct revealed that they had no sense of shame, and thus could have no honor. The slave is the archetype of the man without honor.[10]

That the barbarians and the uneducated resided underneath this threshold of honor is indisputable, yet they were precisely the targets of Paul's apostolic missions. That the Spaniards were considered barbaric as well as uneducated helps explain why Paul uses this remarkably discriminatory language to explain his obligation.

In verse 15, Paul explains why his revolutionary endebtedness leads him to Rome. The "fruit" mentioned earlier describing what he wanted from the Roman churches was to assist in this ministry. So the "eagerness" to preach this gospel in Rome was and remains vital, not in the hope of establishing Pauline congregations in Rome, but to enlist them in his mission project to the uneducated and the barbarians. By the end of his letter, Paul hopes that they will welcome the proposal that this Spanish mission would complete the circle of the known world, winning it for Christ.

IV. NEW LIGHT ON THE THESIS OF ROMANS

That Romans 1:16-17 contains the theme or thesis of Romans is almost universally accepted among commentators. It takes up the issue of Paul's intended missionary enterprise mentioned in 1:13-15 and sets forth a thesis that is confirmed in 1:18—4:25 and amplified in the following argument of the letter. Despite the complexity of the argument, there is a single theme in Romans: the gospel. In my view, the opening words of verse 16, "I am not ashamed of the gospel," sets the tone for the entire letter. In fact, the gospel was innately shameful as far as andient cultures were concerned. The message about a messianic redeemer being crucified was inherently offensive. A divine self-revelation on an obscene cross seemed to demean God and overlook the honor and propriety of established religious traditions, both Jewish and Greco-Roman. Rather than apppealing to the honorable members of society, such a gospel seemed designed to appeal to the despised and the powerless. To use the words of 1 Corinthians, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong. God chose what is low and despised in the world . . . so that no one might boast in the presence of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). For Paul, the shameful issue was the gospel itself, which proclaimed Christ crucified and resurrected. Although the word "cross" is absent from Romans and the verb "crucified" appears only once (Romans 6:6), it is clear from 1 Corinthians 2:2 that Paul assumed the gospel was the message about "Jesus Christ and him crucified." This message about a crucified Messiah was a "stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). There were powerful, social reasons why Paul should have been ashamed of this gospel; his claim not to be ashamed signals that a social and ideological transformation has been inaugurated by the gospel: the first are now the last and the barbarians are equal to the paragons of Greco-Roman culture.

At the center of the thesis of Romans in 1:16-17 is the paradox of power, that in this shameful gospel that would seem to lack the capacity to prevail, the power of God is in fact revealed in a compelling manner. This fits the ambassadorial context that Paul established in the opening words of this letter. The key question is whether the message brought by an envoy comes from a sovereign capable of achieving the purposes of the embassy. Paul's message is indeed the "power of God," echoing the formulation in 1 Corinthians 1:18, that the

word of the cross "is God's power for those who are being saved." This sounds overly abstract until the political background is taken into account. In the Roman cultural context, priestly, military, and administrative forms of power were celebrated as effective means of salvation. The priestly, sacrificial activities of the emperor and his local representatives constituted what Richard Gordon has described as a "veil of power" whose purpose was to legitimate imperial rule and "to maintain the power and wealth of the elite."[11] The imperial cult celebrated the "gospel" of the allegedly divine power of the emperor, viewing him, in the words of an official document from the province of Asia, as

> . . . a savior who put an end to war and will restore order everywhere: Caesar, by his appearing has realized the hopes of our ancestors; not only has he surpassed earlier benefactors of humanity, but he leaves no hope to those of the future that they might surpass him. The god's birthday was for the world the beginning of the gospel that he brought.[12]35

The elaborate triumphs staged by emperors at the conclusion of military campaigns celebrated their allegedly divine power.

This slant on the thesis of Romans not only enables one to explain the claim that "the gospel *is* God's power," but also allows access to the explanatory connection between 1:16a and b. The major point in the thesis statement, that the gospel is God's means of restoring righteous control over a disobedient creation, dovetails with Paul's understanding of his mission to extend that reign. In effect, Paul presents himself in Romans as the ambassador of the "power of God," extending the sovereign's cosmic foreign policy through the preaching of the gospel. This brings "salvation" that was very different from that offered in the Roman civic cult. Paul's gospel shatters the unrighteous precedence given to the strong over the weak, the free and well-educated over slaves and the ill-educated, the Greeks and Romans over the barbarians. If what the world considers dishonorable has power, it will prevail and achieve a new form of honor to those who have not earned it, an honor consistent with divine righteousness. All who place their faith in this gospel will be set right, that is, be placed in the right relation to the most significant arena in which honor is dispensed: divine judgment. Thus the triumph of divine righteousness through the gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected is achieved by transforming the system in which shame and honor are dispensed. The thesis of Romans therefore effectively turns the value system of the Roman Empire upside down.

Salvation in this counter-cultural sense comes to "to all who have faith," which refers to everyone who has accepted the gospel and joined a faith community. The inclusive emphasis with the word "*all*" is characteristic of Romans. The word for "all" appears already for the third time in Romans, marching toward a total of more than 75 times in the letter as a whole. The situation in Rome required this emphasis because of the tendency for house and tenement churches to delegitimize one another. The formula "all who believe" occurs four other times in Romans, always in the context of overcoming tensions between Jewish and Gentile groups. That the majority of "strong" or Gentile-oriented groups was discriminating against the minority of "weak" or Jewish-oriented groups is the most likely explanation for the explication of "all" as "both to the Jew first and then to the Greek." In keeping with the revolution in honor and shame that the gospel entails, overturning the precedence of Greco-Romans over barbarians and the wise over the foolish, Paul seeks to correct the imbalance in Rome.

In verse 17 Paul explains that in this gospel of Christ crucified and resurrected, "the righteousness of God is being revealed." I believe that this is best understood within the missional context already established in the first sixteen verses of this letter. As Ernst Käsemann argued on the basis of apocalyptic parallels to 1:17, this wording refers to "the God who brings back the fallen world into the sphere of his legitimate claim."[13] The triumph of righteousness brings the believer in obedience under the lordship of Christ, but Käsemann did not take account of the establishment of faith communities formed by those who accepted this

message about being set right in Christ. It is the inclusive gospel of Christ that equalizes the status of Greeks and barbarians, wise and uneducated, Jews and Gentiles, which offers new relationships in communal settings to all on precisely the same terms. The early Christian mission is thus viewed as a decisive phase in the revelation of God's righteousness, restoring individuals, establishing new communities of faith, and ultimately restoring the whole creation. This missional context makes it likely that "righteousness of God" should be taken as a subjective genitive referring to God's activity in this process of global transformation through the gospel. The most stunning aspect of this verse is the contention that preaching the gospel to establish faith communities, rather than force of arms or apocalyptic military miracles, is the means by which divine righteousness is restored. In the establishment of faith communities as far as the end of the known world, God will be restoring arenas where righteousness is accomplished, thus creating salvation. In place of the salvation of the *Pax Romana*, based on force, there is the salvation of small groups, cooperatively interacting with one another to extend their new forms of communality to the end of the world. The global offensive in behalf of divine righteousness envisioned by Romans is missional and persuasive rather than martial and coercive.

Paul moves on in 1:17 to explain that this gospel campaign moves forward "from faith to faith." In view of Paul's use of "faith" in 1:5, 8, 12, and 16 as acceptance of the gospel, it is most likely that the progression in this verse refers to missionary expansion of the gospel, which relies on the contagion of faith. This also brings the expression into consistency with the following citation from Habakkuk, which is altered by Paul to make plain to his audience that faith refers to acceptance of the gospel. "The one who is put right [with God] shall live by faith" in this context refers to living together in faith communities rather than in the traditional theological sense of gaining eternal life on an individualistic basis. The proper question to be posed on the basis of Paul's argument in Romans is not, "Are you [singular] saved?" but, "Are you all living together righteously, according to the gospel, in faith communities?"

CONCLUSION

In face of the current campaigns that reflect distorted visions of divine righteousness, and illusions about the capacity to achieve the good through domination and violence, the gospel of Christ shamefully crucified remains supremely relevant. This gospel of divine righteousness overturns unjust systems of honor and shame, overcoming shameful status where ever it remains, and making us know that we are all God's beloved children where ever we may be on that great circle from Jerusalem to the end of the earth. In Christ the line between the barbarians and the citizens of imperial centers has been definitively erased. If this were understood and lived out, the story of the 21st century could reflect the fulfillment of the globally reconciling mission that Paul wrote this letter to advance.

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[1] The creed is marked with quotation marks in my translation of 1:3-4 at the end of this volume.
[2] Käsemann, *Romans*, 15.
[3] Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 20.
[4] Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 20-27.
[5] Harrison, *Language of Grace*, 213–14, 87.
[6] Byrne, *Romans*, 49.
[7] Reid, "Consideration," 189.
[8] Pedersen, "Isagogik des Römerbriefes," 47.
[9] Dauge, *Barbare*, 393-810, showing that the term barbarian in Roman materials serves to depict outsiders as irrational, ferocious, warlike, alienated, chaotic, and in all respects the opposite of the civilized Roman.

[10] Lendon, *Empire of Honour*, 96.
[11] Gordon, "Veil of Power," 126–37, esp. 132.
[12] Letter of the Proconsul of Asia, Paulus Fabius Maximux, honoring Augustus, in Gaertrigen et al, *Inschriften von Priene*, 105.35ff.

[13] Käsemann, *Romans*, 29.