



First to the Jews and also to the Greeks: 'A Clearing through the Letter to the Romans

31.05.2008 | Wengst, Klaus

Before his experience of being called, Paul had been provoked to persecute those of his compatriots who believed in Jesus as Messiah. As a consequence he could interpret his experience at Damascus only as a calling to be an 'apostle to the nations.' In turn, this resulted for him in his pondering the problem of the relationship of the nations with the God of Israel and therefore also with the people of Israel.

"First to the Jews and also to the Greeks:"

A Clearing through the Letter to the Romans.

-
Klaus Wengst

Before his experience of being called, Paul had been provoked to persecute those of his compatriots who believed in Jesus as Messiah. As a consequence he could interpret his experience at Damascus only as a calling to be an "apostle to the nations." In turn, this resulted for him in his pondering the problem of the relationship of the nations with the God of Israel and therefore also with the people of Israel.

My thesis is as follows: This is, especially in the letter to the Romans, Paul's central topic - and not justification. In this letter he pursues a double purpose: On the one hand, he wants to tear down the boundary between Israel and the nations in a twofold manner, when he, first, makes clear that all are under sin and, secondly, emphasizes that through God's action in the anointed Jesus, the nations too have access to God's rich mercy. However, on the other hand, he decidedly holds on to the specialness of Israel, even emphasizing it. In the background are the concrete quarrels of his time.

There is, for once, the question whether the people of the nations who through the gospel proclamation of Jesus as the anointed one have come to believe in the God of Israel have to be integrated into the people of Israel in order to fully belong to it, that is for men, if they are required to be circumcised. This question seemed to have been clarified at the Apostolic Council. It had again become problematic as the letters to the Galatians and Philippians show.

There is, secondly, the problem as to how the coexistence between Jews and non-Jews should be managed in mixed congregations, whether under Jewish or non-Jewish conditions. I.e. concretely, whether Jews should renounce the practice of their particularly Jewish way of life in this communal life, or if the non-Jewish members of the congregation should enable such practice by keeping only to some minimum requirements of the Torah themselves. It is obvious, considering the biography of Paul, that for him the second possibility was virtually excluded. He had as one zealous for God pressed his Jewish compatriots hard, those who had, by living in community with the people of the nations, given up practicing the Jewish way of life. In his calling it had been clarified to him that the ones whom he had persecuted were right after all. Community life under non-Jewish conditions was for him, therefore, highly legitimized. From this position he turned resolutely against the idea that people of the nations should follow any demands of the Torah which concern the particularly Jewish way of life and that separate Israel from the nations. In my mind, it was precisely this question that caused the famous quarrel between Paul and Peter in Antioch which Paul reports in Gal 2:11-14.

"Works of the Law"

In this connection, I want to mention right away an important thesis of my approach to the letter to the Romans. In the case of *érga nóμου*, translated as "works of the law," we are not dealing with human action as such, i.e. with the ethical behavior required by the Torah in general, but very specifically with those commandments of the Torah that set the Jewish way of life apart from that of non-Jews. I therefore do not translate *érga nóμου* with "works of the law" but with the descriptive phrase "what the Torah requires about religious practice." Paul considered this the fundamental issue. However, when the concrete background of this issue was no longer present, after the church had actually become a church of gentiles only, his statements could be read as if they were directed against any action required by the Torah in general.

Let me now proceed by discussing some of the important passages of the letter to the Romans and attempting to show through them how the suggested perspective can open up a new understanding of the letter.

In 1:5, still in the information about the sender, Paul says about himself: "Through him (Jesus the anointed) we have received this grace to be an envoy, so that people in all nations will trustingly follow his name."

What we have gathered from Paul's statements about the experience of his calling, is here, at the beginning of Romans, explicitly stated: The messianic message, which is related to Jesus, includes the nations; Paul sees himself sent to them. Also, at the end of the next paragraph, Paul emphasizes his mission directed towards the nations. After he notes in 1:12 that up to now he had been prevented from coming to Rome, he continues in verse 13f.:

"I would gladly have gathered in some harvest with you as it was the case among the remaining nations. To the Greeks as well as the barbarians, to the educated and uneducated am I obliged. So I am ready to preach also to you in Rome."

As apostle, Paul is obliged to the non-Jewish world. He characterizes it here from the Greek perspective. For Greeks, all others are barbarians, which means culturally backward people. Within the Hellenistic-Roman world, Romans are, from this standpoint, considered to be Greeks; after all, Paul writes his letter to Rome in Greek. From the Greek point of view all are included in the expression "Greeks and barbarians," for Paul this excludes of course the Jews. For him, the whole non-Jewish world is summarized in this expression. He wants to come to Rome as the one obliged to the non-Jewish world.

With verse 16 Paul immediately takes up what he has said before, yet he continues at the same time with information about the topic of the letter. I paraphrase this in the following manner: God also helps non-Jewish people, by showing himself in solidarity with those who trust in him. I translate verse 16 in the following way:

"I am, nevertheless, not ashamed of the good news, because it is a power of God, which helps all those who trust in it, Jews first but also Greeks. God's solidarity is indeed disclosed, which grows out of God's faithfulness and leads to trust in him, as it is written: "The righteous one will live on account of faithfulness and trust" (Hab 2:4)".

Here too, I will only touch on one aspect. Paul says that the good news, the gospel, as power of God - I now offer Luther's translation - "saves all who believe in it." Why does he still continue - again with Luther: - "the Jews first and also the Greeks"? In the commentaries the answer is generally given that he wanted to stress the universal dimension. But that has already been done by the word "all"; more than "all" do not exist. On the one hand, Paul offers a differentiation ("Jews" and "Greeks") and on the other, a prioritization ("the Jews first"). Why? The differentiation here is objectively not parallel to the one in verse 14. Because in mentioning Greeks and barbarians Paul had matter-of-factly excluded the Jews from the grouping "Greeks and barbarians." Now, where he is concerned with all, he takes up the biblical-Jewish basic distinction between the people of Israel and the nations, between Jews and non-Jews. The Greeks now stand *pars pro toto* for the whole non-Jewish world.

"To the Jews first:"

This "first" Paul can only understand in relation to the special covenantal history of God with his Jewish people. God's actions, to which the Bible testifies, relates primarily to the people whom God elected; and it is completely self-evident for Paul that God's action to which the gospel testifies also primarily concerns Israel. However, since he has previously presented himself as preacher of the gospel obliged to the nations, which also gave him reason to bring the good news to Rome, the emphasis now lies for him on the end of verse 16: "and also the Greeks."

Here one finds, therefore, the programmatic-thematic statements at the beginning of the letter to the Romans *in nuce*, the problem specified as I described it at the beginning: On the one hand, he abolishes the difference between Jews and non-Jews, namely in view of the trust in God who works in the gospel and the faith in him. Yet, with the "first" he adheres to this difference and therefore to the distinctiveness of Israel. This is here only marked by the use of "first"; however, it is nonetheless obvious if one simply reads the text. If Paul had only been concerned with the leveling of the difference, he would not and should not have used this "first."

"That all are under sin"

In 1:18-3:20 Paul begins negatively. He negates the difference between Jews and non-Jews in regards to sin, "that all are under sin" (3:9). Here it is important to him what he stresses already in 1:20, that there is no excuse. People in Israel cannot talk their way out of it by claiming to have the Torah, which very concretely demands from them to live responsibly before God. But also people from the nations could know better; they need not be ignorant in regards to God.

It is very informative how Paul, under the aspect of God's judgment, abolishes the difference between Jews and non-Jews in 2:12-29. In 2:12f. he presents as a fundamental point, as his thesis: All who have sinned independent of the Torah, will also perish independent of the Torah; and all who have sinned in the realm of Torah observance will also be judged by the Torah (= in accordance with the standards set forth in the Torah). Because not those who only hear the Torah are right before God, but those will be justified who do the Torah. Paul states here what in Judaism

is a matter of course, that God will judge misbehavior within and outside the area of Torah observance. Under this aspect the difference between Jews and non-Jews is irrelevant, because it does not just depend on knowledge of the Torah but on doing it. It is remarkable that Paul in this connection uses justification terminology in verse 13, i.e. with respect to actions required by the Torah.

Paul succeeds here in leveling the difference between Jews and non-Jews by setting two extreme examples side by side: On the one hand he sets forth the most favorable case for people of the nations, that they indeed do the requirements of the Torah on account of their conscience, though with conflicting considerations when faced with pending actions, and thereby they prove that the actions required by the Torah are written in their hearts (2:14-16). And on the other hand, he sets forth the conceivably most negative case for Jews: that they, though informed by the Torah, do not fulfill the Torah's demands (2:17-24). For the Jews he first offers a concatenation of conditions which express Jewish self-understanding: "If you are called a Jew, lean on the Torah and boast about God, recognize God's will and examine what is important, educated by the Torah, and if you think yourself capable to be a leader of the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an educator of the ignorant, a teacher of the immature who has the embodiment of knowledge and truth in the Torah" (verses 17-20).

For the understanding of this section it is essential that the presuppositions mentioned here were not meant by Paul to be understood as negative statements but are rather exceptionally positive. Only in this way the subsequent argument with rhetorical questions can function properly. The negative actions contradict the positive presuppositions. The assumptions must therefore be understood as positive: "You teach others but do not teach yourself? You proclaim not to steal but you steal?" (and so forth verses 21-23). David Flusser has drawn attention to an objective parallel in rabbinic literature. bJom 86a lashes out against the separation of teaching and life in the following manner:

One who reads the Scripture, learns the Torah and serves the students of the sages but is not dependable in the market place and not friendly in his talking with the people - what are the people saying about him? Woe to this person who learned Torah! Woe to his father who taught him Torah! Woe to his teacher who taught him Torah! This person who has learned the Torah - see how reprobate his actions are, how corrupt his ways! Scripture says about him: "They say about them: people of Adonaj they are; and still they had to depart from their country (Ez 36:20).

After this relativization which is carried out in 2:25-29 in explicit inferences, Paul is led to be reminiscent in 3:1f. of the specialness of Israel: "What then is the advantage of the Jewish people or what are the benefits of circumcision? Much in every respect! First indeed, that they were entrusted with the words of God." This is mentioned here only briefly and on the "first" follows no "second" and "third." In this context Paul is more concerned to prove that the advantage of Judaism does not cancel out the judgment that all people are under sin. Compared with God's reliability "everyone is deceitful" (verse 4). In verse 9b he reminds his readers: "We have previously raised the accusation that Jews and Greeks - all! - are under the domination of sin."

He follows this thesis in verses 10-18 with a concatenation of quotations from the Psalms and the Prophets to prove this in the Scriptures. In verse 19 he sharpens the argument: This standing under the domination of sin concerns especially the Jews, because the Torah - and here he means the entire Jewish Bible - is directed to them: "We know that everything the Torah says, it says to those living in the realm of Torah observance," therefore to Israel, to the Jews. As the purpose of such sayings Paul specifies, "to stop up everyone's mouth."

Their own Bible says to those who listen to it that nobody is righteous but that all have succumbed to sin. So it is true that the whole world is guilty before God, including the Jewish people.

". . . what the Torah demands as religious practice"

By quoting the Torah Paul has negated the difference between Jews and non-Jews with regards to everyone's debt before God. The observable difference in life is obviously the different way of life because Jews hold themselves to specific demands of the Torah. These could already have come into view when Paul in verse 19a spoke of the "realm of Torah observance." If that becomes the focus, those actions commanded or prohibited by the Torah come automatically into the foreground which separates the Jewish way of life from the way of non-Jews. Precisely this would be the meaning of the term *érga nóμου* - "works of the law" - which now in verse 20 turns up for the first time in the letter to the Romans. Paul uses the term only in specific contexts - in general quite rarely - where the question of circumcision for non-Jews and particular Jewish rules are concerned. He has now demonstrated that that which constitutes Jewish existence, the distinction manifesting itself, above all, in circumcision and the special way of life, does not distinguish the Jewish people with regards to the human inclination to sin. I render *érga nóμου* therefore as "what the Torah demands as religious practice". Paul deduces in verse 20a: Therefore, no human being of flesh and blood can be proven righteous (or "without guilt") before God on account of the observance of religious practice required by the Torah. It is, therefore, not at all appropriate for non-Jewish believers in Christ to want to keep this particularly Jewish practice. Read in this manner, there also appears no contradiction to the statement made in 2:13: "The doers of the Torah will be justified" (or "be proven innocent").

In his Jewish tradition, it is for Paul of course also a fundamental truth that no human being can justify him/herself before God. So he had touched on Psalm 143:2, where it is said, "Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you" (or "to prove him/herself to be just"). Correspondingly, it says in bAr 17b: *If the Holy One, blessed be He, were to enter into judgment with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, they could not survive God's reprimand.* The insight that no one can justify oneself before God is spoken of with much clarity in MTeh 143:1, *Who can say on the day of judgment: I am clean of my sin? No human can survive. Thus scripture says, "And who can bear the day of his coming and survive his appearance?" Mal 3:2 ... No human can justify him/herself in judgment. Surely there is no one who is righteous on earth, who does good and does not fail (Eccl 7:20).*

Paul connects the statement that nobody will prove to be guiltless before God on account of religious practice required by the Torah with an explanation: "... for through the law comes the knowledge of sin" (Rom 3:20). This is not to be understood as a statement of principle that reduces the Torah to the exclusive function of leading to recognition of sin. The statement follows, rather, from the argument just made: It is the Torah that opens the eyes to the fact that nobody can justify him/herself before God. In this respect, there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews. Therefore, it is also an absurdity for Paul when non-Jews want to keep the religious practice required by the Torah, which is only demanded of Israel.

If here Paul has in his letter to the Romans leveled the difference between Israel and the nations in a negative respect, he now begins to show that this difference is also leveled in positive ways: Through the kindness of God, shown in the anointed Jesus, God shows himself as in solidarity with all, makes all righteous, who trust and believe in it. It is in my view of decisive importance to recognize that Paul in the case of this positive comparison in the central section 3:21-31 does not set grace against performance, not faith against works, whereby Judaism has then to stand in for performance and works. In interpreting this exceptionally concentrated text, important decisions are made already in the translation. I first present my own:

But now God's solidarity became visible outside the realm of Torah observance, as it is attested to by the Torah and the Prophets, which indeed is God's solidarity through the faithfulness of the anointed Jesus for all who trust in it. There is then no difference; for all have sinned, and are

missing the radiance of God and are made righteous freely through God's kindness, through liberation, namely in Jesus, the anointed one. He is whom God - through faithfulness - to prove the solidarity of God, has set as expiation in his blood, to abate sins that happened beforehand when God let it be - to show the solidarity of God here and now, so that God is just and makes just those who base themselves on the faithfulness of Jesus. Where, therefore, is fame? It has been excluded. Through which aspect of the Torah? Through what it demands as religious practice? No! Rather through the Torah of faithfulness and trust. We indeed rely on this: that a person is made righteous through faithfulness and trust, independent of what the Torah commands as religious practice. Or is God by chance only the God of the Jewish people, and not of the nations as well? Yes, of the nations as well! Surely, God is One and will make the people of the circumcision righteous on account of faithfulness and trust and likewise the nations of the uncircumcision through faithfulness and trust. Are we then invalidating the Torah by emphasizing faithfulness and trust? By no means! Much rather: We are sustaining the Torah.

I can of course not deal here with all aspects of this text. I only discuss important directional indications. The first occurs right at the beginning. Luther translates: "Now however, without support of the law ..." What, however, does "without support" mean when Paul immediately continues by saying that his statements are "witnessed by the Torah and the Prophets?" And further: In verse 19 Paul had used the term *en to nómo*, literally: "in the Torah" or "in the law"; with Luther, "under the law." Objectively, therefore, the meaning is: "in the realm of Torah observance." The beginning of verse 21 then is the precise counter term: "outside the realm of Torah observance." And that fits the position of the nations emphasized in verse 29, which are also brought into a relationship with God. God's righteousness, God's solidarity - here the biblical term is picked up that appears in 1:17 as indication of the theme which expresses the helping and saving action of God among his people Israel, and within it, especially towards the weak and the poor - this solidarity of God has now, outside the realm of Torah observance become visible, has itself shown to the nations as well. This is what Paul wants to establish.

The grace of God - also outside of the realm of Torah observance

That everything depends on God's grace and that, therefore, faith and trust play a very decisive role, is stressed here by Paul as something self-evident. In this, however, he is not at all distinguishing himself from his tradition. It is for him the crux of the matter that through the anointed Jesus, this now also applies to the people of the nations. I want to show briefly that rabbinic texts are in agreement with regard to the grace of God and faith. That everything depends on God's grace is shown for instance by the following passage from the Midrash Mechilta de Rabbi Jishmael:

You have guided us through your grace (Ex 15:13). You showed us grace, because no deeds were in our hands. For it is said: "I will recount the gracious deeds of Adonaj" (Is 63:7); "I will sing of your graciousness, O Adonaj, forever" etc. (Ps 89:1.2). And the world was from its beginning only built through grace. Because it is said: "Yes, I have said: The world was built by grace etc." (Ps 89:2,3)." The Song of Songs often sings of faith; I quote from the same Midrash:

And they believed Adonaj and Moses, his servant (Ex 14:31). If they believed Moses (the inference is made from the) easy to the difficult: (that they also believed) Adonaj. This is said in order to teach you that everyone who believes the faithful Shepherd (is) as if he believes the word of him who spoke, and the world came into being . . . "And they believed Adonaj" (Ex 14:31). Great is the faith with which the Israelites believed in the One who spoke, and the world came into being. Because the Israelites believed Adonaj, the spirit of holiness rested on them and they sang a song (Ex 14:31; 15:1). And so you find that Abraham, our father, inherited this world and the coming world because of faith, with which he believed Adonaj. Because it is said: "And he believed Adonaj; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen 15:6) . . . and you find that the Israelites were

liberated from Egypt only because of faith. Because it is said: "And the people believed" (Ex 4:31). It is said as well: "Adonaj protects those who believe" (Ps 31:24).

Before I comment on the next important change of direction, the understanding of verse 27, I will once again emphasize that Paul, in this section as well, expressly formulates the thesis on which for him much depends, that "there is no difference" (verse 22) - between Jews and non-Jews negatively with regard to sin, which he had proven already at some length, or positively with regard to justification, which he has now begun to expound. Through the anointed Jesus God shows his solidarity also with the nations. That is the background for the question at the beginning of verse 27: "Where is the fame?" He answers decisively: "It has been excluded." In the Protestant tradition - up to the newest German language commentary of 2003 - this question is applied to "pious performance." According to this commentary the question, where the fame is, is answered by pointing to the attitude of people who think they can boast of their own abilities, possibilities and actions: *If the Jew (sic.) is of the opinion that he might invoke the Torah and before God and humans appeal to works, which are demanded by the law, he is deceiving himself entirely and trusts really only on "sarx," the decrepitly and perishable "flesh" (Lohse, 137).*

This opinion, implied to Judaism, is also repudiated within Judaism. I quote from a Midrash:

If it is already necessary that a human behave humbly before a king of flesh and blood, how much more before the Place (= God). Someone has taught: "Be strong as a tiger, rapid as an eagle, quick as a gazelle and courageous as a lion, to do the will of your father in heaven." And it does not continue: so that you can boast before God, rather: "to teach you that there is no pride before the Place (= God)." Elijah says: Everyone who increases the honor of heaven and decreases his own honor, increases for himself the honor of heaven; however, everyone who decreases the honor of heaven and increases his own honor - the honor of heaven remains in its place and he decreases his own honor (BemR 4:20).

Rather, the meaning of Rom 3:27 is that Israel's fame relates to the fact that the Torah was entrusted to Israel and that it thereby distinguishes itself from the nations. Such fame is for instance mentioned in Bar 4:1-4. Here again, the commandments and prohibitions come into view which separate the Jewish way of life from that of others. Paul expressly elaborates on this when he continues, through which aspect of the Torah is Israel's fame excluded? He first denies that it is excluded under the aspect of the Torah's requirement of *érga*. Luther's translation: "through the law of works?" Here, in my opinion, it becomes completely clear that with the combination of the plural *érga* ("deeds") with *nómos* (Torah, "law") cannot mean good actions in general that are required by the Torah. Because this is, in the best case, according to Rom 2:14-16, also possible for non-Jews, while Jews in the worst case, according to 2:17-24, do not adhere to it. Paul had already dealt with this difference. Here he is concerned with the fame that is not excluded, and where the difference therefore remains.

Incidentally, it is conceptually striking that Paul, when he concerns himself with good actions required by the Torah, does not use the term *érga nóμου*. In 2:14 he uses *ta tou nóμου* and in 2:15 in the singular, to *érga nóμου*.

The text in Rom 3:27 then becomes transparent and understandable if *érga* (deed, "works") here, as already in 3:20, means the specific commandments and prohibitions that constitute the Jewish way of life and distinguish Jews from other ways of life, therefore: the religious practice. This means: Under the aspect of what the Torah requires of Israel as religious practice, its fame is not excluded. Paul states this explicitly and one should seriously take account of it. This religious practice marks the distinction which remains; here the specialness of Israel manifests itself which Paul by no means questions. However, this is only a secondary point in this context. Here it is important for Paul to demonstrate that the difference between Jews and non-Jews is also in a positive respect rescinded through the faithfulness of the anointed Jesus, to which all can trustingly

commit themselves and so experience justification, recognition by God. So he answers the question, through which aspect of the Torah is fame excluded? I will first mention here Luther's literal translation: "Through the law of faith." I render it in this way: "Through the Torah, in so far as it testifies to the faithfulness of God and his anointed Jesus and therefore aims at trust and faith also by the people of the nations."

This Paul explains in verse 28: "We indeed reckon that a person is made righteous through faith and trust, independent of the religious practice required by the Torah." The juxtaposition is here not of faith and performance, as was the classical Lutheran viewpoint. Rather, Paul adjudges to the people of the world of nations the same care of God which so far was only directed to Israel. Only under this assumption is it reasonable that Paul in the following verse 29 comes to speak about Israel and the nations under the scheme of "not only - but also." Verse 28 is not the central thesis at which this section aims, but simply a summarizing of things said already before, which here only serves as an explanation.

What Paul wants to aim at, and what he had already touched upon at the beginning, using the phrase "outside of the area of Torah observance," he now states in what follows. First verse 29: "Or is perhaps God the God of the Jews only? Not of the nations as well? Yes, of the nations also!" In this sequence it becomes clear once again that the problem for him does not depend on the question of "divine grace versus human performance" but that it is a question about the nations being added without circumcision. For him, the emphasis is on the end-time equalization of the nations with Israel from the viewpoint of justification achieved by faith/trust and made possible through the anointed Jesus. He makes this explicit in verse 30: "As sure as God is One, who will make the people of the circumcision righteous on account of faith and trust, so also the nations of uncircumcision on the basis of faith and trust."

Finally, Paul declares in verse 31 that he, by propagating faith and trust, by no means invalidates the Torah, but quite contrary, sustains its validity. Jews should, as a matter of course, hold to what has been commanded them, including their particular religious practice. The people who are added from the nations, as Paul states later in Rom 8:4, ". . . will fulfill the demands of the Torah." This means: whatever is demanded by the Torah, excluding the *érga nóμου*, the religious practice required of Israel.

Up to and inclusive of Ch. 8, Paul is concerned with questions which are associated with the fact that he has leveled the difference between Israel and the nations in a positive way. From here his argument can be made transparent. I am not able here to deal with this at length. For now, I want to only draw a sketch of the other main point, namely that he still adheres decisively to the specialness of Israel, and that quite markedly. What he had already touched on in 3:1-3, he makes explicit in Ch. 9-11. I can only refer to a few points. In Rom 9:4f. Paul says about his compatriots who not believe in Jesus:

"They are indeed Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the radiance, the covenants, the giving of the Torah, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and from them, according to his lineage comes the anointed one."

Paul does not know the community of Jesus as "the true Israel;" the honor of the name Israel belongs to his Jewish compatriots. What he says about Jesus, that he is the son of God; what he says of the people in the community, that they are children of God, this he says here without any ifs and buts about his Jewish compatriots. The covenants and everything connected to them are not forgotten. The gift of the Torah is unambiguously positive; and according to ancient usage, worship means the cult carried out at the temple in Jerusalem. Paul has in mind all that has here been enumerated, when he, at the end of the larger context of Ch. 9-11, states in 11:29: "The gifts of grace and the calling of God are irrevocable." Charismata, the gifts of grace that he enumerates here and that are granted to Israel, are complete and independent of whether it believes in Jesus

as the anointed or not, because God in his faithfulness does not make himself dependent on the behavior of those to whom he pledges himself.

"Are not all of Israel "Israel"?"

This is the point that Paul emphatically stresses from Rom 9:6 onward. He first confirms the point he had just made: It is not as though the word of God had failed. The enumerated values are promises of God and remain valid.

The understanding of verse 6b is a very important indicator. One usually reads the sentence as a statement. In Luther's translation: "For not all are Israelites who descend from Israel." Due to this translation it is the usual interpretation that Paul differentiated within Israel. But had he not just emphatically characterized as Israelites those of his compatriots who do not believe in Jesus? Should he already have forgotten this? And also with the following context one gets into difficulties. It was like scales falling from my eyes when, some years ago, I realized that this sentence must not be read as a statement but as a rhetorical question: "Are not all out of Israel, "Israel"?" Of course they are! All Jacob's children who received the honorable name "Israel" are Israelites. This corresponds with Jewish self-understanding. In the case of Abraham and Isaac it is different, as Paul immediately continues. From Abraham the promise goes to Isaac and not Ishmael and the other children of Abraham, and from Isaac to Jacob and not to Esau. Paul's intention in verses 6-13 is to attach the promises of God to God alone and not to their human addressees.

Out of the larger context of Romans 9-11, I want to now deal with 11:28, where Paul views his non-believing compatriots under two aspects: Granted, as regards the gospel they are enemies for your sake; but as regards election they are beloved, for the sake of their fathers. Paul offers here a construction with "granted" and "but", which means that the emphasis is on the second part while the first one is only admitted. In view of the proclamation of Jesus as the anointed one, Paul experiences the majority of his compatriots as hostile (cf., 2 Cor 11:24). But he immediately begins something positive: "for your sake." The background is probably here the concrete historical experience that only the rejection of the messianic proclamation by Israel's majority made it possible for this message to reach the people of the nations. However, when it concerns his Jewish compatriots, the gospel is for Paul not the decisive point of view. More relevant is God's election, and here it remains valid that they are and remain God's beloved. Paul is not Marcion's forerunner. God's history with his people is fundamental for him, not only the past history but also the ongoing history.

To conclude, I want to look at Rom 15:7-13, though only briefly, not thoroughly. Here Paul offers an extremely concentrated summation of the whole letter. According to Ch. 14 there may have been, in the background, quarrels about the question of how Jews and non-Jews should arrange their life as a community, under Jewish or under non-Jewish conditions. Both forms were practiced; an agreement was obviously not possible. Because the aim and purpose of the community is the unanimous praise of God, Paul now admonishes them to accept and welcome each other. This they shall do, "as the anointed one welcomed you," therefore as those who are incorporated into the anointed one, as messianic embodiment.

In verse 8, however, Paul looks again beyond the community, when he makes a statement about the anointed one with respect to Israel: "For I tell you that the anointed one has become a servant of the people of the circumcision on behalf of the faithfulness of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the fathers and mothers." Paul thus declares here that Jesus as the anointed one has a diaconal function towards Israel "to prove the faithfulness of God."

What he had expounded in Romans 9-11 is here stated in the briefest possible formulation: God holds faithfully to his people - independent of its behavior! Jesus as the anointed one vouches for

this faithfulness. He does this by confirming the promises given to the ancestors. He did not fulfill them, but they are also anything but vain; they are valid. The promises given to the ancestors are above all the promises of descendants and land, and for secure and righteous life in the land. As the anointed one, Jesus is servant of Israel in such a way that he does not dissolve such promises, nor makes them of no effect, but confirms them.

I consider it exceptionally important that Paul here does not combine the promises with the category of fulfillment, but with that of confirmation. If it were maintained that Jesus had fulfilled the promises related to Israel, this would only be possible by spiritualizing these promises and taking the designation of Israel away from the actually existing Judaism. Very clearly, Paul does not intend either of these. If Jesus as the anointed one indeed confirmed these promises, what does this then mean for his community when it is called *sóma christoú*, messianic embodiment? Should it not then in this regard take on his serving function towards Israel and so stand up for the validity and realization of these promises?

As to the nations, Paul asserts in verse 9 that they praise God for his mercy which was brought to them by Jesus the anointed one, as the following quotation from Scripture reveals. In summarizing, he takes up what he already touched upon in the thesis of the letter in 1:16 and what he, beginning with 3:21, expounded again and again. Israel and the nations stand together in worship of God; the difference is abolished, yet the specialness of Israel is maintained. That the nations praise God is established by Paul in the following verses with a concatenation of Scripture quotations. I conclude with the quotation from Dtn 32:43 (Septuagint), an invitation directed at the people of the nations, which I treasure as the most beautiful description of the relationship of Christians with Judaism: "Rejoice all you nations with his people!"

Address given at the 31st German Protestant Kirchentag [Church Days] at the Lehrhaus Judentum in Cologne on June 9, 2007. Translated from the German by Fritz Voll with editing by Franklin Sherman.