

ROMANS AS THE COMPLETION OF BONHOEFFER'S HERMENEUTICS

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I. INTRODUCTION

In a remarkable way, the Epistle to the Romans has always shown the way forward in the darkest hours of church history, from spiritual depravity to new revival.¹ This was true as far back as the days of St. Augustine in his battle with Pelagius. The same happened in the sixteenth century with Martin Luther in his fight for the proper doctrine of justification. This was the case with John Wesley in his spiritual agony. The same happened to Karl Barth at the beginning of the twentieth century as he set out to conquer the nexus of problems of liberal theology.²

Churches today live in a deep crisis. This time around, the crisis is called “Biblical criticism,” which is practiced by theological faculties around the world with the help of the so-called historical-critical method. This is why it is extremely important to probe once again the Epistle to the Romans. As theologians, we have a mission to proclaim its message in a fresh way to grassroots parishioners and others interested in hearing it. May we hope for an ecclesiastical renewal through all this increase!

My purpose in this article is to study the hermeneutical principle of the Epistle to the Romans. Which lines of thought does the apostle Paul follow in his study of the Bible (i.e. the *Old Testament*)? I will attach special attention to the new perspective that the gospel of Jesus Christ revealed to him. To begin with, this task calls for a brief survey of the development so far. After this, I will give an account of the actual theme under consideration, especially in light of this context.

II. THE HERMENEUTICAL REORIENTATION

Within the scope of a single presentation, it is not possible to sketch a complete line of theological development with the minutest precision, say, starting with the Age of Enlightenment (much less from the beginning). Therefore, it seems appropriate for me to concentrate on the main lines only. In order not to have to

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¹ This article is based on my book *Romarbrevets hermeneutik: En lärobok för teologer om vetenskaplig metod* (Församlingsfakultetens skriftserie 7; Gothenburg: Församlingsförlaget, 2006). Initially, it was presented at the North European Luther Academy symposium in Helsinki, Finland (September 1999), thereafter at the European Theological Students' Conference in Mittersill, Austria (August 2001), and finally in connection with my teaching at the Lutheran School of Theology in Gothenburg.

² Cf. J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (WBC 38A; Dallas: Word, 1988) xvi–xvii.

deal with all outdated attempts to solve problems, I will merely quote in the following summary L. Goppelt's assessment of the so-called "purely historical" method, which roughly dates to the nineteenth century and belongs to the exegetical phraseology extending to the First World War (and certainly also after this). He reasons in the following manner:

[...] that "purely historical" did not mean objective scientific method. As E. Troeltsch himself clarified, "an entire world view" was operative as rational presupposition. Had it not been the intention here to emancipate biblical research through the historical-critical principle in order to make such research all the more independent of the philosophies of particular epochs? Was not this the goal of wresting such from the domain of ecclesiastical tradition, from the categories—as was often said—of metaphysics? Was there to be a solution to this dilemma? Was one not unavoidably bound to the rational presuppositions of one's time?³#

Space does not permit close investigation of such movements as the Tübingen school, the (original) religion-historical school, or (classical) liberal theology, and so we move directly on to the hermeneutical reorientation which started to take shape shortly after World War I. In particular, two names play a major role there, namely Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann.⁴

Personally, I wish to add yet another name: Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Strangely enough, he has not gained great public attention in the discussion of the principles of the philosophical prerequisites of theology, even though his *Habilitationsschrift, Akt und Sein* (1931), truly deserves consideration in this context. Incidentally, Barth and Bultmann have already been submitted to careful study and multiple critical reappraisals. There is not much left to be studied from their hermeneutical input except for someone whose field is the history of dogma, whereas to date Bonhoeffer's contribution has not been sufficiently scrutinized. At last, the time is ripe for him to break through the prison walls into academic freedom (albeit with all its prejudice against those who think differently).

1. *An interesting debate at the turn of the twentieth century.* Before going into the actual theme, I wish to give a brief account of the interesting debate from the turn of the twentieth century, which dealt with the suitability of various methods in the discipline of theology and touched upon the issue of hermeneutics. Thus, it is appropriate to refer here to the older discussion. Incidentally, my impression is that around the turn of the twentieth century people were at least a bit more aware of the general philosophical prerequisites of academia as a result of the new orientation which the collapse of neo-Protestantism brought about. The methodological consideration was then characterized by a thoroughness and versatility one seldom encounters today. In this day and age, theologians are often lulled into accepting

³ L. Goppelt, *Theology of the NT*, vol. 1 (ed. J. Roloff; trans. J. E. Alsup; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 262–63. German original: L. Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (ed. J. Roloff; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981) 31.

⁴ Goppelt, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* 25–35.

given premises and ready concepts without ever realizing the need to reflect more closely on these, let alone question them.

The above-mentioned debate was launched by P. Jäger's provocative article "Das 'atheistische Denken' der neueren Theologie."⁵ There he energetically defends "atheistic methods" as the only scientific set of tools for theological research. His bold opinion caused an immediate reaction. A. Schlatter wrote a very comprehensive response, "Atheistische Methoden in der Theologie," where he vigorously defends the unique status of the theological discipline against Jäger.⁶ In the following discussion, I will let both parties have their say without much interference in their debate. I will present my own opinion later in this article.

Above all, the debate between Jäger and Schlatter dealt with the issue of what "science" (academic discipline)⁷ is all about. Jäger wrote,

[academic discipline means] that the entire scientific community in their work leaves the idea of God out of the picture and with rigid consistency strives to explain the world on the basis of the world itself. One should, after all, be so fair as to admit that, as the matter stands, academic discipline indeed can have no other methods.⁸

Schlatter responded,

Since his (viz. Jäger's) concept of the world, which posits an enclosed system of viewing the entire realm of what takes place in the world, so that nothing is allowed to come into consideration apart from the world itself, is itself a system of dogmatics; however, it is a dogmatics without values, if for no other reason that it is not worked out and substantiated.⁹

Then Jäger and Schlatter debated about the position of theology at the university. Jäger wrote,

. . . for theology can only have legitimate status within the Universitas Litterarum as long as it sincerely and honestly, and not only in pretense, employs generally accepted scientific methods. If theology cannot, then it must have the resolve to leave the field.¹⁰

Schlatter's response was as follows:

The atheistic approach to theology would in any case be the most certain means of destroying the theological faculties. Once our students read the New Testament just as they read Homer, and our exegetes interpret it as Homer with a de-

⁵ *Christliche Welt* 25 (1905) 577–82. Translations are the author's.

⁶ *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie* 9/5 (1905) 229–50. Translations are the author's.

⁷ In my translation, I render the German word "Wissenschaft" (literally "science" or "scholarship") with "academic discipline."

⁸ Jäger, "Atheistische Denken" 579.

⁹ Schlatter, "Atheistische Methoden" 239.

¹⁰ Jäger, "Atheistische Denken" 579.

terminated exclusion of every thought oriented towards God, then it is over for the theological faculties.¹¹

Next, Jäger and Schlatter discussed the relationship between piety and academic discipline. Jäger wrote,

When we distinguish academic discipline and piety as two separate forms of making the same content relevant for today, it can no longer be considered outrageous when also theologians use the religiously indifferent “historical” and “immanent” methods in their field.¹²

Schlatter responded,

Now, however, when theology also has become atheistic, what is the source of “higher knowledge”? If the theologian certainly does not speak the last, most profound word, who speaks it, then? In any case not the New Testament, as we have indeed “interpreted it without the utilization of the idea of God.”¹³

Finally, one more quotation by Schlatter will be helpful where he very subtly shapes the difficult problems of academic theology:

Now, however, when we wish to explain religion from the standpoint of the world, we place ourselves, from the outset and logically, in a radical contradiction to the object of our study, which simply does not wish to be explained from the standpoint of the world, but rather loudly and persistently asserts the idea of God. The object of our study intends that we think about God; the observer thinks “without taking the idea of God into consideration” . . . And the more we not only observe, but rather wish to explain, the more our object will be forced into our ready-made model, the stronger the scientific caricature will become, and the more certain the alleged academic discipline is transformed into polemics against the object which we are studying. In this way we do not portray what is real but rather a novel presented by the historian.¹⁴

2. *Conditio sine qua non for the theological discipline.* The partly heated discussion between Jäger and Schlatter reveals a difficulty in combining theological research with academic precepts as they have come to be accepted (by whom, no one seems to know, however). Corresponding, endless discussions would just as well take place within our academic environments. To reconcile the dispute probably borders on the irrational, as the debate has stood still so long. Apparently both parties have held their place *mutatis mutandis*. But now I would like to draw attention to new avenues of study. The current understanding of the legitimate premises of academia needs to be modified or rather the unique status of theological research should be demonstrated.

A theologian’s task is to talk about God, that is, to proclaim God’s word. Theology (the word being from the Greek *theos* and *logos*) as a scholarly discipline

¹¹ Schlatter, “Atheistische Methoden” 242.

¹² Jäger, “Atheistische Denken” 582.

¹³ Schlatter, “Atheistische Methoden” 244.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* 248.

deals *per definitionem* with a doctrine of God. Research that starts with a concept that there is no God (or at least there is no God that one can include) cannot, in the deepest sense of the meaning, carry out *theological* research. In that case, does theological research simply have to be taken out of its connection with the university and instead ecclesiastical institutions be founded with particular theological orientations? At least we recognize in such a case that the current academic theology is incapable of studying all that interests us as human beings. This conclusion goes against the general understanding of the function of academia. Why should scholars leave (real!) theological issues outside the realm of academic theology? On the other hand, it certainly seems difficult to accept the working hypothesis of "God" in the exegetical study of biblical texts. In a nutshell, this is where our main problem lies.¹⁵

If we are engaged in "true" theological research, God's existence and his work in history cannot and must not be excluded. A theologian whose work is based on atheistic methods is stranded in a conflict: he is engaged in biblical texts which tell about God's work in the course of history, and yet he utilizes methods which do not even allow God to exist.¹⁶ A person measuring two liters of liquid with a tape measure or weighing three kilograms of potatoes with a ruler would be just as successful.¹⁷ In the final analysis, we must ask ourselves whether it is legitimate to define the concept "academic theology" in an atheistic manner, that is, without allowing for a "supernatural reality." All of the sciences always hold on to certain self-evident premises or axioms even though they are to some extent dependent on the field of research at hand. Therefore, it is not altogether arbitrary to draw such a conclusion that as a basic prerequisite (at least) for academic theology a factual openness toward God's sovereign intervention must prevail. Otherwise, we have no theology in the real sense of the word.

3. *An academic assessment of the so-called historical-critical method.* It is therefore from an academic perspective that we have to take a reserved stance on the so-called historical-critical method within the discipline of theology. A method that does not do justice to the unique status of the sources and of their main intent can hardly be recommended. It is, however, primarily not different methodological tools or minor details that lead to the fatal distortion of research but rather the underlying hermeneutics in its totality. The historical-critical method is primarily based on two (very frequently unmentioned) premises:

a. *Understanding of history.* God cannot affect the course of history. It is not at all certain that he even exists. In the best case, he exists somewhere in heaven, where he will remain forever. History is totally human. God cannot even be compared to an extraterrestrial alien who is claimed to pay an occasional visit to the earth. He only has the right to live in the religious thoughts of a scholar.

b. *Critical stance.* We human beings are the ones who take a critical stance toward the Bible. It is true that a scholar must always work "critically" (cf. for in-

¹⁵ Cf. K. Henttonen, *Voiko sen tehdä toisinkin? Diakoniatieteen lähtökohdat ja valinnat* (Lahden ammattikorkeakoulun julkaisusarja 1; Lahti: Lahden ammattikorkeakoulu, 1997) 162ff.

¹⁶ See, e.g., I. H. Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982) 84–85.

¹⁷ It does not help any if, e.g., agnostic measures are discussed instead of atheistic ones.

stance textual and source criticism), but in this case his critical stance coincides with a deceitful prejudice against the Bible's foremost message, which is the revelation of God's intervention in the miserable plight of the world. In the spirit of such criticism, and in the name of scholarly research, even the best exegetes reach a result which necessarily remains a torso. With their limited point of view, they lack a sense of what is most essential.¹⁸

Thus, the above is not directed against the meaning of grammatical, linguistic, semantic, or rhetorical analyses; form-critical observations; textual, source or redaction critical accounts, and so forth, even though I certainly do not wish to subscribe to all the results attained. Especially within OT exegesis, in my opinion, without going further into the problematic issues, features such as overemphasized redaction-critical aspects prevail.¹⁹ But *abusus non tollit usum*. We are allowed and are able to use a whole set of tools in order to understand biblical texts, and this may begin with another hermeneutical perspective, engaging other hermeneutical principles than those that have been used until now, as we will see below.

4. *The crisis of Protestantism*. In using the historical-critical method, Protestant churches have to a great extent lost sight of the Bible as God's Word. It is a question of God's word without God! Therefore human traditions rule again. They again gain a clear upper hand over the Bible. This time around, however, such usage means that the professors' specific monographs or the bishops' latest proclamations carry the most weight. Perhaps the Lutheran world has suffered the worst from such a development. Not even conservative circles in the Protestant denominations seem to have any other option than to emphasize the authority of the Bible in the churches as a *norma normans* even while they do not hold onto its divine origin within the realm of academia. Protestants lack a clear identity, which paralyzes their work for the renewal of the church, resulting in a concealed conflict in the sphere of academia. Anyone who in accordance with the dictum of academia excludes God and then seeks to create some kind of faith in him with the help of the message of the church is stranded in a spiritual schizophrenia, which evidently cannot convince the modern listener to any great extent.

In order to overcome the problematic state of affairs to which the unique status of the theological discipline gives rise, particularly K. Barth and R. Bultmann, as stated, set out to look for a new holistic solution in the area of hermeneutics. The former represents the Reformed groups within Protestantism, while the latter is closer to the Lutheran persuasion. I will direct my attention toward their positions in the following section.

¹⁸ See especially Marshall, *Biblical Inspiration* 92–93.

¹⁹ It is quite symptomatic that OT exegetes should repeatedly acquire different results when it comes to dividing the textual material between several imagined editors. At times I have the impression that a talented professor and his own students (but none other) can come to the same conclusion! Compare, e.g., the so-called Deuteronomistic concept of history. Cf. D. A. Carson, "Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (ed. D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Academie, 1986) 8: "But having destroyed all the pretensions of external authority, we have discovered, somewhat aghast, that reason is corruptible, that one human mind does not often agree in great detail with another human mind."

5. *The hermeneutical dilemma of K. Barth and R. Bultmann.* It is hardly worth our while in a paper of this length to probe deeper into the comprehensive scholarly work of Barth and Bultmann, so I will be content to point out certain characteristic features in their hermeneutics which touch upon my own theme.

Barth represents what we call “dialectic theology.” He places emphasis on divine revelation. God is transcendent and sovereign. We human beings have no contact with him, not even so much as a point of contact with his supernatural world. An impenetrable wall exists between Creator and creation. Both parties live totally isolated from each other. Human beings have no way of getting in contact with God. He appears to them “*senkrecht von oben*” (straight from above).²⁰ Yet revelation does not coincide with the Bible, as the Bible only *bears witness* to revelation.²¹ Thus, even the reading of the Holy Scriptures does not guarantee that we human beings find a way out of our loneliness. We remain in our misery. Therefore Barth’s position is rightly called “atheistic anthropology.”²²

Bultmann, on the other hand, represents the so-called “existential theology.” He intensively seeks to rescue the early church’s original kerygma from behind the mythological use of language in the NT, seemingly incomprehensible to the modern and secularized person. Demythologization means that the “true apostolic message,” directed at a new understanding of ourselves and of all existence, emerges clearly and distinctly. In this context, however, concrete salvation-historical events such as the virgin birth and resurrection, as well as miracles, no longer play any role. They can be interpreted as secondary material only serving as links to a greater “inner truth.”²³ On account of this, I would call Bultmann’s position “atheistic soteriology.”

So it is the atheistic undertone that has, a bit surprisingly, characterized the theological reorientation ever since the World War I. We must actually ask ourselves whether Barth and Bultmann truly managed to free themselves from the hermeneutical legacy of the nineteenth century, mainly composed of (even if hidden) atheism.²⁴ With Barth’s “atheistic anthropology” and Bultmann’s “atheistic soteriology,” we run into the same problems that have been explained above. A theologian must not accept any atheistic point of view as his hermeneutical starting point. He should dare to be a theologian! Under such circumstances it does not seem altogether strange that from the theological reorientation after World War I hardly anything tangible remained.

²⁰ K. Barth, *Die kirchliche Dogmatik* I/2: *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes. Prolegomena zur kirchlichen Dogmatik* (3d ed.; Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer Verlag, 1945) 305ff.

²¹ *Ibid.* 505ff.

²² A. Richardson, *Raamattu tieteen aikakaudella* (ed. Eero Jääskeläinen; Avain-sarja 12; Lapua: Herättäjä-yhdistys, 1966) 79–80, 100–101; English original: *The Bible in the Age of Science* (London: SCM, 1961).

²³ R. Bultmann, *Neues Testament und Mythologie: Das Problem der Entmythologisierung der neutestamentlichen Verkündigung* (repr. of 1941 ed.; ed. E. Jüngel; BEvT 96; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1988).

²⁴ See, e.g., J. Richmond, *Ritschl: A Reappraisal: A Study in Systematic Theology* (London: Collins, 1978); and P. Althaus, *Das sogenannte Kerygma und der historische Jesus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1958). The former stresses the similarities between Barth and Ritschl, whereas the latter emphasizes the affinities between Bultmann and Ritschl.

Besides Barth and Bultmann, Dietrich Bonhoeffer also strove to overcome the hermeneutical dilemma, attempting not to allow an atheistic premise to determine the final result. His theses have not been submitted to careful scrutiny thus far. Therefore it is appropriate to discuss his approach in more depth.²⁵

III. DIETRICH BONHOEFFER'S ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE HERMENEUTICAL DILEMMA

Bonhoeffer works toward the sort of theological perspective that gives justice to the unique status of the sources without preconceived reservations. According to him, divine revelation is of a contingent nature, that is, it does not adapt to the limitations or demands of reason.²⁶ Deep down we human beings can never understand ourselves by ourselves. We are incapable of placing our own existence in the light of the truth. It is only divine revelation that can do this. Conversion takes place by God's mercy which is at work in the congregation.²⁷ Thus human existence is found either "in Adam" or "in Christ." The transfer from Adam to Christ depends on a miracle: the one who knows the truth is already known by the Truth.²⁸ In that manner Bonhoeffer manages to define the relationship between "Akt" ("die reine Intentionalität," "gerichtet auf," i.e. "faith") and "Sein" (i.e. "revelation") in a satisfactory manner.²⁹ To quote him at some length,

Faith is "in reference to" being (community of faith); it is only in faith that being discloses itself, or "is" (community of faith). But faith knows this being as independent of itself, while knowing itself to be one of the manners of being of being itself. Being transcends something that exists; it is the ground of being of that which exists, as of the I. Thus, act comes from being, just as it proceeds towards being. On its part, being is in reference to act and yet free. The being-of-revelation is "person," hovering in the tension between the objective and non-objective, the revealed person of God and the personal community that is founded on God's person. Here the transcendental approach of 'being only in

²⁵ Theologians have generally passed by Bonhoeffer's *Akt und Sein* with silence, allegedly on the basis of its incomprehensible content. They have often not even reviewed the book. Compare H.-R. Reuter's revealing foreword to D. Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein: Transzendentalphilosophie und Ontologie in der systematischen Theologie* (ed. H.-R. Reuter; Munich: C. Kaiser, 1988) 12, who notes that reviews appeared two years subsequent to publication by Heinz Erich Eisenhuth in *TLZ* and by Hinrich Knittermeyer in *Zwischen der Zeiten*.

²⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein* 76.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, *passim*. He writes, e.g., right at the beginning of his own interpretation of revelation in the following manner: "The falsity of human self-understanding can be exposed only on the basis of revelation and its truth as these have occurred and have called forth faith. If this were not the case, revelation as the last postulate of human thought would be implicated in the dubious validity of self-understanding itself. Then man would be in the position to vindicate himself and establish truth based on the postulates of his own existence. But only revelation itself can do this, if we speak of revelation as it actually is. Consequently: only the person placed in truth has the capacity to understand himself in truth" (p. 75; translation Robert Yarbrough's).

²⁸ *Ibid.* 135–61 *et passim*. Cf. p. 87: "Therefore my knowledge of God depends on whether God has known me in Christ (1 Cor 13:12; Gal 4:9)."

²⁹ On the definition of the concept, see *ibid.* 22–24.

the act" unexpectedly coalesces with the original ontological principle of the freedom of being vis-à-vis the act, of the suspension of the act in being.³⁰

Therefore the fact that Bonhoeffer interprets the congregation as being in a personal relationship with Christ is a necessary prerequisite for his understanding of revelation. God reveals himself in Christ, who commits himself to the congregation. Therefore it is not possible to control his revelation through human reason (no matter how sharp and sound someone's thinking may be).

Through his dynamic understanding of revelation, Bonhoeffer gets rid of the direct counterarguments which earlier research (including that performed by Barth and Bultmann) had been guilty of as we have seen above. Instead of any philosophical speculation, he wants to direct his attention to the actual content of "real" or "true" theology, that is, to the living Christ.³¹

A short extract from Bonhoeffer's position cannot satisfactorily reveal his extremely strong argumentation and rich style. It is a theological masterpiece with many thought-provoking passages rich in aphorisms; it is a book definitely well worth reading. But for now this summary must suffice. In the following discussion, I will try to take the discussion further and take up an aspect of the matter which I believe Bonhoeffer did not take into full consideration and which yet deserves careful scrutiny. In the final analysis, it is Bonhoeffer's own theses which will thereby be confirmed.

IV. THE COMPLETION OF BONHOEFFER'S HERMENEUTICS

De facto Bonhoeffer does not explain what revelation actually is. He does not seem to identify it directly with the Bible. Bonhoeffer does, however, repeatedly talk about the word, proclamation, or sermon as basic elements of the congregation. His argumentation is certainly tied to the thought that the OT and NT are canonical books. However, he criticizes Lutheran orthodoxy for its identification of revelation with the Bible.³² How, then, do revelation and the Bible relate to each other? Bonhoeffer never gives an answer in his book. He is content to argue for a sociological (i.e. ecclesiological) aspect of revelation. He does this for a good reason. However, the reader easily gains the impression that something essential is missing. A sociological aspect seems to be a fairly narrow point of view. Could it be that Bonhoeffer has drawn isolated conclusions about revelation in his *Habilitationschrift*,

³⁰ D. Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology* (ed. W. W. Floyd Jr.; trans. H. M. Rumscheidt; Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 122. Cf. *Akt und Sein* 125: "Thus it turns out that the sociological category [i.e. the social gathering called church] is the unifying point of the transcendental and ontological approach to knowledge. Only in the self-giving act 'is' personhood constituted. At the same time, person 'is' independent from the one to whom it gives itself. This understanding of person is gained through the 'person of Christ' and is valid only for the community of persons in the Christian church which is grounded in Christ" (translation Andreas Köstenberger's).

³¹ See Bonhoeffer's criticism on earlier theology, *Akt und Sein* 27–74.

³² See, e.g., *ibid.* 87, 101.

Akt und Sein, from his dissertation *Sanctorum Communio* without actually broadening his perspective to a noticeable extent.³³ This is a fascinating thought.

It is impossible for me to go into the relationship of Lutheran orthodoxy with the Bible here. Yet it is my opinion that rumor, in this case, is worse than reality. To take an example, Hermann Sasse, another famous systematician in Germany, was later forced to change his rather negative criticism in the face of indisputable facts.³⁴ In the following discussion I would like to draw attention only to the concretization of the content of revelation, a theme that Bonhoeffer, as stated, does not discuss at any length.

If revelation is attached to the presence of Christ in the congregation through the word, at least two questions remain:

- (1) What is the relationship of revelation to the word of the Bible? Bonhoeffer rightly points out that genuine revelation cannot be subjected to any human system or control. According to him, it must retain its freedom, its contingency.³⁵
- (2) What is the relationship of revelation to the central message of the Bible, justification by faith? Here again genuine revelation cannot be reduced to a *system*-based orthodoxy which allows itself to be subjected to the authority of various theologians.³⁶

A Bonhoefferian answer to the questions posed above would strive to follow his type of argumentation in favor of the ecclesiological aspect of revelation: in order to retain the contingent and dynamic nature of revelation, it sounds plausible in this question also to personify the Bible and its central message, that is, to understand all this in a personal relation to Christ. Incidentally, in the context of his work, Bonhoeffer criticizes both the institution of the Roman Catholic Church and the view of the Bible held by Lutheran orthodoxy. He justifies the former critique through reference to the personified character of the congregation, that is, its personal relation to Christ. Strangely enough, however, he does not at all justify his latter criticism.³⁷ If a reader were to continue with Bonhoeffer's vein of thought, it would follow logically that in the latter he would actually come to emphasize the personified character of the Bible, that is, its personal relation to Christ (something that should not be strange to theologians in Lutheran orthodoxy). The same argumentation prevails then with the application of the central message of the Bible, that is, justification by faith.

1. *Christ the core and star* (Kern und Stern) of the Scriptures. Then we face the traditional phrase "Christ the core and star" (*Kern und Stern*) of the Scriptures. But what does such a phrase actually entail? D. A. Carson rightly cautions against gen-

³³ On Bonhoeffer's modifications of his dissertation, see Reuter's "Nachwort" in *ibid.* 174–85.

³⁴ See also G. Wachler, *Die Inspiration und Irrtumslosigkeit der Schrift: Eine dogmengeschichtliche und dogmatische Untersuchung zu H. Sasse* (Uppsala: Sacra Scriptura, 1984).

³⁵ Bonhoeffer, *Akt und Sein* 75–99. To only present one enlightening example: "Therefore, however, are all systems of man, who is not eternally in truth, counterfeit systems that must be shattered, so that the true system is made possible. This shattering takes place in faith through preaching" (p. 84).

³⁶ *Ibid.* 99–105.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 101–2.

eralizations in this context: "How does one avoid generalities? One might say that the center of NT theology is Jesus Christ, but although at one level that is saying everything at another level it is saying almost nothing."³⁸

In this matter, Bonhoeffer falls short. He does not concretize the content of revelation sufficiently but primarily struggles with only the general prerequisites of revelation. Naturally, it seems credible, against the background of the overwhelming coverage of the Bible, to blame almost anyone for insufficient concretization, but on account of the above reasons I believe I have established grounds for the need to complete Bonhoeffer's argument. Towards this end I intend to submit the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul's main work, to closer scrutiny according to the definition of my assignment. If necessary, I will also certainly consult the other Pauline epistles.

2. *The hermeneutical principle of the Epistle to the Romans.* To begin with, the theme (*propositio*) of this epistle admonishes the reader to pay attention to its most important content. This is presented in Rom 1:16–17:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

I will paraphrase the verses in the following manner:

The gospel as God's power reveals righteousness from him for salvation to all (meaning Jews and Gentiles) who believe in Christ in accordance with the OT.

Hence the Epistle to the Romans wants to testify to at least three main theses, the gospel as God's power:

- (1) reveals justification by faith;
- (2) is in harmony with the OT; and
- (3) concerns all, both Jews and Gentiles.³⁹

³⁸ D. A. Carson, "NT Theology," in *Dictionary of the Later NT and Its Developments* (ed. R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997) 810.

³⁹ As a result of the so-called "New Perspective on Paul," there has indeed been much discussion about the "real" meaning of justification by faith as well as whether it constitutes the center of NT theology or exactly in what manner it relates to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles. This is not the place to go at length into a detailed investigation. Still, see many of my monographs and articles, especially *Paulus und das Judentum: Anthropologische Erwägungen* (Åbo: Åbo Akademis Förlag, 1991; available in English as *Paul and Judaism: An Anthropological Approach* [trans. T. McElwain; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995]); "Justification According to James: A Comparison with Paul," *TrinJ* 18 (1997) 43–84 (available in German as *Rechtfertigung bei Jakobus: Ein Vergleich mit Paulus* [Saarijärvi: Gummerus Kirjapaino, 2003]); "Paul's Anthropological Considerations: Two Problems," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul* (ed. D. A. Carson, P. T. O'Brien, and M. A. Seifrid [Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2004]) 343–59; review of Barry D. Smith, *What Must I Do to Be Saved? Paul Parts Company with His Jewish Heritage*, *TLZ* 134 (2009) 808–10; and "God's Righteousness—Once Again," in *The Nordic Paul: Finnish Approaches to Pauline Theology* (ed. L. Aejmelaeus and A. Mustakallio; Library of NT Studies 374; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 40–73. Despite the ongoing discussion and many different understandings, I think that at least in Romans justification by faith *is* the main theme (see 1:16–17). All agree on this, don't they? Moreover, in this article I try to shed more light

These three main theses, in fact, take on the same issues that the above discussion with Bonhoeffer entailed. The first point focuses on the central scriptural message, the second on the significance of the Holy Scriptures, and the third on the unity of the congregation. In this way, scrutiny of the Epistle to the Romans matches amazingly well the hermeneutical considerations given in the previous sections. In addition, the three main theses cover the general content in Romans. The first point corresponds to the explanation of righteousness through faith in 1:18–8:39, the second to the stance on Israel and its holy tradition in chapters 9–11, and the third to the encouragement to mutual love in chapters 12–15. I will deal with the different parts in reverse order.

a. *The congregation: the body of Christ.* The situation in Rome was marked by a considerably broad division among the Christians. Apparently, they had gathered from the very start in various synagogues of the capital city. Their breaking away from the Jewish religion then brought about the birth of several separate congregations. Actually, there was no such thing as a united congregation. Paul does not address his epistle to a *single* congregation in Rome. Quite the contrary, he directs a great number of his general salutations in chapter 16 to separate house churches. In the way of the creation of one single congregation stood controversies over permitted foods and conflicts over festivals, which made it difficult to celebrate communion together in the worship service (together with the real meal). Some opponents represented “the weak” in faith, refrained from food offered to idols, while others, “the strong” in faith, ate everything.

Paul intervenes in the conflict as early as chapter 12, but in greater detail as late as chapter 14. From among his thorough argumentation I will take up only one point which plays an important role in this context. The unity of the congregation has its foundation first and foremost in Christ. Believers form one single body in him (12:4–5). From this comes not only the insight about the many facets of gifts (12:6–8) but also an exhortation to patience and mutual love (chap. 14). The same thought pattern emerges, incidentally, in 1 Corinthians 12–13. There the apostle explains first the unity of the congregation as the body of Christ (12:12–26), then underlines the multifaceted nature of the gifts (12:27–30a; see already vv. 4–11), and finally he affirms the supremacy of love (12:31b–13:7). Even though Paul shares the view of the strong in the purity of all foods, he does not wish to force the weak to accept something that goes against their conscience, while on the other hand he does not want the weak to judge the strong either. Both parties are to live in sincere love and mutual respect (12:9–10), namely in accordance with the spiritual fellowship that already prevails between them through Christ and that is to be preserved as much as possible.

In light of Paul’s reasoning in the Epistle to the Romans, Bonhoeffer’s presentation on the unity of the congregation in Christ thus does not lack support.

on the hermeneutics of Romans. In this regard justification is one important aspect but not the only one. There are other relevant characteristics to be mentioned (see below).

His hermeneutical premise for the theological interpretation of revelation has thereby been confirmed.

b. *The Holy Scriptures: Christ's testimony of himself.* Right at the beginning of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul defines his stance on the OT texts. His gospel promotes Christ as one whom "He [God] promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (1:2). Here Paul presumably includes *all* the authors of the OT as prophets. They have spoken of the incarnation of the Son of God, of his death and resurrection (vv. 3–4). The Scriptures are called "holy" since they are by nature totally different from all the other texts. So, Paul does not read the OT as just any other book. There he finds a prophetic route to the NT, the foundation for his kerygma, something to which he will later bear witness as well.

At the end of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul again sharpens his view on the OT texts. There he praises God who is "able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ [or perhaps "Jesus' proclamation"], according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey Him" (16:25–26).

The final doxology seems almost incomprehensible: the gospel reveals the secret which was hidden but is already there in the *Old* Testament! What does Paul mean with such a seemingly contradictory expression? He thinks that the new revelation in and through Christ broadens the perspective and brings out a viewpoint that allows the message of the Scriptures to come out as a three-dimensional picture. Hence it is the gospel that opens the locked secrets in the OT. We must therefore not read the OT "between the lines" or "from behind the text" but "literally" and at the same time in faith with regard to the factual content, namely Christ.

So both at the beginning and at the end of the Epistle to the Romans, Paul emphasizes that he has wanted to cast light on the OT. This coincides with statistical facts: over half of all the OT quotations in the Pauline Epistles appear in the Epistle to the Romans.⁴⁰ Luther also comes to the same conclusion in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans:

In this Epistle we thus find most abundantly the things that a Christian ought to know.... Moreover, this is all ably supported with Scripture and proved by St. Paul's own example and that of the prophets, so that one could not wish for anything more. Therefore it appears that he wanted in this one epistle to sum up briefly the whole Christian and evangelical doctrine, and to prepare an introduction to the entire Old Testament. For, without doubt, whoever has this epistle well in his heart, has with him the light and power of the Old Testament. There-

⁴⁰ See the table in R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1995 [=1975]) 108–11. He includes only direct quotations, not allusions. See further D.-A. Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums: Untersuchungen zur Verwendung und zum Verständnis der Schrift bei Paulus* (BHT 69; Tübingen: Mohr, 1986) 21–23.

fore let every Christian be familiar with it and exercise himself in it continually. To this end may God give His grace. Amen.⁴¹

In light of the above rather concise survey of the Epistle to the Romans, the apostle Paul explains the OT texts in a clearly Christocentric manner, by help of a personal relation to Christ (the same train of thought appears, e.g., in 2 Cor 3:14–18). From his method of argumentation it follows that the completion of Bonhoeffer's hermeneutical input is in this respect based on sufficient evidence. In a later part of my paper I will further delineate Paul's understanding of the Scriptures.

c. *God's righteousness: Christ himself.* According to the theme of the Epistle to the Romans per the above discussion, Paul confirms that "God's righteousness" appears in the gospel (1:17). In his presentation of himself, he offers as his apostolic assignment (1:1) to proclaim the gospel about God's Son (1:3) or Jesus Christ the Lord (1:4). One is almost to juxtapose the words "God's righteousness" and "God's Son, Jesus Christ" with one another. Incidentally, M. Seifrid comes to the same conclusion, although via another route of study. He argues in the following manner:

It is "in the gospel" that "the righteousness of God" is revealed. Paul's localizing declaration suggests that he refers to the resurrection of the crucified Christ, employing biblical language in order to convey its saving significance. "God's righteousness" is his "vindicating act" of raising Christ from the dead for us.⁴²

Later on Seifrid presents a similar interpretation concerning Rom 10:4. He claims, "Later in Romans, Paul identifies Christ with the revealed 'righteousness of God' to which Israel refused to submit (Rom. 10:4)."⁴³

In addition, such an interpretation is strengthened by the close relationship between 9:30–33 and 10:1–3. The arguments in both passages correspond to each other in the following way:

- pursuing a law of righteousness (9:31): being zealous for God (10:2);
- "as if it were by works" (9:32): establishing one's "own righteousness" (10:2); and
- to stumble over the stumbling stone (9:32), i.e. Christ (9:33): not to submit to God's righteousness (10:3), i.e. Christ (10:4), who by himself has brought about the righteousness (10:5–8).

Since Christ himself represents "God's righteousness," it is really not at all strange that "righteousness by faith" (as if it were a living person) *speaks* in verses 6–8 (cf. a similar language in Gal 3:23–25).⁴⁴

The perspective at least implied in the Epistle to the Romans appears then loud and clear in the two Epistles to the Corinthians. The righteousness of the

⁴¹ M. Luther: *Luther's Works*, vol. 35: *Word and Sacrament I* (ed. E. Theodore Bachmann; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960) 380.

⁴² M. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: The Justification of the Ungodly as the Theology of Paul* (NSBT 9; Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 2000) 46–47.

⁴³ *Ibid.* 47.

⁴⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 542.

Christians coincides there with Christ. The most relevant places are 1 Cor 1:30 and 2 Cor 5:21. According to the former verse, the believers exist "in Christ Jesus, who has become for us ... righteousness." According to the latter verse, reconciliation means that "in Him (viz. Christ) we might become the righteousness of God." Apart from this, Paul says about himself that he seeks righteousness in Christ (Gal 2:17), that he hopes to be found in Christ with "God's righteousness" (Phil 3:9).⁴⁵

The above-mentioned biblical passages prove without a doubt that righteousness is understood as a personal relationship with Christ, if not even as being identified with him. Therefore, in this respect, too, the completion of Bonhoeffer's hermeneutics is based on sufficient evidence.

V. ASSESSMENT

This rather short study of the Epistle to the Romans has defined content in contingent revelation more closely. Also, the broadening of the perspective involved serves to protect contingent revelation against a more or less arbitrary interpretation. For if revelation simply "happens" in the congregation, the objective criteria for judging a genuine versus false revelation are missing. Long ago Scholastic theology became stranded in a serious crisis on the basis of a diffuse definition of the intrinsic criteria of revelation. Its concurrent system included pure arbitrariness which promoted the Catholic clergy's hegemony and authority over the Bible.⁴⁶

In the above discussion, however, I still have not explained the matter completely. At least two issues remain. First, we must sharpen the Christocentric interpretation of the Bible in order to arrange the material for presentation. Second, we need to think further about the relationship between "*Akt*" and "*Sein*," starting with the completion of Bonhoeffer's stance. The question that deserves special attention is whether revelation, solidly anchored in the Bible and its central message, again forms a static system which human beings can control with their reason. Then we would have lost the contingent nature of revelation while hoping to define its special content more closely. For the above reasons I intend to continue my study of the Epistle to the Romans. I am searching for a dynamic view on the Bible.

1. *The Pauline method of reading the Scriptures.* I want to draw attention to two Pauline methods of interpreting the OT, namely to the scheme of "promise-fulfillment" and to typological Bible exposition.

⁴⁵ For more on the connection between the "judicial" and "participatory" categories, see my article "Paul's Anthropological Considerations: Two Problems," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism* 2.343–53.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., B. Hägglund, *Teologins historia: en dogmhistorik översikt [A Survey of the History of Dogma]* (Lund: Gleerups, 1963) 163–66, 174–78; M. A. Schmidt, "Die Zeit der Scholastik," in *Handbuch der Dogmen- und Theologiegeschichte*, vol. 1: *Die Lebrentwicklung im Rahmen der Katholizität* (ed. C. Andresen; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982) 683–722; and R. Seeberg, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Dritter Band: Die Dogmengeschichte des Mittelalters* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1913) 606–21.

a. *The scheme of "promise-fulfillment."*⁴⁷ To begin with, Rom 15:4 will serve as a starting point for the presentation below on the fulfillment of the OT promises within the NT time span. It states, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." "All that was written earlier" and the "Scriptures" are apparently synonymous. So the OT seems to be in its totality a prophecy that concerns us (cf. Rom 1:2). Therefore it certainly is not even worth our trouble to refute the common misunderstanding that Paul would have only emphasized some significant thoughts in the OT. To read such a modern idea into his texts contains an anachronistic perspective. Romans 3:2 most emphatically stresses that the greatest privilege of Jews is that God's word (τὰ λόγια, in the plural) had been entrusted to them. This verse does not actually talk about some separate main principles only.

The general claim of the benefit of the Scriptures and of their prophetic nature in Rom 15:4 stresses the Christological application of Ps 69:10 in the previous verse, that is, Rom 15:3. It is a question of the scheme of "promise-fulfillment," something that actually has its place in the intrinsic message of the OT. Romans 15:8 specifically speaks of the confirmation of the "promises made to the fathers." By the "fathers," Paul here means especially the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but naturally also other great Jewish men. As early as chapter 4, Paul takes up the promise that Abraham and his offspring will be "heir of the world" (vv. 13–21). In chapter 9, Paul then deals with the question of "the children of the promise," Isaac and Jacob and, after them, Christians (vv. 6–13). The apostle Paul thus explains in the course of the Epistle to the Romans what the confirmation of the "promises made to the fathers" graphically includes. Second Corinthians 1:20 states programmatically that "no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'yes' in Christ."

In accordance with its theme (1:17), the entire Epistle to the Romans deals with a great promise: the revelation of "a righteousness from God ... to which the Law and the prophets testify" (3:21, cf. Galatians 3, where the promise is identified with justification by faith). Romans 4 then combines the treatment of the theme with God's promise to Abraham, the patriarch of the Jews (as also in Galatians 3). When the promises made to the fathers resurface in Romans 9, the connection with chapter 4 is preserved through similar terminology: as Abraham's faith was once *counted* (ἐλογισθη - λογίζεται) as righteousness to him (Rom 4:3–5, 23–24), in the same manner now only the children of the promise are *counted* (λογίζεται) as Abraham's offspring (Rom 9:8). Thus we have already gone deeper into what is called typological Bible exposition.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See, e.g., F. Hahn, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, vol. 2: *Die Einheit des Neuen Testaments: Thematische Darstellung* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 116–19, 814–15. Cf. D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and the New," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism* 2:403–4; and R. N. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (2d ed.; Vancouver, 1999) xxvi–xxx.

⁴⁸ D. J. Moo, "The Problem of *Sensus Plenior*," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* 196: "we suggest that typology is best viewed as a specific form of the larger 'promise-fulfillment' scheme."

b. *Typological Bible exposition.*⁴⁹ Romans 4:23–24 reassures us concerning Abraham's righteousness: "The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." Here we are dealing with typological Bible exposition with its three main principles:

- (1) The account or witness of the OT serves as a prototype (*typos*) of what is going to come in the days of fulfillment (*antitypos*).
- (2) The later salvation event rises above the previous, in other words *antitypos* is superior to *typos*.
- (3) The deepest content of the OT is thus understood only through the gospel (in and through faith in Christ) and it specifically deals with the Christians.

Typological Bible exposition always emerges from the clear significance of the OT text and applies it to the real situation in the congregation. The thought that God is the same and he acts in the same way underlies such a method. The earlier salvific deeds therefore anticipate the ones to come. The OT already uses typological Bible exposition. For instance Isaiah compares Israel's return from exile with creation or the exodus (Isa 43:1–7, 14–21).

A similar example appears in chapter 9. The typological interpretation is utilized in a pericope which again comes out of the account of Abraham, namely of his two sons. Just as only Isaac's offspring were counted as Abraham's children, so also now only the children of the promise are counted as God's children (9:6–9).

It is not only a similarity but an opposite as well that is explained by *typos*. Chapter 5 talks about Adam as Christ's prototype (v. 14: *τύπος*), but later on contrasts existing between them are described (vv. 15–19).

Equally, *typos* can function as a negative prototype. First Corinthians 10, with a typological intent, tells about Israel's wandering in the wilderness. The nation's apostasy and sins serve as a warning example for Christians (v. 11: *τυπικῶς*).

On the contrary, allegorical interpretation seems totally arbitrary. It is seldom utilized by NT authors and even then in combination with typological Bible exposition (see Gal 4:24–26). Paul's method of argumentation can be contrasted with Philo, who most often uses allegory without any consideration to the actual meaning of the text.

c. *The contingent feature in reading the OT.* So the two main principles for Paul's interpretation of the OT, that is, the promise-fulfillment scheme as well as typological Bible exposition, appear in his treatment of the Abraham accounts (Romans 4, 9) which no doubt holds a central position in the Epistle to the Romans. It sounds as if his entire study of the OT is leavened by such a double perspective. Everything "circles around" Christ: He fulfills the promises; he unlocks the typological meaning of the Scriptures. This is why, in the final analysis, the interpretation of the

⁴⁹ See, e.g., L. Goppelt, *Typos: Die typologische Deutung des Alten Testaments im Neuen* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1939) (ET: *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the OT in the New* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982]). Cf. Koch, *Die Schrift als Zeuge des Evangeliums* 216–20.

Bible will always fall short without a close relationship with him, without a living faith in him. Yet, university theology generally lacks a sense of this fact. Therefore we must all the more ask ourselves if the results of exegesis are to be expressed from the university lectern or instead from the pulpit, that is, in a congregational context.

It would not be fair to blame Paul for an arbitrary way of reading his Bible. There *are* definitely crystal-clear criteria on which to appraise his Bible exposition, as I have attempted to show above. He uses his methods—if I may express myself a bit anachronistically—very scientifically. But apostolic research is not based on an atheistic foundation but leans on the cornerstone, Jesus Christ (Eph 2:20). In him the Bible is shaped, with its multifaceted content, into a lofty, richly decorated cathedral where thanks and praise are constantly sung to God's glory, instead of its gradual decay into a pile of deserted ruins from the various periods of Bible history. This is where the stumbling block lies. Apostolic research requires Christian faith. In order to understand the OT and through it the NT (or vice versa), a general reader, or alternately a scholar, must already believe in Christ, who is truly the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Through the aid of his reason, he cannot manage to master revelation even if it is totally bound to an "objective world," that is, to the whole Bible. Therefore, the relationship between *Act* and *Sein* will preserve balance in accordance with Bonhoeffer's own argumentation. In order to know the truth in the word, the individual must already be known by the Truth in the Word, Jesus Christ.

VI. APPLICATION OF APOSTOLIC BIBLE EXPOSITION IN PRACTICE

In order to further concretize Paul's method of commenting on the Scriptures, we must cast light on the conclusions that he then draws by putting his view into practice. A couple of examples will have to suffice.

1. *Love as the fulfillment of the law.* Concerning the Pauline interpretation of the law, the focal question is: Is the law still valid? And if it is, is then the entire law or only a certain part of the law valid? Romans 13:9–10 and Gal 5:14 form the starting point for my reflection:

The commandments, "Do not commit adultery," "Do not murder," "Do not steal," "Do not covet," and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: "Love your neighbour as yourself." Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."

In the paraenetic parts of his epistles, Paul thus concentrates on love of one's neighbor. He evidently presumes that the first command (love toward God) has already been fulfilled in and through faith (cf. Rom 8:28). What does it mean in this context that love is the fulfillment of the law, "the second tablet"?

Paul does not expect that Gentile Christians be circumcised or live according to the Jewish festival calendar or give temple offerings. But on the other hand, he

does not anywhere make a distinction between the current moral law and the extinct cultic law, even though such a division is actually valid. In fact, Paul means that all the rules in the entire law are included in the law of love.⁵⁰ His thought pattern is reflected as follows.

Christians fulfill the cultic law by offering their bodies (in love) "as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." It is their "spiritual temple service" (Rom 12:1, *λογικὴ λατρεία*). Since their entire lives will be consecrated to God, they do not even need any dietary rules or commands about special festivals with ritual washing, but love covers all these.

In the Epistle to the Philippians, Paul goes on to use similar language in dealing with his apostolic office. There he speaks about his own blood as a drink offering which will finally be poured over the sacrifice (*ἐπὶ τῇ θυσίᾳ*) when he does his temple service (*λειτουργία*) for the Philippians, or in their place, which is a clear reference to their economic support (cf. Phil 4:10–18) which in practice enabled his mission, "a sacrificial liturgy" (Phil 2:17).⁵¹

Christians also fulfill the law of circumcision by letting their *hearts* be circumcised "in Spirit," not "in letter." It is through the Holy Spirit that God's love is poured into the *hearts* of Christians (5:5). The Holy Spirit awakens in them love directed back at God and the neighbor (15:30). Christians, who serve through the Spirit of God, are counted as the circumcised (Phil 3:3). The expression of "serving through the Spirit of God" (*οἱ πνεύματι θεοῦ λατρεύοντες*) refers back to the "spiritual service" (*λογικὴ λατρεία*) in Rom 12:1.⁵²

Therefore Christians need not follow all the OT rules literally "in flesh," but "in Spirit". By sacrificing themselves and by circumcising their hearts, they also abundantly fulfill such rules which they no longer practice according to the "normal" Jewish convention. It is, however, not a question of an otherworldly Christendom since Paul urges his readers to place their *bodies* in the service of righteousness. Probably he as a former Pharisee "Christianized" his earlier ideals to extend the purity rules of the clergy to take place even in an ordinary person's daily life.

Further, love should not be classified as just one special virtue among others. Rather, it indicates that Christ works in Christians. He lives in and through them. In Romans 13 love corresponds to "putting on the armour of light" (v. 12) which is identical with "clothing oneself with the Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 14). He (or his Spirit) dwells in Christians and fights against the flesh (8:9–11). They are crucified with him in order to walk with him "in newness of life" (6:4, 8, 10–11). In Galatians 5, there is a similar line of thought (vv. 16–25). The Christians live no longer, but

⁵⁰ See my article "Paulus och lagen," in *Troen, teksten og konteksten. Festskrift til Torben Kjar* (ed. Borge Haahr Andersen, Peder Østergård Jensen, and Carsten Elmelund Petersen; Hillerød: Dansk Bibel-Institut, 2009) 216–18; online: <http://www.sec-j.net/index.php/hiphil/article/view/9/8>. Cf. S. Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 437–38.

⁵¹ Cf. J. Thurén, *Galatalaiskirje, Filippiläiskirje* (Hämeenlinna: SLEY-kirjat, 1993) 168–69.

⁵² See above. See especially J. Thurén, *Roomalaiskirje* (Hämeenlinna: SLEY-kirjat, 1994) 250–52. Cf. already S. Odland, *Kommentar till Mattens' Evangelium* (trans. M. Berglid and D. Hedegård; Stockholm: Evangeliska Fosterlands-Stiftelsens Bokförlag, 1937) 91.

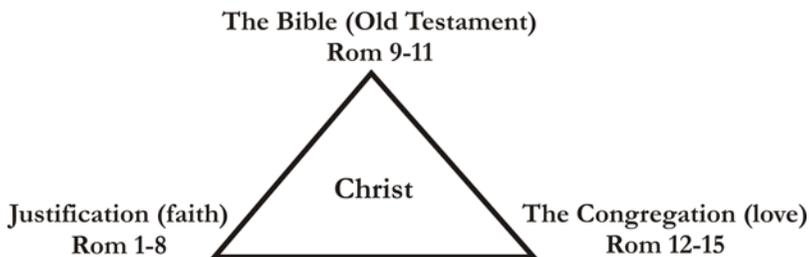
Christ lives in them (2:20). A personal relationship with him defines their acting in love.

2. *The apostle as a representative of Jesus Christ.* Through his apostolic office Paul further understands that he fulfills the OT prophecies. For example in Rom 15:9b–11 he quotes certain selected texts with a christological application from the Book of Psalms as well as from Deuteronomy. The texts all deal with *Christ's* own song of praise among the Gentiles and with his exhortation to stay attuned to His song. Actually, he sang Ps 117:1 (as reported in Rom 15:11) together with his disciples after the Pascal meal, in connection with the institution of the Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26). But how have the OT prophecies now been fulfilled? The Gentiles have not heard Christ's song of praise! And yet they certainly have. For Paul says in v. 16 about himself that he is Jesus Christ's "liturgist" (λειτουργός: a "priestly steward," a "temple priest," a "servant") among the Gentiles. Hence Christ sings with Paul's mouth!⁵³ The apostolic office is that highly esteemed. As a messenger the apostle represents his Sender (also see 10:14). Such an extraordinary position goes back to Gospel traditions (Matt 10:40; Luke 10:16; John 13:20). Once again the importance and significance of a person-relationship to Christ appears in this context.

The image of Christ's activity in the apostolic office as well as the earlier interpretation of love as the fulfillment of the law both prove the scope of Pauline Bible exposition. There, Christians are caught up in revelation's "it happens"-quality without having any control over that contingent process. God preserves his sovereignty. He remains out of reach of the control of reason but in contact with his creatures.

VII. FINAL ASSESSMENT AND CONCLUSION

In my brief study of the hermeneutical principle of the Epistle to the Romans, together with some significant thought patterns in apostolic Bible exposition and their application in practice, I have thus both concretized and completed Bonhoeffer's position. There are three relevant aspects of revelation, and they all have Christ as their content. The result can be made graphic by an equilateral triangle in the following way:



⁵³ Ibid.

The graph shows that Christ will be all in all. He fills out the various areas of revelation with his presence, uniting them into a single totality. Accordingly, the three main sections in Romans, that is, chapters 1–8, 9–11, and 12–15, have been reinforced. If this presentation helps to convey the legacy of the Reformation to future generations, it has served its purpose. “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. Amen.”