

To the Jew, of Course!

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Although not officially sanctioned, “to the Jew first” is the only viable candidate for the Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE) motto. A recent search of LCJE on-line resources located thirty-two documents quoting this text.¹ However, anyone who looks or listens in closely will discover widespread disagreement in the LCJE on how to interpret “to the Jew first” for Paul’s context and ours. Behind the sifted rhetoric of painstakingly worded position statements, competing interpretations of Romans 1:16 jostle with one another in the LCJE.

We must address this lack of consensus because only unity brings strength. Scripture says as much when speaking of the generation of the Tower of Babel: “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language . . . And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them.”² This brings to mind another text: “a house divided against itself cannot stand.”³ We ought to be able to agree on one thing: it would help our cause greatly if we could move toward having “one language,” becoming an undivided house concerning this watchword text, “to the Jew first.”

However, we would be naïve to think we can adequately address this task by selecting representatives to campaign for each option before putting the varied viewpoints up for a vote. For decades now, our guild of educated and experienced professionals has been unable to agree on any one position over against the others, proving that none of the known positions would come out a clear winner in such an election. The pathway to unity and strength does not lie through any of the positions currently held!

We must also resist the temptation to minimize our disagreements on how to interpret “to the Jew first,” as if they don’t really matter. Rather, anything that disrupts unity matters a great deal. It is time to challenge our traditional settling for public statements limited to a lowest common denominator stance on what exactly we mean by “to the Jew first.” Still, we cannot afford to overcompensate, going to the extreme of making bold proclamations of pet interpretations difficult to defend and energized more by political will and emotional force than by theological and exegetical strength. We need to agree not just for group cohesion, but also to equip ourselves with a stance likely to prevail against contrary tides of opinion in the church and in broader Lausanne circles. We need the strength that comes from embracing a strong, unified position.

Toward that end, I am proposing a different approach to interpreting and applying Romans 1:16, one I view to be worthy of widespread agreement. It is rooted in a fresh consideration of the immediate context of Romans 1:16, and the wider context of the Letter to the Romans. After summarizing and critiquing the diverse views represented in our documents as they underscore our lack of unity, I will define and develop this new approach, before making some recommendations for further action.

Four current LCJE positions on the meaning and application of “To the Jew First”

There are four LCJE positions on Romans 1:16 termed here descriptive, paradigmatic, restrictive and prescriptive. Although these positions sometimes overlap or are difficult to distinguish, still there are four of them.

The *descriptive position* simply notes that Paul and/or Yeshua and the apostles went to the Jew first. Therefore, “to the Jew first” is simply shorthand for what the historical record says. Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes that this position lacks hortatory force: “since Paul’s practice in the Book of Acts is descriptive, it may or may not be essential to make Jewish evangelism the first thing one should do when entering a new city or area.”⁴ European and international writings and documents of the LCJE sometimes lean toward this position.

The *paradigmatic position* goes further, suggesting that God’s dealings, and those of the Messiah and the Apostles, reveal a *pattern* of going “to the Jew first.” Proponents of this position hold it to be needless and presumptuous to depart from this pattern. For example, the LCWE Manila Manifesto (1989) says “it would be a form of anti-Semitism, as well as being disloyal to Christ, to depart from the New Testament pattern of taking the gospel ‘to the Jew first.’”⁵ Notice the language here: while the pattern provides moral suasion, this position falls short of saying we are *commanded* to go “to the Jew first.”

The *restrictive position* holds that because the Jews are singled out in the New Testament as a missional priority, the church can only be said to truly be doing mission when its mission includes outreach to the Jews. This is the position taken in the Newmarket Statement when it underscores how the very edifice of the mission enterprise is threatened by neglect of mission to the Jews:

We believe that the mission to the Jewish people is the foundation stone upon which the Christian mission to all the peoples of the world is built. It is the Jewish people who were the original focus of Jesus’ mission: and even when the church widened its approach to include the Gentiles, its witness was still ‘to the Jew first’. If this foundation stone is dislodged, then the universal mission of the Church is in danger of theological collapse.⁶

The Willowbank Declaration speaks restrictively as well, using a slightly different metaphor:

WE AFFIRM THAT the church’s obligation to share saving knowledge of Christ with the whole human race includes the evangelising of Jewish people as a priority: “To the Jew first” (Romans 1:16).

WE DENY THAT dialogue with Jewish people that aims at nothing more than mutual understanding constitutes fulfillment of this obligation. (*The Willowbank Declaration, Article IV, section 19-20*).

This statement reflects a desire on the one hand to underscore Jewish missions, while on the other hand avoiding “going overboard.” To some of us seeking a bolder stance, this

seems to be the rhetoric of reticence. While referencing Romans 1:16, it only says that evangelizing the Jews is “a priority” included in the general mandate to evangelize the human race. This kind of terminological tightrope walking, making a commitment “without going too far,” points to tensions within the LCJE. And these tensions between variant views becomes impossible to ignore when considering the fourth position held among us, the *prescriptive position*.

This position holds that beyond being found and modeled in the text, and beyond being a necessary component of the mission enterprise as a whole, mission “to the Jew first,” is *mandated* in scripture, a duty by which obedience and disobedience are measured. Mitch Glaser, Jews for Jesus, and Arnold Fruchtenbaum all take this position. Arnold Fruchtenbaum is unambiguous in how he characterizes it:

This [to the Jew first] is the biblical procedure for evangelism regardless of the method (radio, television, street meetings, literature, door-to-door, mass evangelism, etc.). Since most believers and local assemblies participate in the Great Commission mainly through monetary giving, this would require giving to the Jew first. This is true of the individual believer as well as of the local assembly in their missions budget (Romans 15: 25-27). What is true of the local church is also true of the missionary in the field. He must first take the gospel to any Jews who may be in the field where he is working. Regardless of his particular place of calling, his obligation is to seek out the Jews and present them with the gospel. Where there is already a command, no special leading is necessary.

This is taken from Fruchtenbaum’s 1985 *LCJE Bulletin* article, “To the Jew First,” which is the most extensive treatment of the prescriptive position to be found in LCJE sources.⁷ On the basis of the present tense verbs in Romans 1:16, that the gospel is to the Jew first, and that it is the power of God to save, Fruchtenbaum says, “Consistent exegesis would demand that if the gospel is always the power of God to save, then it is always to the Jew first.” Granting this to be the case, does this prove “to the Jew first” to be a mandated operational principle? Fruchtenbaum says that it is a doctrinal principle to guide practice, but how do we know that from Romans? Apparently, we cannot, which is why Fruchtenbaum must go to Acts and draw conclusions from the data there which he links to his prior interpretation of Romans 1:16.

When we look at the practice of Paul in the Book of Acts, we see the outworking of *the principle* he stated in Romans 1:16. While Paul speaks of the nature of the gospel in Romans 1:16, he shows us how this understanding of the gospel affects his evangelistic procedure in the Book of Acts. In Romans, he emphasized the “first” was first in priority, but in Acts, we see that since Jewish evangelism was first in priority, it became his first order of business in terms of chronological sequence.⁸

By already concluding what he attempts to prove, is he not arguing in a circle? Furthermore, Fruchtenbaum’s argument seems to be an example of the *cum hoc ergo*

propter hoc logical fallacy, which wrongly equates correlation with causation. While we know that Paul said the gospel is “to the Jew first,” and that Paul in his ministry went to the Jew first, we do not know that his practice of going to the Jew first was due to what he stated in Romans 1:16, nor even that this was a Pauline missional axiom, as Fruchtenbaum insists it is when he says “Only if Romans 1:16 is understood in this way [as a doctrinal position Paul insisted upon and followed] can one better understand Paul’s actions in the Book of Acts.”⁹

To sustain his case, Fruchtenbaum relies in part upon quotations from an unpublished article by Jim Sibley. But Sibley himself declines to label “to the Jew first” a methodological axiom:

Another important observation regarding to [sic] this verse [Ro 1:16] is that Paul is here speaking about the nature of the gospel, rather than setting forth an evangelistic methodology, per se. We cannot but conclude that the nature of the gospel is such that it is particularly and uniquely relevant to the Jewish people.¹⁰

Fruchtenbaum’s strongest argument for the prescriptive position links Romans 1:16 with Acts 13:46, where Paul tells the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you.” He views this necessity to be born of Paul’s alleged adherence to the “to the Jew first” doctrine found in Romans 1:16. However, even if we except Fruchtenbaum’s premise that Romans 1:16 is a methodological axiom, this linkage to Acts 13:46 is indecisive for assigning “to the Jew first” as a missional mandate for us now. How far is the reach of Paul’s “necessity?” Does it reach to us? If so, on what basis do we know this to be so? Is there a clear mandate that all succeeding generations go “to the Jew first?” At best, Paul’s “it was necessary” fails to adequately establish necessity for those we seek to motivate—the church. Although the prescriptive position may be a conclusion we draw from Paul’s practice, the evidence only allows us to call it our conclusion, not Paul’s.

The LCWE came out in print against the prescriptive position in a widely distributed foundational document from the Consultation on World Evangelization held in Pattaya, Thailand in June, 1980:

We observe that the practical application of the scriptural priority [to the Jew first] is difficult to understand and apply. We do not suggest that there should be a radical application of “to the Jew first” in calling on all the evangelists, missionaries, and Christians to seek out the Jews within their sphere of witness before speaking to non-Jews! Yet we do call the church to restore ministry among this covenanted people of God to its biblical place in its strategy of world evangelization.¹¹

Together with the other differences of opinion I have chronicled, this polarization between the prescriptive position and the Pattaya statement demonstrates that the LCJE and LCWE are a house divided that cannot stand for evangelism to the Jews without new attention being paid to shoring up tottering foundations. No one enjoys going underneath

the house to examine the foundation, and no one welcomes the added expense and inconvenience of repairing foundations in need of work. But only a fool would simply paint over cracked foundations with the whitewash of civility.

To summarize and to add urgency to our task, here are some reasons we must repair our ideological foundations clustered around “to the Jew first:”

1. There is no consensus position among us. This proves that none of the current alternatives is sufficiently convincing to win group agreement, no matter how tenaciously proponents defend their pet positions. Only consensus builds power: only in unity is there strength.
2. Our passion for a particularist evangelistic mandate to the Jews is in conflict with trends and documents in the Lausanne Movement chastening Israel and reducing her to the status of being simply a nation like all others.¹² This lowers the profile and priority of the mission to which we are called. We need a theologically sturdy position suited to withstand such pressures and unseat such assumptions.
3. Too often, LCJE position statements use the language of cautious compromise. But “if the bugle gives an indistinct sound, who will get ready for battle?”¹³ We need a rallying cry, not a safe statement of lowest common denominator consensus.
4. The declarative and paradigmatic positions, while inoffensive, lack energy and thrust. They enshrine a kind of missiological etiquette, holding that ministry to the Jews is the decent thing to do. Surely we want a more incisive proclamation than this!
5. The restrictive position simply calls the church to remember the Jews in its missional activities, while failing to impel the church toward outreach to the Jews as a uniquely chosen people. This inevitably devolves into tokenism. Is this the best we can hope for?
6. The prescriptive position, beloved by some of our brightest and best, is weaker than the emotions attached to it. Some dismiss the prescriptive position, arguing that it exemplifies the logical fallacy *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* (“with this therefore because of this”). This fallacy concludes that because A occurs with B, or with multiple examples of B, therefore A causes B. We know exhibit A, that Paul said that the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation of all those who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.” We also know exhibit B, that in his practice, Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, went to the Jew first. What we do not know is that Paul did what he did because of what he said in Romans 1:16.

Furthermore, there are other credible explanations for why Paul wrote as he did. For example “to the Jew first” may refer to the priority of privilege that Jews have experienced as the chosen nation, which priority of privilege and therefore of responsibility is echoed in Romans 2:9 and 10. We know there is a correlation between “to the Jew first” and Paul’s practice: we do not know about causation.

The foundation needs work: we need a new consensus, and that is what I propose. And the warrant for why I view this position to be preferable is that our strongest position on

Romans 1:16 will be one based on the context of Paul's Letter to Rome itself, rather than upon conclusions we reach about Paul's practice from other sources. My intention is to arrive at a position that approximates and embodies the flow of Paul's missional theologizing in his letter.

A fifth approach to interpreting and applying "To the Jew First:" The prophetic-progressive position

The *prophetic-progressive* position is founded on the bedrock of prophetic expectation (prophetic - Romans 1) while orienting itself toward the consummation (progressive - Romans 11). A close reading of Paul's letter to the Romans suggests that this reflects his perspective as well.¹⁴

The prophetic element in Romans chapter one

The immediate context of Romans chapter one provides strong support for the prophetic component of the prophetic-progressive position. Paul introduces himself as "an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures." His good news is not new news, but was long ago planned and foretold. In the prophetic Word, the Great Architect of time shares with us part of his blueprint, and in Romans we are looking over Paul's shoulder as he interprets it. We must not miss how one of Paul's reasons why the gospel *is* good news is that it fulfills prophetic expectations. This being so, in the flow of Paul's argument, the gospel is *of course*, foundationally, and we might even say obviously good news for the Jews, who are the foundational people of God. It is good news first for those to whom it was first promised: to the Jew first. We need go no further in the prophetic Word than Genesis 12:2-3 to find the beginning of this invariable biblical rhythm "To the Jew first and also to the gentile:"—"And *I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*"

The fifty-second chapter of Isaiah is another passage in the Tanach that more explicitly demonstrates it is not a new idea that the gospel is good news to the Jew first. Five times the chapter proclaims that this gospel of the coming Redeemer is good news for Jerusalem, and five more times, that it is good news for Zion. Verse seven summarizes this thrust: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns.'" This is the gospel: the good news of the reign of Zion's God, of whom the Psalmist writes, "I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'"¹⁵ Paul references this very text in setting up what he will say in Romans 1:16. It is only because it is good news for the Jew first that the gospel can by extension be good news for the Gentiles, Paul's audience.

Listen as Isaiah anticipates Paul's "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile:"

8 The voice of your watchmen—they lift up their voice;
together they sing for joy;

for eye to eye they see
 the return of the Lord to Zion (good news to the Jew first—of course!)
 9 Break forth together into singing,
 you waste places of Jerusalem,
 for the Lord has comforted his people;
 he has redeemed Jerusalem (good news to the Jew first—of course!)
 10 The Lord has bared his holy arm
 before the eyes of all the nations,
 and all the ends of the earth shall see
 the salvation of our God (and also to the pagans/Gentiles!).¹⁶

Certainly many, if not most (all?) first century religious Jews knew that salvation begins with the household of Israel before going out to the nations. Of course it is to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. How could it be otherwise? Isaiah is not alone in this conviction. That is why we read in Acts 15 of James finding in the words of Amos a justification of Paul's mission to the pagan world.

Paul reinforces the prophetic component of his argument by reminding us all that this is the gospel "concerning his Son, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh" (Ro 1:3, ASV). This is the good news of the Son of David, that king of Zion! This is a gospel of prophetic fulfillment, the power of God foundationally operating first of all as good news for the Jews and only then for the Gentiles!

The entire thrust of the Older Testament was the foundation of Paul's "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile." But Paul also made a statement prior to his "to the Jew first." He said "I am not ashamed."

Probing Paul's context: shame and vindication

We must not allow our enthusiasm for the latter half of Romans 1:16 speaking of "the Jew first" to distract us from Paul's statement at the beginning of the verse that he is "not ashamed." Why this evocation of shame?

Some hold that Paul was simply indicating his pride in the gospel, that his "I am not ashamed" is an example of litotes, a figure of speech in which a positive is stated by negating its opposite, as when one says, "I am not amused" to indicate "I am displeased," or "he is feeling no pain" to say that someone is numb with one two many pints of Guinness. William Barclay takes the text in this manner, translating our verse "I am proud of the gospel,"¹⁷ as does the Moffat translation.¹⁸

John Stott protests, assigning this translational impulse to commentators' reluctance to attribute the Apostle even the possibility of shame to his gospel ministry. Stott retorts by recounting how he "once heard James Stewart of Edinburgh, in a sermon on this text, make the perceptive comment that 'there's no sense in declaring that you're not ashamed of something unless you've been tempted to feel ashamed of it.'"¹⁹ Contra Barclay and Moffat, to say that one is not ashamed of something should not be taken to be simply equivalent to saying that one is proud of it! To prove this is so just ask yourself if it is the

same thing for a spouse to say “I am not ashamed of you,” as to say, “I am proud of you!” Statements of not being ashamed indicate a prior expectation or experience of shaming accusation.

Although his personal psychology need not be categorically excluded, Paul is not simply referring to psychological shame here, to how he feels about himself: as Krister Stendahl taught us, that would be to retroject to Paul the introspective conscience of the West.²⁰ Paul is speaking predominantly of cultural, social shame: of how he and his gospel are maligned as shameful the Jewish and Roman worlds and in the Roman church as well where some had problems with Paul’s gospel. Paul’s “I am not ashamed” is a response to shaming communal indictments, actual or anticipated.

This may sound trendy to some of us, but it is a fringe opinion. Alexander Wedderburn regarded Paul’s “I am not ashamed” to be pivotal to understanding not only Romans 1:16, but the entire Roman letter:

That is a connection [with his not being ashamed] that makes far better sense if some in Rome had in fact claimed that he indeed ought to be ashamed of his gospel and his proclamation, for that gospel was in some way discredited and disgraceful. It will be the argument of the rest of this chapter [in Wedderburn’s book] that that had been claimed, and that the argument of the rest of Romans from this point to the end of chapter 11 is a defense of Paul’s message and ministry against charges which claimed that it was indeed shameful.²¹

And it is because issues of honor, shame, and vindication permeate his letter that must understand Paul’s “I am not ashamed” if we would rightly interpret his “to the Jew first.” We ought not to imagine, however, that this is a simple task, easily disposed of with a simple nod of agreement. In his recent article in the journal *Missiology*, Missionary Jayson Georges chronicles his own struggle to rightly understand and communicate with people in the Central Asian shame and honor culture where he serves. Struggling to exegete and theologize in the midst of mission, it was only when he began to grasp the shame and honor issues underlying Paul’s writings that he made a breakthrough in understanding and communicating to the culture where he serves. He records how his conditioning as a Western Christian left him ill-prepared to see Scripture in this light: “Romans . . . theologizes in a milieu of honor and shame, but such theology has long been overlooked or reinterpreted by communities with other existential interests.”²² Our habitual Western perspective prevents our picking up significant cultural cues and concerns informing the text, so that our interpretation is generally more a projection of our context and concerns than an accurate reading of the context and concerns of the Scripture before us. This is why, for example, Lutherans will always tend to see the New Testament as being chiefly about justification by faith, while Mennonites see it as being about peace-making.

It is easier and more comfortable to imagine that we already see Scripture clearly and without filters of any kind: but this is naïve or even prideful. Once we have the concepts in mind, a fresh reading of Romans confirms that it is indeed interlaced throughout with

honor and shame. And as will become clear later, it is most significant that these concerns reach a peak in Romans 11.

The discipline of rhetorical criticism helps us get inside Paul's skin as he crafts his Roman argument. He adapts for his use the rhetorical device diatribe to personify the accusing voices to which his letter is in large measure a response.²³ In Romans we find a coterie of accusing voices gathered around the Apostle seeking to withdraw from him status and honor, thus leaving him shamed and his gospel disgraced. Among these is the Jewish community voice which views as shameful his message of full inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God; there is the Roman cultural voice, contemptuous of a religion about a crucified Jew; there Jewish interlocutors (perhaps more rhetorical than real) in and around the Roman church, who regard God's justification of the ungodly to be shameful of God and of Paul, his messenger; and some rhetorical interlocutors, outraged at how Paul's message seems to spell divine malfeasance as covenant promises to Israel are abrogated and covenant love lavished upon former pagans. We will not go far wrong if we interpret the entire Roman letter as Paul's vindication of his God, his gospel, and himself against such accusations.

And Paul's "Yeshua the Messiah and Him crucified" was indeed shameful.²⁴ Every Jew knew that Torah said, "a hanged man is cursed by God"²⁵—not only cursed, but shamed. And additionally shameful, Paul traveled throughout the Diaspora offering pagans full membership in the people of God apart from circumcision and commitment to Jewish covenantal life. To the Jew, Paul was shameful in his desecration of the holy covenant, the holy people and the holy Torah, as he preached his message of a shamed and crucified Messiah who brings pagans beyond the middle wall of partition.

As for the "also to the Gentile" component of our phrase, Robert Jewett is surely correct to ground Paul's shame language at the junction between the crucified Christ and Roman disdain: "For Paul, the shameful issue of the letter is the gospel itself (which) . . . was innately shameful as far as Mediterranean cultures were concerned. . . . The message about a redeemer being crucified was a 'stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles' (1 Cor 1:23)."²⁶

How ridiculous it was, after all: good news about a butchered Jew! Gentile Romans, both Greeks and barbarian, despised the Jews anyway, and this so-called good news message was one generally embraced by slaves, weaklings huddling around a Jew too weak to withstand the might of Rome and avoid the shame of crucifixion. Perhaps this is why Paul speaks of the gospel being the *power* of God to save all who believe. It seems no accident that the term "power" (*dunamis*) appears three times in this immediate context, in verse 4 ("the Son of God in power"), verse 14 ("the power of God for salvation"), and verse 20 ("his eternal power and divine nature)." This gospel, despised as weak by Rome, is actually all about the triumphant power of God.

"To the Jew First" – but is that all? Paul's concerns in Romans 11

Reviewing standard LCJE positions on Romans 1:16, do we have adequate textual reason to believe that Paul wrote the text simply to describe how the gospel appeared among

men or to comment on God's habitual habit of beginning with the Jews? Do we have adequate reason to believe that he said what he said simply as a guide and goad to a prioritized missional effort, as the restrictive approach would say? Or do we have adequate reason to allege that he wrote as he did in order to set the record straight, that Jews should hear the gospel first in every historical and geographical situation? In each of these cases, we must admit the evidence is largely conjectural, a matter of connecting dots which may not be dots but smudges, and for which we do not have numbers next to the dots to indicate what lines and items must be filled in first.

The prophetic-progressive approach brings us out of this morass, through the progressive component of its definition. The prophetic-progressive position holds that the gospel is the fulfillment of prophetic expectation, the means of eschatological blessing for the Jew first and also for the Gentile in vindication of God's promises to each, in accord with the patterns, precedents, and covenants of Scripture. It calls us to bring this good news to the Jewish people, serving the fullness of Israel as our mission and the fullness of the Gentiles as our paramission, progressing toward the consummation of all things in allegiance to the Son of David.

In brief, this position calls us to actively serve the anticipated consummation for the Jews outlined by Paul. Reading Romans 9-11, we find Paul struggling with the plight of the Jewish people, responding to shaming inner and outer rhetorical voices maligning the gospel as being about Jewish disenfranchisement and divine covenant abandonment. In these chapters, we see Paul grappling with the disparity between the prophetic promise of Israel's eschatological salvation, and the realities on the ground: God's new work among the Gentiles is making progress, and the Jews, rejecting the message, appear to have been set aside.

The prophets promised that the Jews should be the first to hear the tidings of Messianic salvation: this was nothing new. While it is true that the Gentiles being received into the people of God as Gentiles was controversial in Paul's time, that the Gentiles should experience eschatological blessings after the Jews was also nothing new: the Jew first and also the Gentile is the clear prophetic pattern and promise! But Paul is troubled by a question: is this all? Is this feeble Jewish response and widespread Jewish hostility to the gospel the best that God can do with his chosen people at the end of the age?

In chapter eleven Paul answers the question. In vv. 1-6 he speaks of Israel's apparent rejection, saying it is not rejection at all: the existence of a remnant proves that God is not through with his people. In vv. 7-10 he speaks of Israel's partial failure to enter into the Messianic fulfillment of God's promises, but although surprising, shows this to be a failure foreshadowed in the prophetic word. In vv. 11-16, anticipating what he will say at the end of the chapter, Paul speaks of a yet to be unfurled magnificent future for Israel, a *pleroma*, a fullness of greater significance than the fullness of the Gentiles. While the fullness of the Gentiles seems for now to have overshadowed the Jews, the end of the story is quite the reverse! While the fullness of the Gentiles means riches for the nations and the reconciliation of the world (vv. 12, 15), the fullness of Israel will be greater: it will mean life from the dead (v. 15), triggering the general resurrection.²⁷ The tension

with which Paul wrestles, between Israel's current abject position and her glorious consummation, will in the end be resolved. The rest of the chapter speaks of the surprising how.

Beginning in v. 17, Paul explicitly erects a bulwark against Gentile Christians in Rome understandably but wrongly assuming that God is through with the Jews and that the Gentiles are his new and sole concern. We all know the parable of the olive tree, and how Paul warns his Roman readers against being arrogant (v. 18), proud (v. 20), and conceited (v. 25) toward the Jews. But in vv. 25-32, he spotlights a mystery about God's dealings with the Jews which embodies the ultimate vindication of God as Israel's covenant-keeping God, and of Israel as his everlastingly beloved people, leading directly into Paul's appropriately magnificent doxology.

25 Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written, "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; 27 "and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins."

28 As regards the gospel, they are enemies of God for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. 29 For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30 Just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, 31 so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. 32 For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

There are three aspects of this now revealed mystery we would do well to keep in mind:

1. A hardening in part has happened unto Israel for a time, and only for a time, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.
2. The salvation of the Gentiles will take place prior to and will be a precondition for the salvation of "all Israel."
3. And thus, after all this, and by means of all this, all Israel will be saved in the end.

This is extraordinary and entirely unanticipated. The prophets had said "to the Jew first." This was nothing new. They had also said salvation would then go "also to the Gentile." This was also nothing new. But no one had ever before said, "to the Jew first and also to the Gentile and then to the Jew again and triumphantly!"

Reidar Hvalvik argues that "in the situation in which Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, the salvation of 'all Israel' was no matter of course. The majority of the Jews had rejected the gospel, and hence nothing in Paul's own time encouraged a hope of salvation for 'all Israel.'"²⁸ He is in part correct: it is likely that at least some Roman Christians had

abandoned this hope. But it seems certain that Jewish expectation uniformly anticipated that all Israel would have a share in the world to come. And in harmony with this expectation, in a way that he never could have guessed, the mystery Paul shares in his letter revealed to Him by God himself, completely vindicates God's faithfulness to Israel and his honor in the face of widespread shaming accusations to the contrary. I agree with Hvalvik that the "all Israel" which will be saved in the end is, for Paul, "Israel as a people—including both 'the remnant' (11.5) and 'the others' (11.7),"²⁹ although not necessarily every living Jew.

Conclusion

What then does all of this mean for the prophetic-progressive paradigm and the work of LCJE? How does all of this lead to a better rallying cry than "to the Jew first?"

"To the Jew first" alternates between the poles of missiological etiquette on the one hand, and a prescriptive approach leaping from the Romans context to find its justification in the Book of Acts, on the other. As we have seen, some dismiss the latter position as based on a logical fallacy. Far better to dive deeply into the Roman letter's contextual grid, surfacing with this pearl of great price clutched in our hands: a better motto, either "To the Jew at the beginning, to the Jew at the end, to the Jew now!" or perhaps, "To the Jew first, to the Jew last, to the Jew now!" or even "To the Jew last!" This is a more dynamic approach because it calls us not merely to respond to the past, when "to the Jew first" was exemplified and proclaimed, but also to responsibility for future, where Israel is destined for a fullness that will overshadow even the Great Commission, the fullness of the Gentiles. Paul is not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God to save all who believe, to the Jew *of course*, and even for the pagan, and it progresses toward that time when God will vindicate his people, his honor, and his gospel when "all Israel will be saved."

If we are to better energize and focus our own actions, and inspire the church toward outreach to the Jews, we will need more than a slogan. Here is some of the work we need to do:

1. We must develop a holy dissatisfaction with the status quo, and a distaste for simply circling the wagons and reloading. It is like playing the card game Solitaire: it will do no good to reshuffle the cards yet again when the problem is that some cards are missing. We don't need to regroup! We don't need to reload! We don't need to reshuffle! We need a new deck!
2. We must show the church that it is in their enlightened best interests not only to engage in reaching the nations (the fullness of the nations), but also to engage explicitly and energetically in outreach to the Jews and support of their development in accord with the fullness of Israel, because only with the completion of both fullnesses will any of us attain to the long awaited consummation. It was such a motivational thrust that energized the Apostle Paul who said he labored "that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead."³⁰ He strove toward the consummation: so should we, and so should the Church.³¹

3. We should do research in Paul's thought to explore how, why, and to what degree he is covenantally optimistic about Israel's future. How does our gospel and perspective compare with his?
4. We should do some serious new thinking and research about the Pauline complementary distinction between the fullness of the nations and the fullness of the Israel, which reflects the consistent rhythm of Scripture which always speaks of "Israel and the nations."³² What does Paul mean by the fullness of the Gentiles? What does he mean by the fullness of Israel? Toward what kind of consummation are we striving? Are we working toward a homogenized humanity, with all ethnic particularism transcended, or will it be an eschaton with all ethnic particularism glorified? And what should that mean for us now?
5. We should do serious and ongoing research and think sacrificially about what the fullness of Israel will look like, and what that should mean for our personal, organizational, and institutional priorities and goals.³³ We should be serving a vision of the future, not simply defending our version of the past.
6. We need to ask if our message is perceived as good news by the Jewish people as a whole, if not, why not, and what responsibility do we have to reconsider how we conceive of and present our message. Is it good news for the Jews as a whole, or is it only good news for Jews prepared to think of themselves apart from their people? Paul's message was good news for the Jews as a whole. Is ours?

I conclude with this definition of the prophetic-progressive position:

The prophetic-progressive position holds that the gospel is the fulfillment of prophetic expectation, the means of eschatological blessing for the Jew first and also for the Gentile in vindication of God's promises to each, in accord with the patterns, precedents, and covenants of Scripture. It calls us to bring this good news to the Jewish people, serving the fullness of Israel as our mission and the fullness of the Gentiles as our paramission, progressing toward the consummation of all things in allegiance to the Son of David.

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¹ By "LCJE documents" in almost every case I mean conference statements written to report to the church and the world on LCJE conferences, consultations and activities.

² Gn 11:6 (ESV). Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotations in this paper are from the English Standard Version.

³ Mt 12:25 (KJV).

⁴ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, "Romans 1:16 - To the Jew First", LCJE Bulletin, Issue No. 85, found on line March, 2008, at http://www.lcje.net/bulletins/2006/85/85_01.html

⁵ (1989, LCWE, *The Manila Manifesto*, found on line at <http://www.lcje.net/manila-manifesto.pdf>).

⁶ *LCJE 1983 Second International Consultation Newmarket Statement*, found on line at www.lcje.net/Newmarket%20Statement%2083.doc

⁷ Fruchtenbaum, *loc. cit.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, emphasis added

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Jim R. Sibley, "Some Notes on Romans 1:16: Unpublished Article, p. 1, quoted in Fruchtenbaum, loc. cit.

¹¹ *Lausanne Occasional Paper 7: Christian Witness to the Jewish People*, Section 1, found on line 3/3/11 at <http://www.lcje.net/ChristianwitnessonJewPeop.pdf>

¹² But see Ezk 25:8-22!

¹³ 1 Co 14:8.

¹⁴ A formal definition of the prophetic-progressive position: The prophetic-progressive position holds that the gospel is the fulfillment of prophetic expectation, the means of eschatological blessing for the Jew first and also for the Gentile in vindication of God's promises to each, in accord with the patterns, precedents, and covenants of Scripture. It calls us to bring this good news to the Jewish people in the context of serving the fullness of Israel as our mission and the fullness of the Gentiles as our paramission, progressing toward the consummation of all things in allegiance to the Son of David.

¹⁵ Ps 2:6-7

¹⁶ Isa 52:8-10

¹⁷ William Barclay, ed., *The Letter to the Romans*, New Daily Study Bible, 3rd Edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, June 2002), 21-22.

¹⁸ James Moffat, *The New Testament: A New Translation, Revised Edition* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1934), *ad. loc.*

¹⁹ John Stott, *Romans: Good News for the World*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1994), p. 60.

²⁰ See his seminal essay, "Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," in Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1976), 78-96.

²¹ A. J. M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 104.

²² Jayson Georges, "From Shame to Honor: A Theological reading of Romans for Honor-Shame Contexts," *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXXVIII, no. 3 (July 2010:296-307), 296-297.

²³ Stanley Stowers holds that Paul used diatribe in the letter to signal his status as a teacher adept in the conventions of rhetoric prior to his arrival in Rome. Among these conventions is the speaker's postulating imaginary interlocutors who embody the positions he seeks to refute. While Stowers holds that this was what Paul was doing, it is likely that Paul had heard reports of actual dissenting voices in the Roman congregations. Stowers holds that his letter was a kind of pedagogical tour de force using imaginary interlocutors as a prop for Paul's demonstrated rhetorical prowess. Stowers seems to miss the relational context of the letter and of the times that called for Paul to take pains to anticipate and respond to tensions in the Roman church, and controversies surrounding his ministry which are frequently chronicled by and about Paul in the New Testament. See Stanley Kent Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, SBL Dissertation Series 57 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1981), 182-183.

²⁴ 1 Cor 2:2, a context where Paul startles us by choosing to lay aside the weapons of classical rhetoric in order to baldly depend solely upon the manifest power of God to validate his apostolic ministry.

²⁵ Dt 21:23

²⁶ Robert Jewett, *Romans*. Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 137.

²⁷ While some view this "life from the dead" to be a metaphor for the reviving of Israel as God's people, this does not effect our point at all.

²⁸ Reidar Hvalvik, "A 'Sonderweg' for Israel: A Critical Examination of a Current Interpretation of Romans 11.25-27," *JSNT* 38 (1990), 87-107.

²⁹ *Op. cit.*, 100.

³⁰ Phi 3:11

³¹ I further develop thinking on the Fullness of the Gentiles and the Fullness of Israel and their implications for all in *Christians and Jews Together* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock), 2009. This will be further developed in yet to be published book, tentatively titled *Converging Destinies: Jews, Christians and the Mission of God*.

³² Although I would go much further than he does on the priority of outreach, by the church and especially by Messianic Jews to other Jews (which me sometimes term “inreach”), for restoring a sense of the rhythm of God’s dealings, and the complementarity of Israel and the Church, I recommend R. Kendal Soulen’s *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press), 1996.

³³ See Stuart Dauermann, *Son of David: Healing the Vision of the Messianic Jewish Movement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock) 2010.