

## "THE GOSPEL'S UNIVERSAL OUTREACH"

(Romans 14:14-33)

(Frank Theilman)

Paul's comments on his past missionary labors and future plans demonstrate both the gospel's universal and multiethnic scope on one hand and, on the other hand, its historical, even ethnic, particularity. Its multiethnic scope has been evident throughout the letter, from Paul's introduction of himself to the Romans as one who had "received an apostleship for the obedience of faith among all the gentiles on behalf of his name" (1:5) to his concluding claim that he has just written them so boldly because God had graciously made him "a priest with respect to the gospel of God, so that the offering of the gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit" (15:15).

In this passage it becomes clear that God's impartiality (cf. 2:11; 10:12-13) and his authority over all peoples as the one God of the universe (cf. 3:29-30; 4:11-12, 16) are not merely abstract theological principles. Nor are they simply ethical principles that generate unity among those who are already believers. In addition, the universal scope of the gospel implies that the church needs to be vigorously engaged in taking the good news of reconciliation to God through Jesus Christ to all human beings everywhere.

This missionary mandate is not the product of a single command to evangelize given somewhere in the course of the letter but is implicit in the nature of the gospel itself. God is not merely the national God of Israel in the same way that Roma was the personification of Roman power [*In ancient Roman religion, Roma was a female deity who personified the city of Rome and more broadly, the Roman state*]. The gospel claims that God is the one God of all creation and that although he has used the nation of Israel for his saving purposes, he is the God of all nations (3:30; 8:19-23).

Just as Paul's apostolic authority infuses Romans and makes it authoritative for all Christians, so Paul's eagerness to recruit the Roman Christians to aid him in taking the gospel to Spain is an implicit call to all Christians to join in the work of taking the gospel to the nations. The work of establishing communities of people around the world who worship God through Christ and live as God's people in the power of the Spirit (15:16) is far from complete.

