OVERVIEW OF THE COURSE:

The Letter to the Romans, written by Paul to a congregation that he had never visited, is commonly thought to represent the apostle’s most complete theological reflection. The church has turned to Romans as a primary resource for thinking about a range of theological topics including justification, baptism, predestination, and the relationship of Law and Gospel.

The purpose of this course is to introduce students to the Letter to the Romans as a resource for Christian theology and ministry. Attention will be given to the background to the Letter to the Romans, to a close reading of extended passages in Romans, and to classical and contemporary interpretations of theological issues in this letter.

TEXTBOOKS AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

The following books are required in this course, and portions of each should be read according to the schedule below:


In addition, it is expected that each student will have a copy of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible and will bring it to each class session. The following edition of the NRSV New Testament is especially recommended: Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*. Oxford, 2011.

EXAMINATION:

Note-taking and learning the professor’s views is an essential component of higher education. Accordingly, there will be an examination in this course on October 28.

TERM PAPER -- Toward a Pauline Theology of Judaism:

Paul believed during at least part of his career that the return of Christ and the culmination of all things would occur during his lifetime. Thus Paul did not develop a theology of an ongoing Jewish faith and its relationship to Christianity. But what might a present-day Christian seeking to be faithful to Paul say about the relationship of Christianity to contemporary Judaism?

Classical and contemporary Christian understandings of the relationship of Christianity to Judaism have included:

- Supersessionism or Replacement Theology: Christianity has replaced Judaism in the biblical covenant. After Jesus, Judaism has no spiritual significance above that of any other religion.
- Dispensational Theology: Only believers in Christ are saved. The Jewish people are still loved by God, and will be restored at some time in the future.
- Two-Track Theology: Judaism and Christianity are different but equally faithful ways of responding to God.

A more recent perspective, arising mostly from the Jewish side, is:

- Biblical Faith Adapted for the Gentiles Theology: There is one covenant, the ancient covenant between God and Israel. Christianity is a “missionary wing” of Israel, theologically adapted to bring Gentiles to the worship of God.

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1 See “we who are alive” in 1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17. 1 Thessalonians is thought to be Paul’s earliest letter, and as such it is the oldest extant piece of Christian writing.

2 The term “missionary wing” is my own, an attempt to represent Michael S. Kogan’s *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* and Pinchas Lapide’s amazing book *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*. 

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Based on a close reading of Romans 8-11 and any other relevant passages, present a Pauline statement of the relationship of Christianity to contemporary Judaism. What are the implications of your findings for a present-day Christian understanding of Judaism? Show how you would adopt, modify, or explicitly reject at least one of the perspectives summarized above. Your task is not to echo Paul, but to present what Paul’s theology would suggest for answering a question that he himself did not address. This paper will require your own theological reflection based on a careful reading of applicable passages.

Note: The textbooks for this course and other secondary resources may assist you in writing this paper. What I will be looking for, however, is not a summary of these but a discussion based on your reading of Paul himself. Your primary references should be to passages in the letters of Paul and any other relevant biblical texts. This paper is due on November 18, and will be the topic of a discussion session on that day.

COMMUNICATIONS:
I will be available to meet students on campus after most class sessions. I also respond to e-mail: HannBob@aol.com.

COURSE SCHEDULE:
The following is the schedule for this course. Students’ interests, the length of classroom discussions, and other similar matters may cause minor changes in this schedule. The dates for the examination and the term paper are firm.

August 28 Introductory Matters
What Are We Doing Here? An Introduction to the Course

How to Read Romans – and Anything Else in the Bible
Introduction to Reading Scripture Exegetically

September 2 Locating the Roman Church
Hellenistic Judaism, the Septuagint, Philo, the Diaspora Synagogues
Roman History, Culture, Religion
The Expulsion of the Jews by Claudius

Read: Matera, pp. 2-23, Wright, pp. 3-20, 62-68, 76-79

September 9 Readings in Romans
Introductory Matters – Romans 1-2
Idolatry and the Ubiquity of Sin – Romans 2

Read: Matera, pp. 24-77

September 16 Righteousness by Faith – Romans 3
Our Father Abraham – Romans 4

Read: Matera, pp. 78-120

September 23 Issues in Interpreting Romans: I
Justification and Faith: Aquinas, Luther, N. T. Wright

Read: Wright, pp. 47, 108-125

September 30 Salvation and Baptism – Romans 5-6
October 21 The Law and Hope – Romans 7-9

Read: Matera, pp. 121-163
Read: Matera, pp. 164-234

October 28 Examination

Read: Matera, pp. 231-282

November 4 Issues in Interpreting Romans: II
Election and Predestination: Augustine, Calvin, Arminius, Barth, McDonald

Read: Matera, pp. 283-348

November 11 The New Life in Christ – Romans 12
The State and Concluding Matters – Romans 13-16

November 18 Issues in Interpreting Romans: III
Toward a Pauline Theology of Judaism

Discussion Session
Term Papers Due

December 2 Reading Romans in the Church Today

Read: Wright, pp. 154-174

3 See N. T. Wright’s reflections on being faithful in “the fifth act,” in his Paul in Fresh Perspective, pp. 170-174.
BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR ADVANCED READING:

“Of the making of books there is no end,” lamented the ancient Preacher (Ecclesiastes 12.12). The following bibliography includes works that may be useful for advanced reading in the topics covered by this course. Those marked with an asterisk are especially recommended for further study and for use in ministry.

THE BOOK I DID NOT ASSIGN:

According to many reviewers, the definitive book on Paul is N. T. Wright’s magisterial Paul and the Faithfulness of God. Fortress, 2013. Why didn’t I assign it? It’s huge: 1600 pages. And it’s not inexpensive: it lists for $89.00. But it may be the most important book on Paul in recent years, and as such it is essential reading for those interested in an exhaustive exploration of the apostle and his message.

GENERAL REFERENCE ON PAUL:


PAUL AND HIS WORLD:

Helmut Koester, History and Literature of Early Christianity. De Gruyter, 2000
Peter Lampe, From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries. Fortress, 2003

THE LETTER TO THE ROMANS:

Brendan Byrne, Romans. Liturgical Press, 1996.
Joseph A. Fitzmyer, Romans. Doubleday, 1993
Martin Luther, Commentary on Romans. Zondervan, 1954.
Jerry L. Sumney, Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans. Society of Biblical Literature, 2012
N. T. Wright, Paul for Everyone: Romans. Westminster John Knox, 2004
INTERPRETING PAUL:
*N. T. Wright, Paul in Fresh Perspective*. Fortress, 2005.