Numerous and varied suggestions have been proposed by scholars in recent years concerning the occasion and purpose of Paul's letter to the Romans 1). Though not all are sceptical as to the outcome, some scholars feel that the varying conclusions witness to an increasing confusion rather than clarity in the interpretation of the letter 2).

One reason for this diversity of opinion may be the actual structure and content of Romans itself. Chs. i 1-17 and xv 14f. function as brackets around the ‘body’ of the letter 3). Since these chapters deal with Paul's travel plans and his concern for the Roman Christians, it is inevitable that they will be at the centre of any discussion concerning the situation to which the letter is addressed or out of which it emerged. Consequently these passages tend to receive undue attention from scholars concerned with the occasion and

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2) Luz's verdict, after a survey of the literature, sums up the reaction of some scholars—'Eine eindeutige Lösung drängt sich aus dem Studium der Sekundärliteratur nicht auf', "Zum Aufbau von Röm. 1-viii", Theologische Zeitschrift 25 (1969), 165.

3) 'Body' is used loosely in this instance only—normally we take it to refer to chs. i-xi, cf. C. J. ROETZEL, The Letters of Paul (Atlanta 1975), 28. CRANFIELD warns of the danger of regarding the introduction and conclusion i.e. i 8-16a and xv 14f. as detachable from the rest of the letter (op. cit. 816). Although he takes the view that Paul sends to the Romans a summary, of the gospel as he understood it, Cranfield rejects as "quite unacceptable" the view "that the structure and contents of i 16b-xv 13 were determined simply and solely by the logic of the gospel" (i.e. entirely without reference to the situation in Rome), op. cit., 818 f.
purpose of the letter 4). Other scholars, however, who lay more stress on the theological significance of Romans, tend to concentrate on the body of the letter—usually chs. i-viii, sometimes i-xi 5), and, less frequently, ix-xi 6).

The way to a comprehensive and more generally acceptable interpretation of the letter must lie, therefore, in a proper combination or unification of these two emphases; i.e. in seeking an explanation of the occasion and purpose of Romans which is consistent with, and adequately related to, the content of i 18-xi 36. Any interpretation which makes good sense of only part of the letter is automatically, by definition, excluded. A coherence must be established also between i 18-xi 36 and xii-xv(xvi)7). In the search for a comprehensive interpretation of the letter, some light, we believe, may emerge from a closer study of ch. iii.

Scholars have frequently drawn attention to the great extent to which ch. iii is composed of questions which are answered at a later point in the letter 8). The chapter begins with a series of questions in vv. 1-8 and ends with another series in vv. 27-31.

4) E.g. P. S. Minear, The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans, (SCM 1971). Only half of the contents of Minear's study is devoted to the body of the letter; cf. also Cranfield's criticisms, op. cit., 820-21.


7) The most recent research supports the view that ch. xvi was a part of the original letter, cf. H. Y. Gamble, The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans (Eerdmans 1977) and U. Wilckens, op. cit. (see note 1), 24-27. For a contrary opinion cf. E. Käsemann, An die Römer, HNT, (Tübingen 1973) 400f. The view taken here is that ch. xvi should not be used as a basis for any interpretation of the letter but only as supporting evidence for interpretations arrived at on the basis of chs. i-xv.

8) Cf. H. Lietzmann, An die Römer, HNT, 8 (1933) 89, A. Schlatter, Gottes Gerechtigkeit (Stuttgart 1959) 122, Luz, op. cit. (see note 2), 169.