

Romans: To the Churches of the Synagogues of Rome

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Paul did not use the label "Christian" in his letters, and it is widely recognized that in Paul's time "Christianity" did not exist in a formal, institutional sense. Instead, Christ-followers were still identifying themselves in Israelite/Jewish terms based on covenant affiliation with the One God who created a people from Abraham's descendents. Those who shared Paul's commitment to Christ were addressed and discussed, in terms of ethnicity, as Jews or non-Jews/Greeks, Israelites or members from the other "nations" (*ethnē*, usually translated "Gentiles"),¹ circumcised or foreskinned, and so on. Institutionally, they were identifiable as members of specific Jewish subgroups within the larger Jewish communities, not as members of a new religion or of something other than Judaism.

In spite of the common recognition of such historical factors, for the most part Paul's letter to the Romans continues to be discussed in concepts and language as if it is a Christian text representing a time when Christianity, however labeled, is understood to have been something other than Judaism, and Christians to have been other than Jews. On this reading, any Jews who became Christians are viewed as no longer holding identity as Jews to be of covenantal value (the Mosaic covenant having been fulfilled and thus made obsolete). In other words, they are not approached as Jews religiously, as if they continued to practice Judaism according to its fundamental norms--Torah-observance, circumcision of sons, Temple worship, Sabbath keeping, etc.--even if they remained ethnically Jews because of birth.² If some Christ-following Jews "also" attended Jewish communal meetings (i.e., "synagogues"), that is approached as if it was an action separate from attending Christ-followers' meetings (i.e.,

¹ We derive ethnic and ethnicity from *ethnē*, which translates as "peoples" or "nations," i.e., "members from the nations" other than Israel; it can refer to members of the nation Israel too. Although Paul does not use the singular form, it would refer to a person from the nation to which one referred.

² This thinking is also disclosed by the very posing of the question of whether these Jews would have circumcised their sons--regardless of the answer given, that the question would require being raised or debated speaks volumes about the traditional assumption that they no longer practiced covenantal Judaism, in which this practice of familial continuity is a given, having been commanded of Abraham for all generations.

"churches"): Christians and Jews represented separate group identities; they met separately and they upheld different foundational norms.

The traditional position is generally presented in binary (this or that) theological terms, thus Christ or Torah (often labeled "Law"),³ concluding that Christ replaced Torah, making the latter obsolete for guiding life among Christ-followers--or that is how it should be (i.e., traditionally "Paulinism" is by definition based on a "Law-free Gospel").⁴ Within a few centuries, that position was made official policy for Christendom--no Christians, even (former) Jews who "converted," were permitted to attend Jewish meetings or practice Jewish rites or ways of life⁵--and this was apparently the view of some (although by no means all) Christ-following non-Jews already in the early second century (e.g., Ignatius of Antioch).⁶

³ "Torah" is a Hebrew word that denotes "Teaching" rather than simply "Law," including laws/commandments but also many other teachings, stories, warnings, consolation, etc. Depending upon context, Torah can refer to the Pentateuch (first five books of Tanakh/OT), the Mosaic Covenant, the Tanakh (OT) or Scripture overall, or refer to the overall teachings of Judaism. It is unfortunate that in discussions of Paul the Greek word he uses, *nomos*, is usually simply rendered "law," which contributes to the binary categories in which Paul is usually discussed (in Greek it also signifies "principle," "convention," "custom," and can be used to refer to Torah in its several senses). In a number of cases in Romans, Paul uses *nomos* to refer to principles or conventions other than Torah, including the "principles" of "sin" and "death" as well as the "conventions" of the Romans, etc. Furthermore, for Paul "Torah" is not the opposite of "love" or "freedom," but embodies "teaching" about such values, including by "commandments" that clarify how those whom God has "freed" from Egypt, from sin, and so on, are to treat ("love") others.

⁴ Mark D. Nanos, "The Myth of the 'Law-Free' Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4 (2009): 1-21 [<http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjr/vol4/iss1/4/>].

⁵ Nicea II, Canon VIII; see James Parkes, *The Conflict of the Church and the Synagogue: A Study in the Origins of Antisemitism* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), 394-400.

⁶ Ignatius, *To the Philadelphians* 6.1, for the first extant reference to "Christianity [*Christianismos*]" as a religious system, apparently coined to set it out in antithesis to "Judaism [*Ioudaismos*]" (see also *To the Magnesians* 9.1). *Codex Theodosianus* 16.8.22 of Oct. 20, 416 CE, outlawed "defiling" any Christian or member of any sect with "the Jewish mark." That this debate continued--albeit not about their own contemporary setting, since it had been resolved by then that Christianity did not allow for the practice of Judaism--is witnessed in the exchange at the beginning of the fifth century (in Constantinian Christianity) between Augustine, who upheld that the first generation of Christ-following Jews had continued to practice Judaism as a special transitional phase, and Jerome, who maintained that even the first generation of Christ-followers knew better than that from the beginning, upholding that any practice of Judaism for any Christians would have undermined the central truth claims of

Following from these premises, the primary problems Paul addressed in Rome are usually understood to have arisen from the failure of some within the Christ-following community to respect this change of eras and to live "free of Torah" and the value of Jewish identity (such as the "weak" in Romans 14, according to most interpretations), or alternatively, from the misguided teaching of those who promoted Torah and Jewish identity alongside of commitment to Christ. Secondly, however, Paul ostensibly did not want the implications of that theological viewpoint to be taken too far: thus he called for his audience to adjust their social behavior to avoid offending any "weak" Christ-following Jews (and perhaps "judaized" non-Jews) among themselves, and also to not think that God had rejected those Jews who did not (yet) share their commitment to Christ.

Those traditional ways of approaching Paul as well as Romans are easily challenged. In these texts I find reason to propose that Paul and his communities--including the community he did not found but wrote to in Rome--were subgroups of the Jewish communities that believed Jesus represented the dawning of the awaited age.⁷ The Jews in these subgroups, Paul included, observed the covenantal obligations of Torah, for they were Jews involved in a fully Jewish movement.⁸ They upheld that by the gift of the Holy Spirit now made available with the arrival of the awaited age to come they were enabled to practice their commitment to the God of Israel according to the highest of ideals of Torah. The non-Jews who joined them did not become Jews and were thus not under the Mosaic legislation (Torah) on the same terms as Jews; however, they were committed to lives of righteousness defined in Jewish communal terms and thus by Torah, for they met in Jewish groups, and thus according to the Jewish norms for these groups, and enabled by the same Spirit of God.

This ambiguous identity created problems for these non-Jews as well as those Jews who promoted it--and for theologians ever since. Those in the Jewish community who did not

Christianity. See Joseph W. Trigg, "Augustine/Jerome, *Correspondence*," in *Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Michael Glazier (Message of the Fathers of the Church 9; Wilmington, Delaware, 1988), 250-95.

⁷ See Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996); Idem, "The Jewish Context of the Gentile Audience Addressed in Paul's Letter to the Romans," *CBQ* 61 (1999): 283-304.

⁸ Note that Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44, seems to suggest this, and Ambrosiaster in the 4th cent. in his commentary, *Ad Romanos* (ed. H. J. Vogels, *CSEL* 81:1), described the earliest Christ-followers in Rome being taught to keep Torah by Christ-following Jews.

appreciate non-Jews claiming full identity and rights within the Jewish community apart from proselyte conversion, a tradition providing inclusiveness, might be expected to react with confusion and disapproval; if such identity claims continued they would likely be deemed dangerous and subject to discipline. There would be any number of reasons for such reactions, beginning probably with protection of divinely commanded covenantal norms, which called for all (males) who claim to be children of Abraham to be circumcised (Gen 17:9-14; 1 Macc 1.14-16, 48, 60; 2 Macc 6.10), among other communal obligations. Also practical socio-political concerns would likely arise, including fear that the community's rights would be compromised, resulting in punishment and perhaps elimination of these rights by the Romans for harboring non-Jews who did not participate in familial and civic cult yet did not become Jews. Their non-Jewish family members, friends, neighbors, and civic leaders would have reason to be upset with this arrangement, perhaps even more so: the gods were being neglected, a threat to the welfare of all, and it posed a risk to communal socio-economic interests. In addition to the need for undisputed access to communal goods driving a need for unambiguous identity, consideration must also be given to the simple cultural observation that in antiquity one's identity in a community was more central to one's sense of self than the cultural norms shaping post-enlightenment notions of self, which the funerary inscriptions from the ancient Roman Jewish catacombs bear out, wherein family and communal associations and functions are described more so than reflections on personal afterlife.⁹ Complicated? Yes, but Paul's letters indicate just such complexities existed for these non-Jews in terms of how to negotiate Jewish communal identity while remaining non-Jews, rather than that they were experiencing the kind of already fully "gentilized," separated communities and values usually championed in Paul's name.¹⁰

⁹ Leonard Victor Rutgers, "Jewish Ideas about Death and Afterlife: The Inscriptional Evidence," in *The Hidden Heritage of Diaspora Judaism*, 2nd ed. (CBET 20. Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 157-68.

¹⁰ By way of analogy, imperfect as it may be, consider the dynamics likely to arise if some small group within the Amish community of the U.S. began to teach non-Amish neighbors that they could avoid military service if they but attended Amish meetings without actually becoming Amish. Any non-Amish neighbors who believed this would eventually find that this proposition, which they may have thought was an Amish norm, was actually controversial, to say the least. Amish leaders upon learning of it, would likely seek to stop this breach of policy, for it posed a threat to their rights if they did not maintain compliance with the government's definition of who was Amish and thus entitled to avoid service, and it undermined long-standing communal identity standards

What happens if we read Romans anew based on the proposition that the audience to which Paul addressed the letter met together as subgroups of the larger Jewish community (or communities) of Rome? Do the features of Paul's letter make sense when approached from this contextual vantage point? Besides avoiding the disapproval and dismissal of the value of Judaism, what might be at risk for Christian identity and guidance? In this essay, we can only begin to explore why this approach is compelling in view of some of the historical and rhetorical data available, but it is my opinion, granted, as a Jew and outsider, that the gains for Christians, including theological principles and spiritual guidance will be enhanced rather than diluted when they are no longer tied to the negative binary (either/or) categories traditionally posed in terms such as Christians or Jews, Christianity or Judaism, Christ or Torah, freedom or obligation, grace or responsibility, faith or works (deeds/actions), moral or ritual, spiritual or physical, and so on. In keeping with Paul's own arguments, these categories are more realistically approached in this-and-that rather than this-or-that terms. Emphasis within each category including binary terms such as these will change given the variables of context, time, the participants involved, and so on, but the basis of Paul's beliefs and actions (his concepts of faithfulness to Torah and Christ) were not conceptualized in a Christianity or Judaism framework. Rather, for Paul and those under his influence, surprising though it may seem to many, they were based on a notion that being a Christ-follower was the ideal way to live out Judaism in the awaited age-to-come, which they believed had begun.

The Historical Context

There is a great deal of information about Rome in the mid-first century CE, yet surprisingly little is known about the Jewish communities there, and outside of Romans and Acts of the

around which community life turned. At the same time, the non-Amish boy seeking to gain this right would likely be challenged by his family, friends, neighbors, and civic leaders, for behavior considered unpatriotic, misguided, and dangerous. The Amish subgroup leader upholding this deviant policy, like Paul, would be responsible to either teach them to abandon it, or hold fast in the face of social pressure from many directions, and self-doubt as well. The way that all of this would unfold in different local contexts would of course be different, yet certain developments would likely be common to them. Mutatis mutandis, these are the kinds of complexity that I propose was faced by the non-Jews within the Christ-following Jewish subgroups. In his letters we see several sides of Paul's responses to those who have been persuaded by him and others to uphold a social identity that deviates from the prevailing Jewish and non-Jewish communal norms.

Apostles, which can be variously interpreted, nothing is known about relationships between the Jewish communities and Christ-followers of Rome. Nevertheless, there are several topics to discuss.

The population of Rome at the time is estimated to be just short of one million, and the Jewish population to be twenty to fifty thousand, although the overall population of Rome as well as that of the Jewish people may have been much smaller.¹¹ There is no evidence of any structures from the time used for meetings of Jews or for Christ-followers. There is no reason to suppose that Christ-followers such as Paul, when he refers to "gatherings"/"churches" (*ekklēsia*), is involved in distinguishing his group from any other Jewish subgroup or its gatherings, which could equally be referred to as *ekklēsia*, and for that matter, to any other community or assembly of people. Just as we use the terms community, meeting, gathering, and assembly as general terms today, so too were they used then. To be sure, it later came to be the case that "church/*ekklēsia*" specifically referred to Christian gatherings and buildings, while "synagogue"/*synagōgē* referred to Jewish gatherings and buildings.¹²

The Greek word translated church, *ekklēsia*, and the Greek word translated synagogue, *synagōgē*, were used interchangeably in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Scriptures) to translate the basically synonymous Hebrew word *kahal*, all of which refer to the assembling of people together, that is, to a meeting or a community including the overall people of Israel (and in James 2:2 *synagōgē* was used to refer specifically to gatherings of Christ-followers). Paul appears to use *ekklēsia* not, as often claimed, to distinguish his groups from *synagōgē*, but rather to signify their identity as subgroups "meeting" specifically within the larger Jewish communities. The point was not to indicate a rival movement, but to bear witness to the proposition being upheld among them that these gatherings demonstrated that Christ had

¹¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 17.300-3; *J.W.* 2.80, says eight thousand Jews supported the delegation from Judea to Rome in 4 BCE; otherwise, there is little data from which to shape estimates; see also Philo, *Embassy* 155-58, about the Roman Jewish community in 41 CE. Recently much smaller estimates for both Rome overall and the Jewish population have been proposed; see Leonard V. Rutgers, "Reflections on the Demography of the Jewish Community of Ancient Rome," in *Les cités de l'Italie tardo-antique (IVe-VIe siècle)*, edited by Massimiliano Ghilardi, Christophe J. Goddard and Pierfrancesco Porena (Rome: École Française de Rome, 2006), 345-58.

¹² In general, non-Jews used *synagōgē* to refer to any kind of gathering together, including of animals or things, and was used specifically for gatherings of associations (Lat., *collegia*), and *ekklēsia* was used to refer to many different kinds of gatherings, most formally to indicate the assembling of the citizens of a city to cast votes.

begun the restoration of Israel and the reconciliation of the nations already in the midst of the present age, as promised in Scripture. It may have also been preferred for its suggestion of a gathering of equals regardless of hierarchical differences in normal society, for it was originally used by Greeks for the citizens of the city who all cast ballots of equal value. Be that as it may, interestingly, although perhaps of no intentional significance for Paul, in Romans he does not use the term *ekklēsia* to refer to the overall community but only to one specific "gathering" in the house of Prisca and Aquila (16:3-5); almost certainly there were other gatherings in other locations.

Paul addressed households where meetings took place, and households were also the likely venue for many meetings among Jews. Of the few synagogue buildings that are dated to Paul's time or before, there are none in Italy.¹³ Philo, who wrote just before Paul, referred to the *proseuchē* of Rome in which Jews met on the Sabbath (*Embassy* 156-57), although it is not clear whether he was using language common in his native Alexandria to communicate to fellow Alexandrians, who used *proseuchē* ("place of prayer," apparently originally temples in Egypt) to refer to buildings, but not necessarily by his contemporaries in Rome, since to date the inscriptions from Rome refer to *synagōgē* ("congregations" most likely, not "buildings") but not to *proseuchē*.¹⁴ There may have been some buildings in Rome, even large ones, and they may have been referred to as *proseuchē* or *synagōgē*, but there is no evidence of it. In any case,

¹³ The evidence from the synagogue at Ostia, a port for Rome, is under debate, and specialists today seldom date its origins to before the late first-century CE, and only with certainty to the second century CE. Anders Runesson, "The Synagogue at Ancient Ostia: The Building and its History From the First to the Fifth Century," in *The Synagogue of Ancient Ostia and the Jews of Rome: Interdisciplinary Studies*, edited by Birger Olsson, Dieter Mitternacht and Olof Brandt (Jonsered, Sweden: Paul Åströms Förlag, 2001), 29-99, on 81-82 explains why the synagogue likely dates to the mid- to late- first century CE at the earliest. L. Michael White, who is overseeing archaeological explorations at the synagogue in Ostia, explained in July 7, 2009 conversations at Ostia that he now dates the earliest level to late second cent. CE (his latest reports and interpretations are not yet published). For the opposite reading of the evidence, see Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

¹⁴ Juvenal, *Satires* 3.296, in the early second century CE, refers to *proseucha* as a Greek loanword in Latin, and there are other cases of non-Jewish references from the second century CE on; see Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 97-99, 127-28. On the origins of the *proseuchē* as temples, see Anders Runesson, *The Origins of the Synagogue: A Socio-historical Study* (Coniectanea biblica. New Testament Series, 37; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001), 436-54.

even if there were several public structures that could hold several hundred people for a meeting, there were likely hundreds more small meetings to facilitate reading and discussing Scripture, worship and prayer, celebrating Sabbaths and other holidays, and other mutual interests and causes as well as social life in general, whether supplementary to meetings in larger public buildings, or in lieu of their availability to some or much of the Jewish population. These gatherings would take place in adapted homes or apartments or workshops or even outdoors.

In addition, the Jewish community of Rome, as elsewhere, likely consisted of many different communities or subgroups. Some of these were probably very independent of others, largely unaware of if not intentionally distinct from each other for any number of reasons. These might include the distance between each other in this large city, differing viewpoints on the interpretation and practice of Torah, various views on the level of acculturation that was appropriate, different cultural and ethnic backgrounds, dissimilar economic standing, and so on. Philo might be expected to mention if there was an overarching governing body in Rome analogous to the one he describes in Alexandria (i.e., a *gerousia*; council of elders/senate/governing board), but he does not do so;¹⁵ thus most scholars hold that the Jews of Rome were organized more independently. Inscriptions found in the catacombs of Rome suggest at least eleven distinct synagogue communities by the third or fourth century CE; however, none of these synagogues have been dated as early as Paul's period, although recent carbon dating at one catacomb suggests it was in use already in the first century CE.¹⁶

Similarly, Romans 16 appears to indicate that there were already a number of small groups of Christ-followers, although only one household "gathering [*ekklēsia*]" is specifically noted (16:3-5). The total number of people addressed might have been as few as fifty based on

¹⁵ *Flaccus* 74; see also Josephus, *J.W.* 7.412.

¹⁶ Rutgers, "Dating the Jewish Catacombs of Ancient Rome," in *The Hidden Heritage*, 45-71. For recent carbon dating of the Villa Torlonia Catacomb to the first century, see Leonard V. Rutgers, Arie F. M. De Jong, and Klaas van der Borg, "Radiocarbon Dates from the Jewish Catacombs of Rome," *Radiocarbon* 44.2 (2002): 541-47. Note that some of the names suggest communities that can or might be traced back to people and places of Paul's time or before (e.g., of the Augustiales, of the Agrippeans), even if not the catacomb activity or any buildings that might have been associated with them. Communities adopt names for any number of reasons, including historical continuity with previous community developments that they may wish to remain salient to distinguish their present or future identity, or perhaps to align their identity with an historic patron.

Paul's greetings to less than thirty specific individuals. Even if there were several hundred, whether spread throughout the city in small gatherings with some level of independence, as many suggest, or not, they would easily fit within the larger (yet still overall minority) Jewish communities of Rome as subgroups. They may have still been largely unnoticed and probably not well understood, however different they might have begun to be on some topics and in some behavior. Their subgroup identity is suggested all the more if most or all of the members of the groups confessing Christ were composed of the non-elite, and thus likely dependent upon rather than independent of existing Jewish communal leadership, organizational legitimacy, tradition including adjudication of conflicts, meeting places, and access to other communal resources. In other words, when we think about the "churches" of Rome we can think in terms similar to those of the "synagogues" of Rome, as "house-churches" in keeping with "house-synagogues." That remains the case whether or not there were other more formal buildings in addition to such groups or subgroups meeting in spaces adapted as needed, and whether they were referred to as *synagogē* or *proseuchē*, since all of these terms were interchangeable until much later than Paul's letter.¹⁷ But this still does not tell us much about the relationships between the Christ-following subgroups and the larger Jewish communities of Rome.

The Jewish communities were treated by Romans in some exceptional ways since the time of Julius Caesar (based on Senate documents of 48 to 44 BCE; *Ant.* 14.190-212), which were granted in appreciation of Judean support for his military operations in Egypt in the first century BCE (*Ant.* 14.192-95; 16.52-53). Josephus explains that although Caesar issued an edict forbidding (religious/political activities by) "associations [*thiasous*]," that, nevertheless, "even in Rome" the Jews were not similarly banned, but were permitted "to live in accordance with their customs and to contribute money to common meals and sacred rites," "to assemble and feast in accordance with their native customs and ordinances" (*Ant.* 14.214-16; trans. Marcus, emphasis added; reiterated by Augustus, *Ant.* 16.162-65, 172). Suetonius corroborates that Caesar "dissolved all guilds (*collegia*), except those of ancient foundation" (*Julius* 42.3; trans. Rolfe; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 14.213-16; 18.83-84), although there is contrary evidence that many associations, not just Jewish ones, did meet throughout these periods as long as they did not

¹⁷ E.g., a second century CE inscription from Stobi, in Macedonia, tells of one who converted his home into a house synagogue, reserving the right to continue to live there with his family (*CII* I.694).

stir up trouble. Josephus also relates that these rights continued to be defended under Claudius when local disputes arose in Alexandria, Dora, and elsewhere, especially throughout Asia Minor and in Syria, and that these rights had "never been disputed" by the Romans (*Ant.* 19.280-311; see also a papyrus from Egypt confirming Claudius's continued support, *Claudius Pap. Lond.* 1912.73-105; *CPJ* II, no. 153, col. V, lines 86-88). Titus understood them to be still in effect during the Revolt, a few years after Romans was composed (*J.W.* 6.334; 7.106-10). When these rights were occasionally denied to them within various local communities, Jewish communities appealed to the reigning emperor for judgment according to this precedent (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.213-67; 16.160-78, 278-312; 19.304-6).¹⁸ Philo mentions that when grain distributions were scheduled in Rome on a day that Jews regarded to be a Sabbath, their proceeds were set apart until the next day (*Embassy* 158), which suggests a generally positive attitude on the part of Roman leadership toward Jews close to Paul's time, and likely that these Jews were citizens, since it was for citizens in particular that these distributions were apparently made.¹⁹

This distinctive treatment brings up a relevant topic for interpreting Romans, specifically, was the kind of anti-Jewishness that is observed by Roman authors after the Judean Revolt prevalent among Romans when Paul wrote this letter in the mid-50's? There is not space for adequate discussion of all of the factors, but it should be noted, and is hardly surprising, that there is a decisive negative shift after 70 CE, following the Revolt and Vespasian and Titus's victories and emperors. The Arch of Titus celebrating the triumphal march and the Coliseum/Flavian Amphitheater, built from the spoils of the war and by Jewish slave labor, bear witness to this campaign yet today; in addition, the traditional Temple Tax was turned into a Roman tax on Jews to finance restoration of the Temple of Jupiter, and the Temple of Peace in the Forum was built to house the booty.²⁰ In short, they appealed to this victory over the Judeans to exemplify and legitimate the beginnings of their new (Flavian) dynasty--with

¹⁸ See full discussion in Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights in the Roman World: The Greek and Roman Documents Quoted by Josephus Flavius* (TSAJ 74; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

¹⁹ Pucci Ben Zeev, *Jewish Rights*, 454-55.

²⁰ See Josephus, *J.W.* 7.116-72, on triumphal march; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.218 and Dio Cassius, *Rom. Hist.* 66.7.2; Martial, *Epig.* 7.55, on the Temple Tax; Josephus, *J.W.* 7.158-62; Seutonius, *Vesp.* 9.1; Pliny, *Nat.* 36.27, on the Temple of Peace.

unavoidable implications for Jews in general.²¹ Even if the Jews of Rome and elsewhere throughout the empire were not directly involved in the Judean Revolt, it is not unusual for such distinctions to be blurred in times of political crisis involving an ethno-religious group's identity, especially when it suits the interests of certain parties (cf. Josephus, *J.W.* 5.2; 7.420).²²

It is important to keep in view, however, that the Revolt is later than Paul's letter to the Romans, and Jews were still in general regarded positively, held in high regard as good citizens who exemplified high ideals, for example, representing the opposite of hypocrisy,²³ even if upholding some ideas and practices that were considered strange, if not also judgmental.²⁴ This general respect toward Jews and Judaism, albeit mixed with some ambivalence, has not been often factored into interpretations of Romans.

An important aspect of these rights to observe the ancient Jewish traditions was the ability to express honors "on behalf of" Caesar and "to God" for Caesar, rather than "to" other gods or Caesar, and to avoid other similar problems for Jews presented by civic (Roman and local) cult behavior, including elements of imperial cult. Although Jewish communities arrived

²¹ Martin Goodman, *Rome and Jerusalem: The Clash of Ancient Civilizations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 366-76, 428-77.

²² Consider, e.g., some today who fail to distinguish clearly between Islamic nations or so-called "insurgents/terrorists" and Muslim people, whether members of those nations or other non-Islamic nations, and regardless of how vehemently these Muslims might be opposed to such people and policies.

²³ Implied in Romans 2:17--3:3, where Paul's argument turns on enumerating the kinds of obvious sins that would be known by non-Jews to be categorically judged as sins by Jews. Note that Paul's language here mirrors the Stoic-Cynic Epictetus's similar appeal to the central values of Stoics that would be obviously subverted by anyone who would merely call themselves a philosopher without understanding the central values that identification entails according to Stoic ideals, and he also notes specifically as an example that it is not enough to be called a Jew if one does not behave like a Jew (*Diss.* 2.19.19-21; 3.24.40-43, 50-51). Both of these provide examples of Jews (and Stoics) stereotypically being known for maintaining their commitments to high ideals and denouncing hypocrisy. See also the biblical tradition from which Paul likely draws: Deut 4; 7:6-11; Isa 52:7-10; 61--63; 66:19.

²⁴ Once again, *mutatis mutandis*, consider the range of American views of the Amish, who are exempt from the draft for their religious sensibilities and generally respected as peaceful people, yet at the same time perhaps regarded as odd for some of their customs about motorized vehicles, buttons but not zippers, etc. In times of war, if an Amish neighbor's child was killed in military action, it may well be that the Amish, whose child was not exposed to this danger and yet benefits from the protection of the military, are viewed with some resentment. Treatment that deviates from the norm elicits a variety of reactions.

at ways to make peace with Roman cultural imperatives, even to the extent of dedications to Roman rulers in meeting places,²⁵ which some Jews would regard as complicity beyond acceptable boundaries, certain cultural values could not be compromised, even when masked by cooperation: e.g., for Jews, there was but one God, and there could be no representations of God--or anyone claiming to be a god or son of a god--made or displayed. One important way that accommodation of Roman sensibilities was apparently achieved during Paul's time was through offerings gathered by Jews throughout the Roman world, or perhaps paid out of or supplemented by provincial taxes, that were sent to the Jerusalem Temple to pay for twice a day burnt offerings made by the Jewish people "on behalf of Caesar."²⁶

It is easy to see the attractiveness of joining Jewish subgroups for non-Jews who turned from the worship of other gods to the worship of the God of Israel in Christ. However, apart from "full" identification with the Jewish community by becoming Jews themselves through proselyte conversion, their ostensible "atheism" for not worshipping the Roman gods as well as not having any image of their own, and even traitorous refusal to continue participating in familial and civic cult without being included in the Jewish community's various ways of demonstrating loyalty, would be inscrutable if not dangerous (cf. Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.4-5; Juvenal, *Sat.* 14.96-106). That case arose later in the second century CE when the Romans began to identify Christians as something other than Jews and to develop policies of discipline for neglect of proper behavior for Roman subjects who were not Jews (cf. the correspondence between Pliny the Younger and the emperor Trajan in c. 110-12 CE indicates not only the problem that developed, but the very uncertainty leading to the discussion indicates how much it represents a new development: *Letter* 10.96.1-10; 10:97.98-117). But there is no similar evidence that Roman authorities knew about "Christians" as a separate socio-religious group independent of Jewish communal life during the time Paul wrote to Rome.

The earliest mention of "*christiani*" arises in accounts of them being blamed by Nero for the fire of 64 CE, language which probably indicates a subgroup identity within the Jewish community that was vaguely understood by non-Jewish Roman authorities rather than an independent religious association ("a 'superstition' of Jewish origin").²⁷ It was reported by later

²⁵ Cf. Philo, *Embassy* 133-34; *Against Flaccus* 48-49.

²⁶ Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.77078, 196-97; *J.W.* 2.197, 409; Philo, *Embassy.* 156-57, 232, 317, 356; Cicero, *Flac.* 66-69.

²⁷ Stephen Benko, *Pagan Rome and the Early Christians* (London: Batsford, 1985), 16, 20.

historians who were not present to know what Nero actually understood about these groups, versus what they had come to know in the forty or more years since, whether by personal contact or from other sources (Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44.2-8; Suetonius, *Nero* 16). If Christ-following non-Jews were already neglecting familial and civic cult apart from affiliation with the Jewish communities of Rome, it seems highly unlikely that they were not known about immediately as a threat to the welfare of Rome, as well as to the interests of the Jewish communities and their relations with Roman authorities. The Jewish community's own rights to refrain from civic cult would be brought into question for not bringing any non-Jews into compliance with communal norms. I propose that the language in Romans suggests the beginnings of just such tensions within the Jewish communities regarding the non-Jews in these subgroups, but also that it implies that no hard break between the larger Jewish community and these subgroups had been already made. Paul sought to address intra-Jewish communal developments.²⁸

In the past forty years or so, the traditional interpretations of Romans have developed a new historical construct that supposedly explains how it came to be that the Christ-followers Paul addressed in the mid- to late-50's CE were (presumably) already meeting separately from the Jewish communities of Rome. This was the natural result of an expulsion of the Jews from Rome during the reign of Claudius (usually dated to 49 CE, although some date this to 41 CE).²⁹ According to the construct, this expulsion was supposedly precipitated by conflicts between Christ-followers and the larger Jewish community.

²⁸ I propose that Rom 13:1-5 is calling for subordination to the synagogue authorities (rather than Roman authorities) and payment of the Temple tax by these non-Jews in just such an effort to demonstrate their commitment to the Jewish communities, albeit apart from becoming proselytes (*Mystery of Romans*, 289-336). This fluid situation is also implied by the end of Acts, wherein the Roman Jewish community is represented, several years after Paul would have written Romans, to welcome Paul and tell him that its leaders do not know much about the Christ-following groups, although they have heard some rumors against them from elsewhere (28:16-22). That is extremely unlikely to be true if the edict of Claudius constructs are correct (discussion below). At the same time, if Luke's account is accepted to represent the historical case, this might suggest that Paul's effort in the letter to forestall any troublemaking in Rome had been successful.

²⁹ Wolfgang Wiefel, "The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity," in *The Romans Debate*, edited by Karl P. Donfried, Rev. ed. (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991 (German original, 1970), 85-101. This construct is variously developed in James C. Walters, *Ethnic Issues in Paul's Letter to the Romans: Changing Self-definitions in Earliest Roman Christianity* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1993); A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 149-202.

This construct is based upon a reading of two early second century CE accounts. Suetonius briefly mentions a conflict regarding someone named *Chrestus* (Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4), which led to an expulsion of the Jews for turbulence within their communities (disturbing the *Pax* or "peace" so central to Roman imperial rule), and in Acts 18:2, Luke notes that Aquila and Priscilla were expelled from Rome along with "all" the Jews. The conclusion is then drawn that since the Jews were forced to leave Rome under Claudius, the only (or, at least, most of the) Christ-followers who remained were non-Jews. Even if some Jews remained, the Christ-following communities were no longer a part of the Jewish community, by choice or default, being responsible for such a cataclysmic disruption of life for, if not the expulsion of, some estimated 20,000 to 50,000 Jewish people.

It is maintained that the Christ-followers who remained developed their own identity as "Christians," however labeled, and their ethos in the natural direction of "gentile" in contrast to "jewish" values to define communal life. Thus, a few years later, when Jews began to return under Nero (beginning in 54 CE, based on the assumption that upon his death Claudius's policy was allowed to terminate, although there is no evidence that Nero reversed any such exile of Rome's Jews as a policy decision), those who were Christ-followers, including those who were formerly in leadership roles within the Christ-following subgroups of the Jewish community, were not being welcomed back without reservations. Rather, they were being greeted, if at all, with the proposition that they needed to adopt a more "strengthened" (i.e., non-Judaism based) approach to Christian values, such as Paul is generally imagined to have upheld, e.g., in Romans 14. This new lifestyle revolved around rejection of the Torah-defined ways of life that distinguished Jews from non-Jews, such as circumcision, Sabbath and other calendrical observances, kosher dietary customs, and so on.

There are many reasons to be suspicious of this construction: the sources are unclear and conflict with each other, and it is doubtful that Paul would have approached that level of ethnicity-based discrimination already being expressed in communal policies legitimated in the name of Christ or Christ-following leaders (all the more if they have appealed to Paul as if that was what he upheld) with the arguments we meet in Romans.³⁰ Let us examine a few details.

³⁰ For a more detailed discussion, including support for this skepticism among Roman scholars, see my "Some Problems with Reading Romans through the Lens of the Edict of Claudius," in *Mystery of Romans*, 372-87; more

First, it is highly unlikely that all or even much of the Jewish community was expelled from Rome by Claudius. Suetonius's report can be understood to indicate an expulsion pertaining only to those Jews who were involved in a disturbance, in direct conflict with the statement in Acts 18:3 that all the Jews were expelled. That neither Jewish authors such as Josephus and Philo, nor Roman historians such as Tacitus reported the event suggests there was at most a limited action. This fact is all the more suggestive when it is noted that citizens, which at least a number of Jews in Rome were, could not be expelled without due process, and either way, if expelled, it would have constituted significant news to report. Indeed, it would have supported Tacitus's negative description to note that even when citizens, Jews and converts were a threat to Roman political order (*Hist.* 5.4-5). Moreover, Dio Cassius writes specifically that Claudius did not expel the Jews of Rome but only restricted their meetings, and the rationale he supplies is that there were too many Jews to do so without creating a crisis (*Rom. Hist.* 60.6.6-7). If perhaps Dio was referring to a different incident in the reign of Claudius, as some suggest, then he skipped over this cataclysmic incident when Jews were expelled--making the construct all the more suspect. That the author of Acts can also observe that the Jewish leaders in Rome have little first-hand knowledge of the Christ-followers but understand this to be a sect of Judaism that is spoken against elsewhere (28:17-22) suggests that, although he also mentions the wholesale expulsion, Luke does not link this to a disturbance over Christ or with Christ-followers--and in fact, he does not state why the Jews had been expelled, including Aquila and Priscilla (18:1-4). The author of Acts may well know that it had nothing to do with disturbances having to do with the topic of Christ, whatever his source, which seems to have exaggerated the extent of any such edict, perhaps misconstruing rumors of some calculated imperial posturing involving only a limited action for much more extensive action than likely occurred. Luke's notice simply accounts for why Aquila and Priscilla, who are not explicitly identified as already Christ-followers, were in Corinth when Paul met these fellow Jews and leather workers. The reason he provides for Paul moving in with them is interestingly not because they were already fellow Christ-followers, but because they

recently, see Bruce N. Fisk, "Synagogue Influence and Scriptural Knowledge among the Christians of Rome," in *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 157-85, esp. 160-71.

shared the same occupation: "because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them" (18:3 NRSV).

Second, it is unlikely that the expulsion mentioned was precipitated by disputes about Jesus Christ. Suetonius elsewhere discusses the *christiani* under Nero rather than the *chrestiani* (Nero 16.2), following Tacitus, who already knew of the *christiani*. Apart from manuscript corruption, which is possible but presently untraceable in this case, this spelling suggests that Suetonius knew the difference, that he did not make a mistake and was not under the impression that the expulsion under Claudius, however broad, had anything to do with Christ or Christ-followers, but someone in Rome named *Chrestus*, a name he could expect someone in Rome to possess.³¹

Third, it is curious to suppose that Romans would have expelled Jews, perhaps citizens, at least those with longstanding traditions which were generally respected, but not also expelled the non-Jews meeting in their midst, perhaps many not citizens, even slaves, who could not similarly appeal to previous latitude based on observing ancient traditions. Would they be left in Rome to carry on meetings involving the name Christ if already groups associated with that name had provoked sufficient disturbances of the peace to have led to the expulsion of the Jewish community in the first place?

Fourth, most importantly, Paul's approach to the non-Jews in Romans is not what one might expect if they were in fact in positions of power and using that power to exclude or discriminate against Jewish Christ-following brothers and sisters within their small groups. If they appealed to the teaching of Paul or other leaders of this movement to legitimate such behavior, as was apparently the case for some disputes in Corinth, we could expect Paul to much more directly challenge these teachings and teachers, and to dispute that this was in any way what he upheld (cf. 1 Cor 1:10--6:20). We might also expect that instead of extending simple greetings to the at least five Jews mentioned in chapter 16, and acknowledging their positions of authority in the community (two holding meetings in their house, which suggests a problem with the construction, and two others are apostles), that some kind of direct instruction to receive and respect them would be highlighted.

³¹ Suetonius also appears to be unaware that this supposed *Christus* was not actually in Rome at the time of Claudius, if that was to whom he meant to refer.

Although a relatively new twist on this historical data, more than a few recent interpreters matter-of-factly relay this construction in their introductions to Romans, yet as can be readily demonstrated, the data is not sufficient to provide a reliable foundation to build upon. Someone coming upon this construct who did not think it supported an interpretation of Romans already held, and certainly if one thought the letter indicated a different kind of social context, would, upon examining the evidence, not likely be impressed that it constituted a useful or reliable historical measure by which to limit the options for exploring the context for or meaning of Paul's message.

The Rhetorical Implications from the Letter

In the formal opening of the letter, Paul introduces himself in language that would make little sense to a Greco-Roman person apart from learning the story of Christ within the context of the Jewish communal narrative, one that can be developed from Jewish Scriptures but not elsewhere.³² He not only cites Jewish Scriptures, which he will continue to do in the letter more than any other extant letter, some fifty-plus times, but he alludes to these Scriptures many more times--apparently assuming that the recipients would be competent to follow his line of thought. Yet copies of these Jewish texts, at this time written on scrolls that were expensive to acquire and apparently not well known outside of Jewish communities, would presumably not be readily available. Moreover, most of his audience would probably only know the letter when read aloud, since most people of Paul's time, some eighty to ninety percent being the normal estimates, could not read. How then would they know the Scriptures upon which his arguments were based--apart from being socialized into Jewish communal life and its symbolic system for making sense of reality, or for that matter, of spirituality?

If these non-Jews attended Jewish communal meetings, they would hear the Scriptures read, translated, and interpreted in sermons, a regular, weekly event based on cycling through the Pentateuch and texts linked to it from the Prophets and other Writings.³³ Or are we to

³² Similarly, see Fisk, "Synagogue Influence and Scriptural Knowledge," 157-60, 177-80.

³³ Cf. Philo, *Hypoth.* 7.12-13; Josephus, *Ant.* 16.43; *Ag. Ap.* 2.175; *J.W.* 2.291; Luke 4:16-22; Acts 13:14-15; 15:21. Exactly how close these readings were to later Haftarah practices (wherein liturgical readings combine passages from the Pentateuch with those from the Prophets and Writings) is a matter of debate, with the implications of the dating of the Targum (Aramaic) translations and elaborations a significant factor. But these texts suggest that similar

suppose that those raised on Greek and Roman stories but not those of the Bible were meeting in households independent of Jewish communal affiliation, each of these households already in possession of these expensive scrolls (or had attendees who already knew them well enough from earlier exposure that they could now recite and explain them), in addition to having competent readers and the educational programs required to bring each member up to a level that Paul seemingly expected for them to be able to understand his Scripture-based arguments and trust the authority of these texts for guidance, on which his appeal to them is based? Alternatively, are we to suppose that Paul's appeals to Scripture simply overshot the likely familiarity and competence of his recipients, playing on their respect for the authority of this source as a persuasive advantage he held over them?³⁴

Although we cannot be certain of the historical audience's relationship to the larger Jewish community from the fact that many of his arguments require at least some familiarity with the Jewish community's master narratives, Paul's audience is approached throughout the letter as if familiar with many concepts that would be foreign to non-Jews. In the first sentence, the significance of the lineage of David is made central, that is, the idea that a king (i.e., messianic leader) as promised in Scripture was now on the throne of Israel although his descendents had been living under occupying empires for some six hundred plus years, and now lived under Roman rule. The one whom Paul claims to fill that role is presented to have been killed by crucifixion, which was reserved for slaves and feared terrorists, and carried out by the regime of Caesar, the one ruling the world from their home city, Rome. Roman readers would likely immediately recognize that Paul's argument begins with a challenge to the claims of the Roman empire; but how deeply would they resonate with the complexity of this tradition apart from familiarity with Jewish communal interpretations and ways of negotiating the paradoxes such aspirations created in daily socio-politico-religious life?

practices, however different they may be, such as they are in the Palestinian and Babylonian rabbinic cycles, were already a common and probably central feature of synagogue meetings.

³⁴ As proposed by Christopher D. Stanley, "Paul's 'Use' of Scripture: Why the Audience Matters," in *As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Christopher D. Stanley (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 125-55. This aspect of Stanley's argument is challenged in the same volume by Kathy Ehrensperger, "Paul and the Authority of Scripture: A Feminist Approach," 291-319.

There is not space to discuss many similar topics in the letter that seem to suggest a Jewish communal context, since for many interpreters they simply suggest some familiarity with Jewish Scriptures, as indeed did come to be the case in Christianity. Such topics are found throughout the letter, similar to the example of messianic claims for Jesus in his opening sentence. There are several features in chapter 11, which discusses the topic of those Israelites/Jews who do not share Paul and his target audience's convictions about Jesus, that support a strong case for intimate interaction, as well as the improbability of the kind of break that is central to the edict of Claudius constructions of the situation in Rome. Let us take a closer look at this particular chapter.

The Implied Jewish Communal Context of the Non-Jews Addressed in Chapter 11

The identity of the Christ-followers Paul addressed is a critical factor in determining how to approach the implications of his comments. It is now widely recognized that regardless of the actual make-up of the audience in Rome, it is important to hypothesize (or risk unexamined assumptions about) the make-up of the audience Paul imagined he would influence. Even more specifically, the debate now centers on identifying whom he targeted with his various comments, perhaps even different ones at different points in different arguments. These specific people or subgroups are referred to variously as the author's "target" or "implied" or "encoded" or even "rhetorical" audience--that is, the ones whom the author seeks to persuade directly when the letter is read. For when an author is engaged in seeking to influence, it is possible that the construal of the audience that arises in the correspondence is already shaped in ways that the author wishes for them to conceptualize themselves and their circumstances, as well as the best way for them to think about proceeding after reading the correspondence. This "rhetorical" dynamic can mislead the later reader who does not know the actual make-up of the original historical audience, author, and situation, including exactly in what ways the author sought to influence that audience, and how the author chose to address them, or intentionally refrained from doing so. It is also possible for the author to target different specific constituents among the audience imagined to receive the text, and to do so disproportionately, either by ignoring certain other groups among the recipients, or addressing them and their concerns less or indirectly, even implicitly

addressing their concerns surreptitiously by addressing everyone but them--for any number of reasons.

Throughout the letter there are indications that Paul's target audience--the ones to whom he directs his attention specifically in spite of how many Jewish Christ-followers might be among them--that there are at least some is indicated by those described as his Jewish compatriots directly in chapter 16--are non-Jews. They are identified as those from among "the nations" (*ta ethnē*) to whom Paul is specifically called to proclaim the message of Christ (e.g., 1:5-6, 13; 11:13-32; 15:15-16). Furthermore, in the midst of Paul's arguments, these non-Jews are often differentiated from "them," Jews about whom Paul writes, and in many cases "they" are Jews who are not Christ-followers (e.g., 3:1-3; 9:1-5; 10:1-2; 11:1, 11-32; 15:25-32). Although there is controversy about whether Paul was always targeting non-Jews throughout the letter, in 11:13 he makes explicit that he is targeting non-Jews, members from the nations other than Israel ("now I am speaking to you Gentiles"; NRSV), and this remains the case throughout this chapter, even in the way that his allegories are constructed.

Chapter 11 represents the culmination of the arguments Paul began in chapter 1, followed by the "therefore" of 12:1, which initiates a transition to the instructions that occupy the rest of the letter. Of special interest is the social context of the non-Jews that Paul's language addresses. Paul seeks to explain to non-Jewish Christ-followers the present anomalous situation in which many Jews (members of the nation Israel) are not persuaded about the meaning of Jesus at the same time that a number of members of the other nations, such as his addressees, are persuaded, even though the Scriptures, as Paul understands them, uphold the covenant promise that "all Israel will be restored," "removing godlessness from Jacob" (i.e., Israel), and "taking away their sins" (11:26-27).

Throughout the argument Paul instructs these non-Jews to resist any temptation to grow arrogant or suppose that they have now replaced those Israelites "stumbling," that is, those Jews not joining Paul as heralds responsible to proclaim the message of Christ to the nations. These non-Jews are not to be concerned only about their own success. Rather, they are to humbly recognize the generosity (grace/favor/benefaction) of God toward themselves, and in reciprocity, to think and to live generously toward those who are temporarily suffering this fate, which is somehow, mysteriously, tied up with how God is bringing about the promised restoration of these members of Israel. Nevertheless, those Jews remain in the

covenant relationship, albeit in some kind of disciplinary state. He seeks to clarify that however inscrutable the plan may be, it involves some Israelites now requiring God's mercy for their present failure to be persuaded to proclaim Christ to the nations alongside Paul in a way similar to the mercy that was extended to these former idolaters from the other nations for their failure to be persuaded about the One Creator God--now, although for different reasons, all are joined in equal need of God's mercy (vv. 25-32).

In making his case, Paul develops an allegory in which the non-Jewish audience is analogized with one shoot cut off of a wild olive tree and grafted among the many branches natural to a cultivated olive tree, which are analogized with members of Israel (vv. 17-24). Some of these natural branches are partially broken, analogous to those described as stumbling in an earlier metaphor of vv. 11-15, while others are in good health, or still running the course as heralds declaring the news of good (gospel) to the nations, the remnant, among whom Paul counts himself (vv. 1-10), which preserves the interests of all the branches in the tree.³⁵ By way of the olive tree allegory, Paul makes plain that God will not tolerate arrogant attitudes or behavior toward those branches suffering some kind of temporary state of harm, which are being cloaked in a divine "callus [*pōrōsis*]" to keep them, and the overall tree protected until they are prepared to produce fruit.³⁶ In other words, they are being divinely preserved until the arrival of the promised time for Israel's restoration and the inclusion of the nations as the fruit of God's plan for restoring all of the world.

Paul's language is directed toward a social situation based on the supposition that these non-Jews are involved in personal contact with Jews who do not share their views about Jesus, but whom Paul believes will, in due time. At the same time, it is important that these non-Jews avoid behaving in arrogant ways that might turn these Jews away from considering this proposition. Moreover, if that should occur, it is these non-Jews whom God will punish severely; in metaphorical terms, they will be cut off from the tree, to which they were not

³⁵ See Mark D. Nanos, "'Broken Branches': A Pauline Metaphor Gone Awry? (Romans 11:11-36)," in *Between Gospel and Election: Explorations in the Interpretation of Romans 9--11*, edited by Florian Wilk and J. Ross Wagner (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 339-76.

³⁶ See Mark D. Nanos, "'Callused,' Not 'Hardened': Paul's Revelation of Temporary Protection Until All Israel Can Be Healed," in *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation*, edited by Kathy Ehrensperger and J. Brian Tucker (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 52-73.

natural in the first place. It is also notable that the image in the allegory of one wild shoot among many natural branches is suggestive of a social situation in which the non-Jews are symbolized as the minority group among a much larger and more diverse body of Jews, not the majority or separated socially from the Jews whom they might negatively affect--although we must be careful not to make too much out of allegorical elements. In any case, the social connections implied in spelling out the role of these non-Jews in the divine plan for the restoration of these Israelites, and the price to be paid for failing to perform their part, are palpable. Actually, Paul makes them plain just before beginning this allegory.

Paul introduces the idea in vv. 11-12 that some Israelites were suffering a temporary setback in their divine role as the messengers of God enlisted to bring God's words to the nations. That has been to the immediate benefit of these non-Jews, but ultimately, Paul argues, their best interests will actually be served when these Israelites are restored to carrying out their special task. In this earlier metaphor of messengers running but some temporarily tripping (which Paul draws on both before and after the tree allegory, actually, at various places throughout the letter), they are characterized as "stumbling," but forcefully declared "not fallen!" These non-Jews are instructed not to think in zero sum terms, as if their own success is best gained by these Jews remaining unconvinced about taking the gospel message to the nations. In v. 12 and again in v. 15, Paul makes the comparative point that the return of those Jews will be exponentially more advantageous for these non-Jews than has been to date the obvious gain deriving from their temporary misstep: "what will their [these Jews] acceptance [of this task] be but life from the dead!" (v. 15; NRSV, bracketed comments added). Even if the stumbling of some has resulted in temporary benefit, Paul declares that these non-Jews' own aspirations will actually only be realized following the restoration of these Jews to their role as heralds of the gospel.

In vv. 13-14 Paul tells these non-Jews, in terms that seem calculated to insult, that even his efforts toward themselves were first of all developed around his commitment to the ultimate restoration of those fellow Israelites. In other words, these non-Jews' interests are not even the ultimate goal of Paul's ministry! Rather, his work among them is a means to accomplish another end: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle

to the Gentiles, I glorify my ministry in order to make my own people jealous, and thus save some of them" (NRSV).³⁷

Note that it is not jealousy of these non-Jews that Paul promotes, as if he might expect these Jews to understand the non-Jews to be replacing them, as usually interpreted. That would have hardly made sense to any Jews who rejected this message as mistaken, since they would not then have seen themselves as missing out or supposed that these non-Jews have gained something worth gaining; rather, they have decided already for themselves that this was not the case. Moreover, Paul seeks to make his fellow Jews "jealous," and specifically, jealous "of his ministry," that is, of Paul's successful work among these non-Jews. Jealousy bespeaks the desire to "emulate" (Gr.: *zealous*; to want to gain for oneself), not to deny to the other per se; it is very different from wanting to provoke "envy" (Gr.: *phthonos*), a begrudging reaction to the good gained by another.³⁸

Paul wants to make his fellow Jews join him in declaring the good news among the non-Jewish nations when they see the successful results of his ministry. He imagines that the Jews who witness this will recognize that Paul's success represents their own promised destiny, the hope of Israel, so that they will then conclude that they are not "yet" participating with him in this special, covenant privilege, because they have not shared his conviction that the age to come, when this would be expected to take place, has begun with Christ. It is Israel's special calling to be the ones who declare God's words to the world (cf. 3:1-2!), at least when the day arrives to initiate this special task. Paul believes that day has dawned with the resurrection of

³⁷ The case can be strengthened by alternative translation, but it is not necessary in order to make the point: "But I am speaking to you members of the nations: inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the nations, I think (about how to carry out) my ministry, if somehow I may make my flesh (i.e., fellow Israelites) jealous of me, and restore some of them."

³⁸ These two emotions are often conflated in English, but in Greek they are treated differently, with even God being described as jealous but not envious. Jealousy is a positive desire to have something, for example, provoked by seeing someone else's excellence or success and thus wanting to emulate them or it (it can be negative, if wanting it only for oneself involves denying it to another who is similarly entitled to have it); whereas envy is begrudging the other the good that the other gains, as if it somehow necessarily involved one's own failure to gain or hold on to the desired good (zero sum thinking, there is only so much to go around, and if someone else wins, someone must lose, so one wants to make sure it is not oneself).

Christ and calling of himself and others to be "sent" (i.e., apostles) to the nations with this news, followed then by the full light of that day.

Thus, in Paul's way of thinking, when he gains a positive response to the message of good he declares among non-Jewish nations, that will be a signal to his fellow Jews who witness the event and the subsequent turning of these non-Jews from idolatry to the one God, from lives of depravity to righteousness, that a new, promised stage has arrived. To account for this transformation among the nations they will then reconsider the time, now able to recognize that the awaited day has indeed begun among these subgroups composed of Jews and non-Jews celebrating Christ. Israel must be in the stage of being restored (i.e., "saved," in common theological terms), and made ready to announce this news, but some of them have not been included, by their own (mistaken) choice. Rather than envy, that is, begrudging Paul or his audiences claims of gaining good by way of God's benevolence, they will judge this behavior legitimate (i.e., "justified," "*right-eous*," in common theological terms) and want to be a part of this awaited fulfillment of Israel's covenant expectations (i.e., "to evangelize"); in Paul's terms, they will join him in trusting that God has raised Jesus from the dead, and announce the dawning of the age to come that this act of God has initiated.

Paul's relating of his motivation and plan for success among the non-Jewish nations reveals much, but what does it suggest about the state of the social situation in Rome? Consider that if a cataclysmic separation of the Christ-followers into separate meetings, indeed, into rival and specifically non-Jewish-oriented organizations, values, and meetings, has already developed, such as the traditional and edict-of-Claudius constructions for the context for Romans contend--then Paul's hopes for the positive reaction of Jews to his ministry among the nations would seem to be misguided, to say the least. How could he suppose that they will assess his mission in self-authenticating terms? Would not any Jews who would learn of his mission consider this activity to be independent of Jewish communal aspirations or interests, dangerous, and all the more so if claiming to represent Jewish rather than some new Greco-Roman movement, which could perhaps be dismissed as irrelevant? Could such activity result in reconsideration in the positive manner that Paul seems to anticipate and desire?

If the communal life of Christ-followers took place in groups that were no longer operating within the larger Jewish community--all the more so if they were by definition formed in rivalry to the Jewish communities and their gatherings, or caused sufficient trouble

to lead to the expulsion of some, or many, or all of the Jews from Rome--Paul could not reasonably suppose that they would now learn about these later developments in such terms, or assess them positively. Jews who had already dismissed the claims of these groups would probably not only remain unaware of such non-Jewish communal activity, at least be no more aware of it than any other non-Jewish cult formed around their various gods and rites, but they would be expected to regard any such news that reached them--rumors, most likely by then--with indifference if not hostility. But Paul does not think that will be the outcome, and he glories instead in imagining how his ministry among the non-Jews will provide the positive catalyst for his fellow Jews to reconsider his message, moreover, to want to emulate his ministry.

I approach Paul's texts with the assumption that he was able to reason well, regardless of whether I agree with his conclusions, and in spite of the fact that it seems things did not turn out as he hoped that they would. Nevertheless, it takes real, intimate contact within the community of those who practice Judaism for Paul to expect that his readers will understand his meaning and identify their own interests and experiences with these aspirations, as well as to suppose that his fellow Jews will react in the manner he describes. I do not understand (do you?) how Paul could imagine this scenario, or expect his audience to do so, apart from continued identity within the Jewish communities as subgroups, as those who understand themselves to be models of the practice of Judaism, albeit as non-Jews. That conclusion is in keeping with how Paul interprets the significance of incorporating non-Jews within these Jewish subgroups as equal members of God's people although they do not become Jews/members of Israel, but rather represent those from the other nations who join alongside of Jews/Israelites. For Paul, this communal gathering thereby exemplifies the arrival of the end of the ages, when, according to Scripture, the wolf will graze with, rather than devour, the lamb (Isa 65:25).