§ 1 Preamble

… It may be useful to preface our detailed reconstrual (i.e., in DOG, part four\(^1\)) with a reframing discussion, that is, with an analysis of the circumstances that could have surrounded the composition and original reception of Romans 1–4. While not a decisive argument in its own right—because it only addresses the frame and not the text—such a discussion can open up new interpretative spaces (perhaps while simultaneously curtailing familiar but unreliable zones of hermeneutical operation); the imagination of the rereader might be liberated in certain respects. And such an explanation is, in any case, an important component of any broader historical-critical reading.\(^2\) But any discussion of the

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2. This aspect of the text’s explanation was introduced in DOG, part two, chapter seven in relation to the need for explanations at a text’s circumstantial frame (see § 2.4). It is most economically analyzed in terms of J. Christiaan Beker’s framework of contingency versus
circumstances surrounding the production of Romans 1–4 faces some peculiar difficulties of its own that will have to be navigated successfully before a framing explanation can make a useful contribution to our broader argument. Indeed, these are notoriously treacherous interpretative waters.

The difficulty apparent at this point was signaled as early on as the introduction. A complex and unresolved debate exists over just why Paul composed Romans—“the Romans debate.” Scholars have not agreed on a plausible explanation of why Paul composed Romans as he did and then dispatched this letter to Rome (and in the past this may have assisted the conventional construal of Romans 1–4 in certain respects). It should be possible, coherence—the occasional or particular dimension of a text versus the abiding and normative: cf. esp. *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (paperback edn with new intro.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984 [1980]), xiii-xx, 11-6, 23-36.


4 The conventional construal often proceeds in terms of straight coherence, which is unparalleled in Paul’s extant texts. (It reads Roman 1–4 as a direct account of Paul’s gospel; no circumstances at Rome are directly in view—see § 3 option 6 below.) However, the strangeness of this approach is partly obscured by the lack of consensus over Romans’ contingency. In strictly argumentative terms, the lack of a particular explanation of Romans’ contingency is not probative for a claim that Romans can simply be read coherently—but in psychological terms it is probably
nevertheless, to introduce some clarifications to this debate that will allow us to go on to grasp a single explanation of Romans’ provenance and then to reframe the following detailed exegetical deliberations in *DOG*, chapters fourteen through nineteen from an illuminating perspective, even if not all the tangles in the debate have thereby been resolved. These all-important clarifications will begin with a new consideration of the relevant data; any plausible explanation of Romans must account for sixteen different features of the data, satisfying any further issues that arise in the process—so § 2. Following this, we will discuss through § 3 the many explanations of that data that fail, isolating during the process some key interpretative dynamics. (There are ten main alternatives at this point.) In § 4 we will turn to the one theory that does seem to be able to encompass the data without difficulty. We will also briefly consider some objections that might immediately be made to this theory, suggesting that—while such concerns are understandable—none actually derails our developing analysis. And with this entire discussion complete we will be able to approach the text of Romans 1–4 in *DOG*, chapter fourteen from a new interpretative angle—as a complex, carefully crafted debate with a powerful opposing position within which Paul competes for the assent and loyalties of the diverse Roman Christians.

useful. It is difficult to challenge the conventional reading’s lack of contingency without a demonstrably plausible explanation of Romans’ contingency to hand.
§ 2 The data

Any explanation of the original production of Romans must be able to account for all the data in that letter—its nature, structure, and so on. We seek to know why Paul wrote what he actually did (which is of course the point of this sort of explanation). And Romans is quite peculiar in this regard. Some classic remarks by Kümmel provide a useful point of entry into this data: “Romans bears a double character: It is basically a dialogue of the Pauline gospel with Judaism…. And yet the Epistle contains expressions which definitely characterize the congregation as Gentile Christian.” In fact, we may speak more accurately of a double double character. The dialogue with Judaism noted by Kümmel is a

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5 The other questions that are usually involved with the broad issue of provenance are not generally in dispute for Romans—who wrote it, when, from where, and to where. It is largely undisputed that Paul wrote Romans to the Roman Christians from Corinth at the end of his missionary work in the Aegean (this can be dated slightly differently, but variations here will not affect our discussion), assisted by the scribe Tertius (16:22). Questions concerning the letter’s integrity generally tend to be settled conservatively as well (as we have seen in part in DOG, chapter twelve; and see more on this below in relation to key subsections like 16:17-20).

6 Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1970), 218. Kümmel goes on to reason that “the announcement of his visit, the explanation of his intentions, and the wooing of understanding and help from the Christians in Rome in respect to the goal of his mission, which he is pursuing, explain only the external occasion and the immediate purpose of the Epistle. The broad, theological discussion and the controversy with the Jews which permeates the book must have other, more deeply lying foundations” (220). But this is of course, in a certain sense, exactly the wrong way to approach the entire problem. J. F. Fitzmyer is also especially sensitive to this data: cf. *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1993), 69-73.
slightly tendentious characterization of the letter body (1:16–15:13),7 which consists of a series of discussions, at a fairly abstract, systematic level, of various issues and motifs that are fundamentally Jewish—the sinfulness of pagans because of their idolatry and gender deviance, law and law observance, a final judgment, Scripture, Abraham, Adam, sin, creation, the election of the patriarchs, the present posture of Israel, and so on. Indeed, the point is obvious. Only at 12:1 does the text turn in any sustained fashion toward the letter’s audience, and only from 14:1 onward are remotely practical local questions detectable, although even then Paul’s treatment seems quite generalized (cf. 1 Corinthians 8 and 10). Romans’ letter body consists, in short, of abstract—or apparently “coherent”—and Jewish material (which is not necessarily the same thing as a discussion of Judaism).

Most interpreters detect a fourfold division within this material—roughly in terms of chapters 1–4, 5–8, 9–11, and 12–15.8 Different motifs and questions are treated in each of these subordinate units, and their manner of treatment can differ quite significantly, but they all tend to remain within a Jewish orbit. So, for example, the use of short scriptural quotations falls almost entirely into chapters 1–4 and 9–11, with smaller patches of citations in 12–14 and a climactic catena in

7 Tendentious because it assumes, along with Justification theory, that Paul’s engagement with Jewish motifs and questions is an engagement with Judaism per se.

8 Precise delineations of these subsections do not matter at this point. However, more exact specifications will emerge later on, in tandem with detailed exegetical work. Robin Scroggs has provided a classic analysis of these units in "Paul as Rhetorician: Two Homilies in Romans 1-11," in Jews, Greeks and Christians: Essays in Honor of William David Davies, ed. R. Hamerton-Kelly and R. Scroggs (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 271-98.
15:9-12. More than fifty explicit citations occur in these subsections, along with numerous softer textual echoes. But explicit citations occur only three times in all of chapters 5–8. So the abstract Jewish letter body of Romans modulates significantly through at least four subordinate phases.

The letter frame of Romans (1:1-15; 15:14–16:23/24/27), however, seems to be practical and localized and is oriented, as Kümmel observed, primarily toward converted pagans. Paul speaks in the frame of certain key motifs,

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9 See Exod. 20:17/Deut. 5:21 in 7:7; and Ps. 44:22 in 8:36; probably along with Gen. 22:12 and 16 in 8:32. Admittedly, certain key Jewish narrative echoes are discernible in these chapters as well, but their treatment is arguably distinctive.

10 There has been a great deal of discussion of the audience of Romans—whether it is pagan, Jewish, or some mixture of the two. Paul’s detailed greetings in Romans 16 identify three Jews explicitly in his Christian audience (Andronicus, Junia, and Herodion: see vv. 7 and 11), and Acts asserts the same identity for Aquila, and presumably for Prisca by marriage and conversion (v. 3; cf. Acts 18:2). (Romans 4:1, 7:1, and 9:10 point to Jews less decisively.) Beyond this evidence, the encoded audience seems originally pagan, although the possible presence of God-fearers complicates this matter still further. However, ultimately I am not convinced that the detailed resolution of this issue—if it is resolvable—will solve the broader question of purpose. Paul does not elsewhere address Jewish questions at length, abstractly, just because his audience contains Jewish Christians (cf. 1 and 2 Corinthians). And to suggest that he does so in Romans because the Roman Christians do not know him begs the key questions. (Ephesians, however, is an intriguing counter-example at this point.) Conversely, to suggest that he cannot address Judaism because his audience is entirely pagan is a weak contention (as the legion of scholars converted from modern secular paganism and now fervently addressing Jewish questions in relation to Paul perhaps attests). We ought of course to pursue the identification of Paul’s empirical audience, but also to balance this construct against constructions of the implied and the encoded audiences,
especially of his apostolic call to the pagans, which seems to include the Roman Christians (1:1, 5-6, 11, 13-15; 15:15-22, 32). He also speaks of his desire to visit Rome, along with the reasons for its frustration until now (1:9-13; 15:23b-24), and of his plan to evangelize beyond Rome in Spain (15:24a, 28b), in the context of a “non-interference” clause (15:20)—that he wants to preach only where Christ is yet unknown. Paul makes a number of practical requests in the letter frame: for prayer support as he visits Jerusalem with the collection (15:25-28a, 30-31); for an appropriate reception at Rome for Phoebe, who is presumably the letter bearer (16:1-2); and for a process of mutual greeting at Rome (16:3-16). He also utters a warning concerning false teachers (16:17-20). In short, Romans’ letter frame, primarily oriented toward converts from paganism, is utterly practical or contingent. Quite concrete problems and actions are discussed.

Thus, Romans possesses a unique character within Paul’s extant letters in terms of its interwoven complexity, structure, tone, and style. Moreover, it seems composed in terms of two principal complementary lines of tension—a practical letter frame oriented primarily toward converted pagans wrapped around a highly abstract, coherent letter body oriented apparently toward Jewish issues. And we now have the relevant data for our main set of explanatory criteria. Ideally, a plausible framing explanation of Romans ought to be able to comprehend this entire data set within its compass (a challenge, to be sure), and

and integrate these theories in turn with a broader hypothesis concerning the letter’s purpose and design.

11 I will assume the inclusion of Romans 16 with the rest of the letter in what follows, as the majority of interpreters do. I will address the integrity of vv. 17-20 shortly—although, again, only a small minority suggests its excision.
not merely one or two aspects of it; it must be able to explain Romans’ double
double character, along with all of the various further features apparent within
that structure. These requirements can be summarized in the following
enumeration.

_Eight features of the letter frame (I-VIII) —_

I: an address primarily to converts from paganism, both specifically
and implicitly, in terms of Paul’s authority (see II)

II: repeated emphases on Paul’s apostleship (1:1, 5, 9, 13-15; 15:15-22)
and gospel (cf. 1:1, 9, 16; 15:16, 19; cf. 16:25)

III: an elaboration of II in terms of a principle of “non-interference”
(15:20)—Paul’s desire, in accordance with Isaiah 52:15b, to preach
Christ where he has not yet been named

IV: various nuances within Paul’s generic expression of a desire to visit
the Roman Christians—to strengthen and to harvest them, to be
mutually encouraged, also to bring them a spiritual gift (1:11-13),
and even perhaps to do signs and wonders among them (cf. 1:11;
15:19)

V: a desire to evangelize Spain, and a corresponding request for
assistance (15:24, 28b)

VI: a forthcoming visit to Jerusalem and delivery of the collection, and
a corresponding request for prayers for safety and acceptability
(15:25-28a, 30-32a)

VII: a request that the Roman Christians greet one another (16:3-16a)
VIII: a warning against false teaching (16:17-20a)

Eight features of the letter body (IX-XVI)—

IX: a transition to the abstract level of discussion in the letter body (and back)

X: a transition to the Jewish concerns of the letter body (and back)

XI: a transition to Romans 1–4

XII: a transition to Romans 5–8

XIII: a transition to Romans 9–11

XIV: admonitions against pagan Christian arrogance toward Jews (11:13-32)

XV: a transition to Romans 12–15

XVI: admonitions to the “weak” and “strong” (Romans 14)

Ideally, all these features need to be explained—I through XVI—if a plausible explanation of the character of Romans is to be supplied. And a set of critical explanatory dynamics is detectable in much of the debate, which develops in terms of two main interpretative trajectories.

Some of these features in the data are explicable in self-sufficient terms; they explain *themselves* in terms of their content sufficiently to warrant their

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12 Strictly speaking, more relationships exist between the four main subunits in the letter body than the three mentioned here; however, for simplicity’s sake they are arguably reducible to these three main transitions. Plausible explanations at these points—at the proximate frames—should encompass plausible explanations of the other implicit substantive relationships as well.
inclusion within the letter without further justification. I would place within this
category feature I, arguably also II, features IV through VI, VIII, and XIV-XVI. (I
will elaborate on these claims momentarily.) But this leaves various features
unexplained in self-sufficient terms—III, VII, IX-XII, and XIII (some of which are
very significant). And it is of course these unexplained features that create our
difficulties with respect to Romans. The explanation of the provenance of
Romans now reduces to two possible trajectories. A feature needs to be identified
from among the self-sufficient ones that not only explains itself but can plausibly
be extended to explain the unexplained features. Either this, or another
explanation must be introduced that is not overtly attested in the letter but can
nevertheless explain the outstanding features. Clearly, however, the second
option also creates further difficulties for itself. Any such explanation must prove
that it is actually relevant to Romans even though it is not directly attested (or, at
least, not obviously so); the introduction of this further data must be plausible.
The history of the Romans debate is in many respects just the exploration of
these two main explanatory options.

Almost all of the self-sufficient features have been pressed at some point
to see whether they can sustain the additional weight of the rest of Romans. Two
are arguably too bland to offer much hope in these terms (I and IV). So basically
this category includes explanations revolving around features II (and Klein
includes III here), V, VI, VIII, XIV, and XVI (usually in combination with XV;
XIV-XVI also go together well). I regard three of these explanations as especially
plausible—VIII, XIV, and XVI, so they will be treated in the most detail in what
follows. The rest seem to fail relatively overtly and quickly.
Complementing this broad explanatory trajectory, various external explanations have also been suggested from time to time, principally in relation to the unexplained features of Romans’ letter body. These characteristically introduce further issues that need to be satisfied if their broader explanation is to hold good, and they tend to struggle at such points. Three types of explanation can be detected in this trajectory, bringing their own explanatory riders with them: the claim that Romans is an essentially coherent genre of text, such as a letter-essay or protreptic; the claim that it was a circular, sent originally to multiple destinations; and the claim that it is a composite.\textsuperscript{13}

We should note finally that most explanations tend, to a greater or lesser degree, to embrace a multiple approach; they rely on more than one explanation to account for all the data in Romans. And this seems quite acceptable, except that it does introduce a further rider into the debate, namely, the various explanations must cohere. That is, it must be shown how these different questions arose for Paul at essentially the same time and place. Certainly, most of Paul’s other letters were not occasioned by such multiple considerations, and for letters that were, this is both evident and plausible.\textsuperscript{14} The difficulty of meeting

\textsuperscript{13} I will not engage here with some of the older and overtly false theories that are touched on from time to time by RD—for example, the German claim in a previous generation that Paul needed to visit the capital of the empire in order to crown his missionary achievements (that is, by way of comparison with a mission to the German Reich that failed to evangelize Berlin), or that Paul was dealing with antinomians (Lütgert’s view, in which relation one might also usefully consider Luther’s attitude to the enthusiasts), and so on.

\textsuperscript{14} The most likely candidates for multiple causation are 1 Corinthians and Philippians. Subsidiary goals may also exist for 2 Corinthians, if it is not a composite. First Corinthians is
this criterion will depend very much on the balance and nature of any broader, multiple explanation’s subordinate underlying theories.

Key features in the data of Romans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Self-sufficient</th>
<th>Non-self-sufficient</th>
<th>Expandable</th>
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<td><strong>Letter frame</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>I: address primarily to converts from paganism</td>
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<td>II: emphasis on Paul’s apostleship and gospel</td>
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<td>III: “non-interference” clause (15:20)</td>
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<td>IV: expectations for the Romans (strengthening, etc.)</td>
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<td>V: Spanish mission</td>
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<td>VI: visit to Jerusalem with the collection</td>
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<td>VII: mutual greeting at Rome</td>
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<td>VIII: warning against false teaching</td>
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<td><strong>Letter body</strong></td>
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<td>IX: transition to abstract concerns</td>
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<td>X: transition to Jewish concerns</td>
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<td>XI: transition to 1–4</td>
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<td>XIV: warnings against pagan Christian arrogance toward Jews</td>
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<td>XVI: admonitions to the “weak” and “strong” in 14</td>
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perhaps the most complex occasional letter in the Pauline corpus and hence susceptible to a multiple explanation. But most of that letter is explicable in terms of a letter from Corinth to Paul (responding to an earlier letter from Paul) and an oral report, both of which contained complex internal agendas. It is not implausible, moreover, to suggest that these different sources of information arrived simultaneously in Ephesus, and they may even have coinhered in the same vehicle—the Corinthian letter bearers. There is overt evidence within the letter for all these dynamics; thus, in this case, the theory of multiple causation has little difficulty justifying its multiplicity (and is not in any case as multiple as it first appears).
We can now evaluate these options in turn, although I will treat the explanation arising from feature VIII later (in § 4), out of sequence, because it is in my view the most plausible and requires a more detailed evaluation.
§ 3 Various explanations

It is entirely understandable that Paul would address the Roman Christians—and indeed be interested in them—primarily as converts from paganism (feature I; cf. 1:5-7, 13-15; 15:15-16, 18). This is the primary locus of his spiritual authority; however, any explanation of the letter in such terms clearly devolves into the closely related theme of Paul’s apostleship to the pagans (feature II). Romans was not written simply because the Roman Christians were, in the main, converts from paganism.

Similarly, the desires for past visits that were frustrated and for future visits that would bring benefits are perfectly understandable; they were epistolary commonplaces. So Paul expresses numerous wishes in relation to the nature of his visit (feature IV)—for the Roman Christians’ strengthening, perhaps primarily through the imparting of some spiritual gift (1:11), for mutual encouragement (1:12), for a further harvest among them (1:13b), for a blessing (15:29), and for refreshment (15:32b). But these expectations are too bland to explain the rest of the letter. Paul has not written Romans merely to express these wishes. His apostleship to the pagans, however, does seem potentially to explain much if not all of Romans, and various scholars have asserted as much.  

(1) The importance of Paul’s apostleship and gospel. The Roman Christians were—at least in the main—converted pagans; therefore, it makes perfect sense to suggest

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that Paul, the apostle to the pagans, would be concerned to establish his
authority over them and his law-free gospel among them (that is, since he did
not himself convert them). Indeed, this is one of the strengths of this theory; it
ties together the emphases in the letter frame on Paul’s apostleship and gospel
with an apparent emphasis in the letter body on the gospel (that gospel usually
being located in the conventional reading of Romans 1–4, thereby linking
features II, IX, and XI as well). Moreover, Romans’ repeated emphasis on Paul’s
apostolic authority, while not as pronounced or overt as Galatians’, is otherwise
unparalleled among the highly formulaic openings and closings of Paul’s letters.
This can be seen especially in the almost liturgical affirmation and expansion of
apostleship that Paul includes before reaching even the identification of the
letter’s addressees (cf. 1:1b-6)—a rather extraordinary interruption of ancient
epitostal etiquette. He also returns to the theme in chapter 15 (see esp. vv. 15b-
16, but vv. 17-29 and 32 significantly amplify and reinforce this theme as well).
Clearly, this is an important element of the letter that must feature in any
plausible explanation of its provenance. But can it sustain the explanatory

16 Paul’s apostleship and gospel are so closely intertwined that in other letters the two
notions can sometimes interchange almost seamlessly (cf. esp. Gal. 1:6-9, 11-12, 15-17; 2:2, 5, 7-9).
A close reading of parts of Romans suggests the same conclusion.

17 So Klein observes correctly that “it is exactly the theme of the gospel and Paul’s
responsibility for carrying it out in Rome which connect the letter’s opening, body, and closing”
(RD, 34, n. 22—although this is not the only such connection!).

18 So Klein notes correctly again: “every hypothesis concerned with the intention of the
Epistle to the Romans must submit to another criterion: whether it can succeed in relating the
purpose and content of the letter as closely as both the text and the projected apostolic activity in
Rome call for” (RD, 34-35).
burden of Romans as a whole? Could Romans be Paul’s apostolic introduction to Rome, functioning simultaneously as an act of evangelical reinforcement and incorporation?\textsuperscript{19} While this theory can explain most of the remaining features in the data, it struggles to account for certain key points—two in particular.

First, the suggestion that Romans is freighting Paul’s gospel can account for only one of the three more abstract, Jewish units in the letter body—the unit chosen as Paul’s gospel. From this point, interpreters tend to be thrown back on older and often rather problematic assertions—for example, that Romans 5–8 describes the process of sanctification after Romans 1–4 has described justification. Romans 9–11 then supposedly addresses “issues regarding Israel,” but nowhere else in the Pauline corpus does a discussion of the gospel devolve into a further complex discussion of issues regarding Israel—neither in the otherwise rather similar Galatians, where much of the terminology of Romans 1–4 and 5–8 is discernible (although in a highly compressed form),\textsuperscript{20} nor in briefer accounts of soteriological material in other letters. (Nor does anything in Paul’s descriptions of his initial gospel presentation elsewhere suggest an intrinsic role for unbelieving Israel in that presentation.)\textsuperscript{21} So this approach can theoretically

\textsuperscript{19} An intriguing comparison is thereby set up with Ephesians. If authentic, this letter was most likely sent to Laodicea as the companion letter to Colossians and Philemon. And as such it seems to have functioned in very much these senses—an introduction of Paul’s apostolic office and a description of his soteriology and ethic. This would explain, among other things, its smoother, more complex and abstract style, which is much like Romans.

\textsuperscript{20} One reading of Gal. 6:16b limits these issues largely to one clause of eight words!

\textsuperscript{21} It should be emphasized that these observations in no way exclude accounts of Israel from broader descriptions of Paul’s thought; however, the case needs to be made here that an
account for one of the three argumentative units in Romans’ letter body, and in abstract and Jewish terms, but much remains unexplained.

More awkward, second, is Paul’s stated non-interference clause in Romans 15:20 (feature III). There Paul states boldly that his apostolic gift and duty, confirmed by signs and wonders (v. 19), involves preaching where Christ has not yet been named so that he does not build on “another foundation.” And this also fulfils the scripture that says “those to whom it has not been proclaimed concerning him will see, and those who have not heard will understand” (v. 21; cf. Isa. 52:15b). As Klein points out more clearly than most, Paul is contravening this stated principle if he is writing to Rome in an apostolic fashion. The problem could be mitigated if it is conceded that at this point Paul commits an egregious blunder. However, the emphasis in the letter closing on this dimension of Paul’s missionary work is actually quite sustained (see at least vv. 20-22, rooted in vv. 15-19, and arguably related further to vv. 24 and 28b); it seems entirely deliberate.

Hence, Klein’s own solution is superior, and we should pause for a moment to consider it. Klein suggests that Paul means by “foundation” an apostolic foundation. And, defined in these terms, the problem now inverts into part of the solution. Since the Roman Christians lack an apostolic foundation, Paul ought to write to correct that. However, this ingenious solution falters in account of the gospel raises such issues in detail almost automatically, so that an attribution of Romans 1–4 to the gospel can explain simultaneously the presence of Romans 9–11 in the same letter.

22 “Paul can consider an apostolic effort in Rome because he does not regard the local Christian community there as having an apostolic foundation” (RD, 39). And it is a short step
several ways and so should be discounted. Paul does not define the “foundation” in this apostolic fashion in 15:20; it is a matter merely of ignorance (cf. Isa. 52:15b!). Moreover, his development of “founder’s rights” elsewhere never makes that claim in apostolic terms; it is simply a parental and generative metaphor and claim (cf. 1 Cor. 3:9-17; 4:14-16; cf. also 2 Cor. 10:13-17 and Gal. 4:19-20). Still more embarrassing, the Romans have apostles present with them already—Andronicus and Junia, whom Paul calls apostles (16:7). (Prisca and Aquila probably enjoyed this status as well, and if they did not, they could certainly act as apostolic proxies for Paul: cf. perhaps Col. 1:7.) So unfortunately, the incorporation of feature III into a theory based on II also falters. Paul’s non-interference clause remains an embarrassment to the “apostolic” explanation of Romans.

The suggestions of Klein and those persuaded by him should not simply be dismissed; accounts of the data that he emphasizes are an essential part of any ultimately plausible explanation of Romans as a whole—the repeated developments of Paul’s apostolicity, and the apparent contradictions caused by his expressed desire to preach “where Christ has not yet been named” (15:20) in combination with his obvious desires to influence and to visit Rome. But clearly these textual features and their resolution cannot carry this explanatory burden from this realization to the further claim that Paul must therefore in effect preach the gospel to Roman Christians, supplying them with “a theological treatise” (RD, 42). Klein adds that this is why Paul never refers to the Roman Christians as an ἱκκλησία (although, as Watson notes, the Philippians are not accorded that title either; cf. Phil 1.1 [however, cf. also 4:15]; PJ&G, p. 189). (A more practical explanation for this fact also arguably exists; see the further discussions of feature VII below.)
alone. We move, then, to consider the next possible explanation in terms of a self-sufficient datum with wider implications.

(2) Romans as a request to assist Paul’s mission to Spain. One of Paul’s three overtly stated aims in Romans is a request for assistance as he travels onward to evangelize Spain (feature V; 15:24). The verb προσέπιπτω that Paul uses here is significant, often denoting assistance to someone making a journey. When we “send people on their way” in the modern era, we generally mean by this—if we are speaking English—that we have also equipped them to some degree, perhaps having fed and accommodated them. They have been taken care of. And the connotations of the Greek are similar. Hence, as Robert Jewett and others have espied, Paul is in effect requesting assistance here from the Roman church for a mission to Spain, and this support could conceivably have been quite extensive. Moreover, unity at Rome was a practical prerequisite for such support, perhaps explaining features XIV and XVI as well. And a request in advance of Paul’s arrival in Rome would be prudent and so makes perfect sense. Other pieces of

23 Talbert notes his desire to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen the Roman Christians (1:11-12; 15:15-16; feature IV); his request for prayer (15:31; part of feature VI—see theory 3 just below); and this request for assistance in a mission to Spain (15:24: feature V); cf. Romans (Macon, Georgia: Smith & Helwys, 2002), 12.

evidence that have already been noted can then arguably supplement this central concern. In particular, it is understandable why Paul would need to have his apostleship established. Moreover, it is even understandable why he would at some point supply a version of his gospel; the Roman Christians need to understand what they are supporting. However, at this point, the theory arguably begins to break down.

It is not necessary for Paul to establish his entire gospel in advance of his arrival merely to solicit a request for prayer and missionary support. Paul requests a fairly ambitious favor from a figure he does not know personally in Philemon—as much as the release of his unhappy slave, Onesimus, to Christian service—and does little more than make a set of brief (albeit crafty) rhetorical appeals. In fact, it would have been much easier simply to wait to establish both his apostolic credentials and his gospel in the usual fashion, in person and with some “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4b; cf. Rom. 15:18-19a; 2 Cor. 12:12). It is difficult to imagine the Spanish mission itself being the especially urgent concern in relation to which not a moment could be lost in terms of theological exposition. And we run again into the same problems already encountered in relation to an emphasis on feature II (and to be

25 Paul could indeed want to strengthen the Roman Christians (IV), so that their assistance would be facilitated. His solicitation of their prayer support for Jerusalem (VI) also further involves them emotionally and spiritually in his work (as well as providing prayer support for a difficult situation). And so on.

26 The addition of Ephesians and/or Colossians to this communication might partly offset this contention, however.
encountered again shortly\textsuperscript{27})—that an emphasis on the proclamation of the gospel can only explain one of the three abstract argumentative units in the letter body. Hence, other theories would have to be mobilized, at which moment we have either abandoned this theory or subordinated it to another. Moreover, it must also be assumed that an emphasis at one point on the gospel can explain the text’s preoccupation with diverse Jewish questions (feature X)—assuming in fact that the text is actually concerned with Judaism, and that the gospel is intrinsically concerned with Judaism as well, at which point, a key substantive question in relation to the Justification theory is clearly being begged. In short, while this feature of the data can arguably explain the urgency of Romans, many of the features of the letter frame, the paraenesis, and (arguably!) at least one section of the letter body that needs to be designated “Paul’s gospel” (although none is overtly), it cannot explain the rest of the text’s character. Furthermore, it tends to beg some key questions at the vital point, and therefore must be judged deficient.

I would add that there is a danger of misunderstanding the immediate argumentative function of this datum as well. It is not an especially long or significant textual presence (see only 15:24, 28b), and its principal statement occurs after a much longer exposition concerning Paul’s apostolic ministry and practice (vv. 15b-21). We may suspect, then, that the Spanish mission, although doubtless a genuine intention on Paul’s part, has an important localized argumentative function. (This will be assessed in more detail in § 4.) Suffice it to say for now that the theory of a Spanish mission is one more element that must

\textsuperscript{27} See § 4.1.
be explained in the provenance of Romans and that it can open up surprisingly wide and constructive dimensions within the letter. But it clearly falls short of being a complete explanation.

(3) Romans as a request to assist Paul’s trip to Jerusalem. The second of Paul’s overtly stated aims is a request for prayer that he might be “rescued from the disobedient in Judea” and his “mediation in Jerusalem be acceptable to the saints” (15:31; feature VI). It is clearly a strength in any explanation to be able to appeal to explicit requests by Paul in the text of the letter. However, equally clearly, it is difficult to understand why Paul would attach a letter body of some fifteen chapters to this request. A short letter framing this verse would suffice (and numerous papyri exemplify requests of this nature and length). This explanation does have the virtue of explaining why the letter needs to be dispatched now. Obviously, the request for prayer support must be made before Paul goes to Jerusalem. But the character of the vast majority of the text is left unexplained. This datum needs to be involved, then, in any broader explanation of the letter, but it is too weak to sustain any plausible reading in its own right. But it is also the starting point for a powerful and influential suggestion by Jacob Jervell. Jervell argued that Romans was really a rehearsal of the arguments that Paul felt that he would have to make on his arrival in Jerusalem: “The essential and primary content of Romans (1:18–11:36) is a reflection upon its major content, the ‘collection speech,’ or more precisely, the defense which Paul plans

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to give before the church in Jerusalem“ (*RD*, p. 56). We should pause to consider this famous theory more carefully.

Jervell makes his case in stages. He points to three instances in Romans of the verb παρακαλω, which frequently indicates significant matters in ancient letters (cf. 12:1; 15:30 and 16:17). Dismissing the relevance of 16:17 and, to a lesser extent, 12:1, he notes the position of 15:30 at the head of the request for intercession in relation to the forthcoming visit to Jerusalem. He then argues that Jerusalem’s acceptance of Paul’s mission is absolutely essential to its future and suggests further—probably quite fairly—that the church’s receipt of the collection will imply that broader acceptance, although strong countervailing pressures seem to be at work, from both within and outside the church. Hence, vital issues are at stake, the risks are high, and Paul’s request for prayer certainly seems fair. Moreover, the letter body of Romans has, he suggests, “the characteristics of a speech with marked apologetic, and to a lesser degree, polemic tendencies. In other words, we find here a presentation of Pauline preaching—yet always defensive and intent on clarifying possible misunderstanding” (*RD*, p. 61; Jervell points here especially to the many strategic questions in Romans, but also to its oversights in systematic terms). This allows the further important suggestion that the letter body of Romans is bound up with the situation in Jerusalem; it is both explanatory and defensive. Paul has sent these deliberations to Rome by letter as well so that the Roman Christians can understand precisely what is at stake and join with Paul in intercession for a safe and effective visit: “one thing is obvious: such prayer can only be said on the

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29 Fitzmyer discusses the parallel views of Fuchs and Suggs at this point: *Romans*, 75.
basis that one knows why and for what purpose one is praying, and that such prayer always takes place in unison” (*RD*, p. 62). Moreover, as a result, Paul is able to present himself in Jerusalem as a representative not only of the formerly pagan churches of the northeast but of the critical and prestigious church in the empire’s capital—at the center.

This is a perceptive and provocative case. If true, it would resolve many if not all of the letter’s explanatory challenges. But it stumbles at a critical point. Jervell struggles to explain the dispatch of arguments located in Jerusalem to Christians living in Rome. There are two difficulties here. First, not everyone will grant that the letter body of Romans is an account of what will take place rhetorically at Jerusalem. I find this a highly plausible suggestion, but there is no direct evidence for it. Certainly Paul never says as much. And second, the claim that these arguments have been sent to Rome because the Roman Christians

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30 I find it significant that we run into the same difficulty here that dogged Stendahl’s famous reframing suggestion. Both Stendahl and Jervell reposition the arguments of Romans in a defensive frame ultimately concerned with Paul’s radical law-free mission to the pagans. There is something inherently plausible about this suggestion, fundamentally because it locates Romans within the Judaizing crisis apparent elsewhere in Paul’s letters—notably Galatians and Philippians 3. Material in those letters is similar to Romans. Moreover, scholars do tend to assume that many of the arguments Paul was forced to make there would also have been made in Jerusalem (cf. Gal. 2:1-10; also Acts 15). In emphasizing the defensive quality of the argument in Romans, along with its Jewish concerns, both Stendahl and Jervell (the latter probably more effectively) create space for an explanation of its content and modulations through the letter body—features IX through XIII. But they fail to make the specifics of their case, which is not without foundation but is clearly fragile. Important elements of this case will be incorporated in the explanation of Romans’ provenance later on (see § 4).
must understand exactly what they are involved with—the purpose of the requested prayers, and their necessary unanimity—seems weak if not overtly false. Paul’s requests for intercession elsewhere never receive this sort of extended and detailed preamble. Furthermore, Paul’s account of prayer in Romans 8 specifically disavows the notion of complete understanding during prayer, undergirding this aspect of intercession with the work of the Holy Spirit in speechless petition! (Jervell also uses a dubious wordplay here. Clearly, there ought to be unison in prayer for Paul’s safety and success—both Paul and the Roman Christians should obviously be praying for the same thing—however, it does not follow that Paul and the Roman Christians must also be unified in every thought and theological position, which would presumably make much Christian intercession difficult!)

There is still in my view much to learn from Jervell’s provocative suggestion. But the theory itself must be judged deficient and rejected; a comprehensive explanation of Romans in terms of feature VI does not seem to work (although arguably it comes closer to working than many scholars realize).

Feature VII denotes the set of extensive mutual greetings that Paul includes in 16:3-16a (meaning by “mutual” Paul’s instructions to the Roman Christians to greet each other). Only Colossians 4:10-18 is comparable in the rest of the Pauline corpus, and the relevance of that material is of course disputed. But even there we do not see the emphasis on mutual greeting in the manner of Romans 16. This

31 “The request for solidarity in their intercessory prayers can only be made at the end of the letter after Paul has finished his detailed account” (RD, 62; emphases mine).
distinctive feature of Romans consequently requires explanation.\textsuperscript{32} However, lacking even self-sufficiency (that is, an obvious function of its own), it must be combined with some other theory if it is to explain the rest of Romans, so it will be considered further in § 4 below. Suffice it for now to note that feature VII must be a part of any plausible account of Romans as a whole. Why does Paul spend so much time here setting up mutual relations within Roman Christianity?

Feature VIII emerges primarily in relation to certain pithy warnings against false teachers that Paul includes in 16:17-20. Such is this subsection’s importance that I will consider it in detail in § 4 below, filling out its relationship with the letter’s other concerns. Clearly, it is self-sufficient; warnings against false teachers are frequent in Paul, as in much of the rest of the New Testament, and need no further justification. Its explanatory implications will need to be teased out shortly in detail.

With these qualifications and postponements in place, we have largely covered the features of Romans’ letter frame, and only one has any real promise in terms of broader explanation. We turn, then, to the letter body, where features IX and X initially occupy our attention—the abstract and Jewish nature of Paul’s discussion in this extended and complex text. Here our second main trajectory of explanations starts to become apparent. Certain interpreters have judged at the outset that Romans’ letter body is not contingent at all but coherent—presumably in view of features IX and X—and so have sought to discover why

Paul might have written a coherent text.\textsuperscript{33} Two such theories are especially powerful (and a weaker version will be noted immediately as well).

(4) \textit{Romans as a generalized genre—letter-essay or protreptic or ambassadorial.} One way of negotiating the treacherous path from contingency to coherence that is necessitated by this broad approach is to posit Paul’s composition of an essentially coherent letter from the outset. Different variations of this basic approach are detectable in the literature, but all share the same underlying rationale. The letter body of Romans is abstract and generalized because Paul—uniquely—composed Romans in terms of some abstract and generalized genre, although presumably for quite concrete practical reasons. So, for example, Stirewalt has suggested that Paul composed a “letter-essay”; David Aune, that he composed a “protreptic” letter; and Robert Jewett, that he sent an “ambassadorial” epistle (although Jewett’s proposal links up cleverly with other important suggestions).\textsuperscript{34} These scholars all face difficult explanatory riders, however. They must demonstrate the existence of the type of letter that they are suggesting Paul has written in Romans and then make a case for Paul actually

\textsuperscript{33} Reintroducing Beker’s important terminology and methodological distinction at this point. The scholars noted below propose a directly coherent content for Romans’ letter body but argue that certain circumstances elicited this (in effect thereby avoiding Beker’s strictures).

\textsuperscript{34} Stirewalt’s and Aune’s proposals are represented in \textit{RD}, 147-71 and 278-96 respectively. Jewett’s proposal was first stated in “Romans as an Ambassadorial Letter,” \textit{Interpretation} 36 (1982): 5-20; although this should be supplemented by the material noted earlier in relation to feature VI, the Spanish mission. More of his suggestions will also be introduced later. So Jewett’s richly considered views are not reducible to this particular theory.
writing it at this time to Rome for plausible practical reasons. And they tend at these later points to stumble and fall. The elegant suggestion that views Romans as a protreptic discourse serves to illustrate these difficulties.\footnote{Klaus Berger was the first to make this connection—briefly—in 1984; see his Formgeschichte des Neuen Testament (Heidelberg: Quelle & Meyer, 1984), 217; and “Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament,” in ANRW II, 25/2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1984), 1140. Aune is a well-known representative of the view, partly because of his elegant presentation, and partly because of his inclusion in RD. The theory has since been argued at length by Anthony Guerra in Romans and the Apologetic Tradition (SNTSMS 81; Cambridge: University, 1995).}

Aune and others have suggested that Romans is influenced by philosophical protreptic—a subcategory of the broader protreptic genre. Philosophical protreptics are basically propaganda on behalf of a particular philosophical position.\footnote{The most famous examples are Aristotle’s Protrepticus (which has been lost but preserved in part in the writings of Iamblichus), and Cicero’s Hortensius. But the reconstruction of the genre can be assisted by fragments and indirect comments in ancient texts as well—cf., e.g., Plato, Euthydemus, 278E-82D (esp. τὸ δὲ ἡ... ἐπιδείξατον προτρέποντε τὸ μιράκιον ὅπως χρή σοφίας τε καὶ ἀρετῆς ἐπιμεληθῆαι; “What you have... to do is to give us a display of exhorting this youth as to how he should devote himself to wisdom and virtue” [Plato IV (LCL; tr. W. R. M. Lamb; London: Heinemann, 1924), 402-3]); and Isocrates, Against the Sophists. Cf. also Lucian, Vitarum auctio.; Diog. 2–4; Tatian’s Oratio. Graec. 1–28; and Justin Martyr, Dial. Tryph. 1–9, esp. 1.4–1.5 and 2.3–6.2.} They seek to recruit converts to their own program, to refute competing programs and figures, and to strengthen those who are already loyal.\footnote{Advocates of this theory balance these objectives slightly differently at times, but I find that their reasons for doing so are often overly delicate. It is difficult to prove that a text could be intended and received only by “insiders” as against “outsiders,” or vice versa (as Aune asserts).} Their broad similarity to Romans’s letter body is immediately evident—a
concern with opponents, dialogues, exhortations, systematic refutation, comparison, proof, and so on. Although they are primarily Greco-Roman, Klaus Berger has also suggested some similarities with Jewish texts—specifically the Wisdom of Solomon 1–5 and the Didache 1–6 (especially in their emphases on “two ways”). Later Christian texts may also fall into this category—for example, Justin’s First Apology—and Clement wrote a lengthy and overt instance.

Advocates of this viewpoint have spent much time establishing and delineating the philosophical protreptic genre and its occasional overlap with epistolary forms. I am happy to grant this level of the explanation; it is the further corollaries that concern me at the theory’s all-important point of transition from coherence to contingency. I see a number of problems at this methodological juncture.

How do we know that in Romans Paul has actually crafted a protreptic letter? Do the two genres overlap sufficiently to make this identification certain? The evidence supplied at this point is not yet persuasive to me. (It is basically too generalized.) That is, we do not have decisive evidence that Romans is a

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A text is not susceptible to this sort of control once it has been published and released to its readerships.

38 Advocates of this theory need to demonstrate that the text of Romans contains explicit markers of a protreptic discourse that are sufficient to elicit that recognition from competent auditors—and to make this identification rather than any other. These markers must consequently be stronger than all other possible identifications, and be sufficiently specific. And I am not convinced that these cases have actually been made. The claims are usually couched in terms of generalities; opponents, exhortations, diatribe, refutation, two ways, etc., are said to characterize that discourse and this text. But these motifs can be found in most of Paul’s other letters as well, none of which are identified as protreptic. Much of the case seems to rest, then, on
protreptic. Conversely, if Romans is a protreptic, then arguably all of Paul’s letters are! Moreover, it must be asked whether Paul could have composed a philosophical protreptic in any case. This seems unlikely, given the elite and specialized philosophical context of that genre and its representatives; Paul was a Pharisee and an artisan, not a Greek philosopher or a senator.

Granting these satisfactory responses here for the sake of argument, however, would Paul have composed a protreptic to Rome in order to convert and to exhort people there? All the available evidence stands against this. It is not—as we have already seen—how he normally presented his gospel in rhetorical terms, or how he sought to convert people; nor is it how he normally sought to strengthen and exhort people. So at the critical point of transition

the generally soteriological tenor of philosophical protreptics—that this way of life should be embraced because it leads to life. But see more on this claim just below.

39 John of Sardis, in his *Preliminary Exercises*, suggests that “protreptic speeches are deliberative, yes, but on agreed upon subjects,” indicating that their orientation is quite rigid and formal (although his discussion in context is complex): cf. George A. Kennedy (ed.), *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2003), § 11, 216.

40 And we do not know of any other Pharisees and artisans composing protreptics. Paul did not write texts remotely similar to Aristotle’s or Cicero’s. Wisdom of Solomon 1–4 and *Didache* 1–6 are not convincing parallels to the genre.

41 Most importantly, and as we have already seen, the evidence from elsewhere in Paul—such as it is—does not suggest a carefully crafted and polished rhetorical presentation of the gospel. Nor does it support the “speech-based” model of evangelism (which tends to presuppose the rationalistic emphases of Justification theory). Paul’s conversions seem to have taken place through networks and in relation to informal speech. This does not preclude his formal speaking
from contingency to coherence, we lack any direct evidence that this is what happened, and the supporting evidence in terms of analogous activities by Paul tends to contradict this claim.

Moreover, it is difficult to account for various other elements in Romans that must ultimately be accounted for—and especially from the letter frame. The non-interference clause is especially opaque (III), but so are the extended mutual greetings (VII). But I also query whether we have received much practical assistance in relation to the transitions that take place through the letter body. Simply specifying the abstract genre to which Romans belongs may explain features IX, X, and even XI, but it does not explain the awkward points of transition that occur later on (i.e., XII and XIII) any more effectively than previous theories do (although XVI is arguably more understandable as an exhortatory discussion typical of protreptic) A certain counterargument seems effective at this point as well.

It has long been observed that the letter body of Romans, although abstract, is not a comprehensive account of Paul’s theology, because too many vital topics are left out—an account of the Eucharist, a full account of

on occasion, but the evidence concerning the nature of those performances is limited. Similarly, when Paul exhorts elsewhere in his letters—which he does frequently—he never employs a protreptic discourse.

42 Indeed, this is doubly problematic. It is incomprehensible why Paul would insert this unhelpful principle into the conclusion of a protreptic. But, even more importantly, it provides a completely different account of what motivates Paul and why he proclaims his gospel—it is a divinely revealed and authorized event, attested ultimately by the work of the Spirit. Insofar as Romans participates in this program, then, it is not a protreptic at all.
eschatology, and so on. And that Paul would compose a protreptic (or a letter-
essay or an ambassadorial letter), setting out his position systematically but
omitting key topics from this gospel, seems incomprehensible. The letter body of
Romans is abstract and often treats important questions, but it does not seem to
be a balanced presentation of Paul’s coherence—of his theology per se.

For all these reasons, then, the protreptic explanation must be judged an
elegant failure, as must all analogous theories, which tend to stumble at just the
same points. Granting the existence of some rather formal genre, the recognition
of this genre in Paul’s letter to Rome, along with his reasons for composing this
sort of letter at this time, nevertheless remain unexplained and unjustified, as do
several of his transitions and instructions (or lack of them!) within that text. The
letter frame also remains opaque. However, another powerful explanation in
coherent terms is available that courts fewer of these dangers.

(5) Romans as a preserved circular. One ingenious way to generate a coherent letter
body was suggested by T. W. Manson, using the exciting new manuscript
evidence available to him of p\(^46\). Manson suggested that the bulk of Romans

\(^43\) So (i.a.) Kümmel: “The old view that Romans is a systematic, doctrinal presentation of
Christian belief… is untenable, for important elements of Pauline teaching, such as Christology
and eschatology, do not receive full attention, and some, such as the Lord’s Supper and church
polity, are not touched upon at all” (Introduction, 220-21).

\(^44\) He is not the sole representative of this basic theory. Donfried notes the support (in
1970) of Bultmann, Bornkamm, Marxsen, Knox, and Suggs (RD, 44, n. 1), although Marxsen is
also an important advocate of explanation 9, noted below. In terms of the history of scholarship,
the detachment of Romans 16 is now an “older” view, currently not much suggested, if at all.
was a circular, composed by Paul in deliberately general terms, and sent by way of multiple copies to different churches. Moreover, the textual confusion surrounding Romans 16, and the new evidence of a shorter version of Romans supplied by $p^{46}$, apparently confirmed this suggestion concerning multiple versions. Indeed, Manson supplied arguments for the original semi-independent status of Romans 16 and its address to Ephesus. He thereby isolated at least two original destinations within the canonical texts, thereby directly supporting his thesis of multiple destinations. And some manuscript traditions also omit specific references to Rome.

In my view, this is one of the most potentially effective contributions to the entire debate, and it deserves serious consideration. Manson has in fact solved most of our difficulties if he is right. Unfortunately, the evidence, when it is examined closely, proves either too weak to support such strong assertions,\footnote{His contentions about the Ephesian address of Romans 16 are indecisive. It is true that Prisca and Aquila were last noted in Ephesus (cf. 1 Cor. 16:19), but this couple moved around, and Acts documents their origin in Rome (18:2). Similarly, in relation to Epaenetus, it is quite plausible that a convert from Asia would migrate to Rome. His close association with Prisca and Aquila might even indicate this, because he may well be part of their household. (We also have no evidence that Paul's first convert in Asia was Ephesian.) These observations are not without weight altogether; they \textit{might} indicate an Ephesian address. But they can be plausibly explained in different terms. And important prosopographical counterevidence points more directly to Rome, most notably, the households of Aristobulus and Narcissus.} or even subtly to contradict his claims. In particular, the manuscript evidence indicates a different textual history for Romans, in terms of later redactions, rather than an original existence in multiple forms. In addition, Romans 16 looks
more integral to the letter than separate (at least, on text-critical grounds).\textsuperscript{46} If an Ephesian address for Romans 16 is abandoned as unlikely, and that chapter attached firmly to the rest of the letter, then a single Roman destination looks unavoidable and Manson’s contentions collapse. So this theory must be abandoned, which is a pity because it is one of the few theories that, if correct, could actually explain most if not all of our features. Like many theories, this one founders in relation to its explanatory riders; it cannot demonstrate the truth of the additional claims that need to hold good in order for its basic plausibility to be maintained.

We have already touched on a third theory in this general trajectory—the attribution of one of the letter body’s subunits to the gospel (usually Romans 1–4)—and we ought now to consider it in a little more detail, since Romans has been read in this way for most of its interpretative history.

(6) Romans as self-expression — a straightforward statement of Paul’s gospel.

Principally in view of features IX and X, and the assumed equation between the text following XI and Paul’s gospel, Romans has been read for much of its

\textsuperscript{46} Like most, I am relying here on Gamble’s detailed work: H. Gamble Jr, The Textual History of the Letter to the Romans, Studies and Documents 42 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1977); although this should be complemented, if not corrected, by P. Lampe, ”Zur Textgeschichte des Römerbriefes,” Novum Testamentum 27 (1985): 273-77. Jewett provides a judicious summary of text-critical issues (Romans, 4-18)—although he is strongly committed to the excision of 16:17-20; see more on this just below. This reinforces Donfried’s desideratum that “[a]ny study of Romans should proceed on the assumption that Rom. 16 is an integral part of the original letter” (RD, 104).
interpretative history as a systematic theological statement. Melanchthon is often cited as a prime example of this view. He famously observed that Romans is a christianae religionis compendium and went on to write a lucid commentary in these terms, as well as a systematic theological treatise structured in the same way. We would now probably speak in Pauline circles of a coherent reading, using Beker’s terminology; Romans is simply a statement of Paul’s own theology and hence of his “coherence.” Although modern historical-critical scholars have theoretically broken with this viewpoint, it remains strangely persistent. Commentators frequently approach Paul’s text in this fashion, coherently. (Nygren and Moo are candid about doing so.\textsuperscript{47} Many other interpreters,

\textsuperscript{47} So Nygren simply states at the outset of his (part) commentary, “What the gospel is, what the content of the Christian faith is, one learns to know in the Epistle to the Romans as in no other place in the New Testament. Romans gives us the gospel in its wide context. It gives us the right perspective and the standard by which we should comprehend all the constituent parts of the Gospels, to arrive at the true, intended picture” (\textit{Commentary on Romans} [tr. C. C. Rasmussen; Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1949 (1944)], 3)—although Nygren goes on to emphasize Rom. 5:12-21 especially strongly in this relation, which is not a conventional reading (see esp. 19-28).

Moo states that “the major part of the body of Romans, chaps. 1-11, develops by its own internal logic: Paul’s focus is on the gospel and its meaning rather than on the Romans and their needs…. [P]ast battles… forced Paul to write a letter in which he carefully rehearsed his understanding of the gospel, especially as it related to the salvation-historical questions of Jew and Gentile and the continuity of the plan of salvation” (\textit{The Epistle to the Romans} [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996], 20-21). Moo goes on to summarize: “We moderns must beware the tendency to overhistoricize: to focus so much on specific local and personal situations that we miss the larger theological and philosophical concerns of the biblical authors. That Paul was dealing in Romans with immediate concerns in the early church we do not doubt. But, especially in Romans, these issues are ultimately those of the church—and the world—of all ages: the
however, arguably treat the letter this way tacitly and/or in effect, assuming an equation between part of the letter body and Paul’s gospel without any plausible explanation.\textsuperscript{48} Gunther Bornkamm is often quoted in this relation, although a little unfairly.

continuity of God’s plan of salvation, the sin and need of human beings, God’s provision for our sin problem in Christ, the means to a life of holiness, and security in the face of suffering and death” (22). And it is worth noting that of the five “ultimate” issues named here, at least two and probably three are rooted in a conventional reading of Romans 1–4 (although perhaps including 5:1-11), while the others arguably raise acute systematic difficulties.

W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam are not dissimilar: “the most powerful of all the influences which have shaped the contents of the Epistle is the experience of the writer…. [T]he Apostle has made up his mind on the whole series of questions at issue [i.e., “the controversy relating to Jewish and Gentile”]; and he takes the opportunity of writing to the Romans at the very centre of the empire, to lay down calmly and deliberately the conclusions to which he has come” (A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896], xlii, xliii).

\textsuperscript{48} Less overtly, T. Schreiner rejects a purely coherent approach (Romans [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1998], 15-16), but lapses back into it at all the key points: cf. “[h]e must satisfy both Jewish and Gentile Christians that his stance on the Mosaic law, circumcision, and the place of Israel accords with the OT Scriptures… Paul’s intention is to show [the Gentile wing in the church] that his gospel constitutes the true fulfillment of what the OT Scriptures teach about the Mosaic law, circumcision, and the role of Israel (and Gentiles) in salvation history” (21); and “[h]uman beings will reflect on the wisdom of [God’s] plan and honor him. Paul ultimately wrote Romans… to honor his Lord”—actions not necessarily to be denied in a broader sense, but that seem to be very odd explanations for the composition and dispatch of a letter by Paul to Rome in the 50s CE (23). Principally in relation to the evident concern of Romans 12-15 with unity (i.e., features XV and XVI), Schreiner argues that “Paul wrote to unify the church so that they [i.e., Jews and Gentiles in Rome] would function harmoniously. Such unity could only be obtained by
a thorough explication of Paul’s gospel, for Paul’s advice would be heeded only if the Romans were persuaded that his understanding of the gospel was on target, especially in relationship to the Mosaic law and the place of Israel in salvation-history” (22). But several questions are begged by this additional reasoning.

As we will see in more detail shortly, Paul does not elsewhere preface exhortations to unity—and even in the specific sense of between “weak” and strong—with accounts of the gospel, nor does he link these two types of discussion together in abbreviated form. His authority does not necessarily rest on this process of evaluation by the Roman Christians, nor does he define his authority in this fashion in Romans. He is appointed an apostle by God!, who affirms this through signs and wonders if necessary. In addition, his reliability is more likely to have been evaluated in terms of his relationship with tradition: cf. 1 Cor. 15:1-7! Finally, that his understanding of the gospel that underpins his exhortations to unity would necessarily include some “relationship to the Mosaic law” assumes that the gospel is Justification (although Schreiner immediately introduces an awkward salvation historical dimension as well), and ignores the difficulties of that gospel generating ethical exhortations. It also ignores the controversial answers that Paul supplies to many of the Jewish questions—answers that would probably have elicited hostility and rejection from Christians with Jewish loyalties, as against acceptance and acquiescence. (Romans, when read conventionally, does not in my experience function especially well in modern ecumenical discussions between Jews and Christians. Aspects of this problem have been touched on already in DOG, part one, chapter four.)

For all these reasons, then, Schreiner’s attempts to link coherence and contingency together seem unsatisfactory, and his lapses into coherent explanation consequently lack probity. And in this he is representative of many other commentators.

Kathy Grieb courts this danger by way of a narrative emphasis: “Romans is a sustained argument for the righteousness of God that is identified with and demonstrated by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, understood primarily as his willing obedience to suffer death on the cross…. Paul’s argument in [Romans]… is constructed on a series of stories nested within the one great story of what God has done for Israel and for the Gentiles in Jesus Christ” (The Story of

N. T. Wright interprets similarly: “… to understand why Paul wanted to say just this at just this moment to these people, the most important thing to do is to grasp the main theme of the letter and to see why it was important to first-century Jews in general, to Paul in particular, and to him in this setting most specifically…. [namely] God and God’s covenant faithfulness and justice, rather than… ‘justification.’ …Paul’s aim, it seems, is to explain to the Roman church what God has been up to and where they might belong on the map of these purposes.” (“The Letter to the Romans. Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in The New Interpreter’s Bible [ed. L. Keck; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2002], 10:397, 403, 404).

Talbert is more dialectical, but still emphasizes coherence: “[Three stated aims] functioned as catalysts for Paul’s letter. The argument of Romans, however, was determined by the logic of the gospel as Paul had thought it out during his Aegean mission. In this sense, Romans is a summary of Paul’s mature thought insofar as it applied to the Roman occasion” (Romans, 12). He also invokes feature XVI, which will be assessed shortly: “[t]he function of Paul’s gospel [in Roman] was to unify Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome” (19, emphasis original).

Brendan Byrne is a rhetorical variation, viewing Romans as “a genuine ‘preaching of the gospel’—not as an instrument of initial conversion but, in epideictic mode, as a ‘celebration’ of values held in common, to increase adherence to those values and further detachment from rival values [i.e., the Jewish law!] that could threaten them” (Romans [Sacra Pagina; Collegeville, Minn.: Glazier, Liturgical Press, 1996], 18). However, just why Paul undertakes this epistolary “celebration” at Rome is not entirely clear.

Fitzmyer lapses into this view as well (partly by way of Stirewalt’s advocacy of Romans as a “letter-essay”: see more on this theory just below): “[Paul] writes the essay-letter to introduce himself to the Roman Christians, who are mostly unknown to him personally, and sets forth in it his view of the gospel, which he has been preaching in the east, and his reflections upon it, hoping that it will aid the lives of Roman Christians as well…. (Romans, 79). Ultimately Fitzmyer draws together several views of Romans’ provenance—as many as eight!—in a “multiple” explanation that strains credulity.
Bornkamm spoke of Romans as “Paul’s last will and testament”—“[a] great document, which summarizes and develops the most important themes and thoughts of the Pauline message and theology and which elevates his theology above the moment of definite situations and conflicts into the sphere of the eternally and universally valid…” (RD, pp. 27-28). Bornkamm did not view the letter in these terms literally and took pains to say so; rather, he wrote that it has become this type of text in effect, and he is absolutely correct. Most interpreters treat Romans, and Romans 1–4 in particular, as a systematic statement of Paul’s theological position—of his gospel—even when they disavow this approach elsewhere. However, this approach is supposedly no longer viable in the modern historical-critical period (at least, in terms of that particular language game).

It violates most of the canons of historicizing interpretation, ignoring both the contingency of Paul’s letters and the role of the original audience, valorizing instead the later role of the church in an overtly anachronistic mode, and privileging—in a rather modern fashion—Paul’s self-expression, and his supposed systematizing and reflective concerns. Hence, such an approach to the provenance of Romans ought to be dismissed from further consideration (that is, in a strictly historical-critical analysis), and interpretations in these terms held accountable. If Justification advocates rest ultimately on such views for their broader account of the letter, in this respect they will be vulnerable.

We should now consider one final approach to Romans’ provenance in terms of coherence briefly, although it overlaps partly with contingent features. Indeed, it almost straddles our two main approaches, although it has already been treated critically in chapter twelve and found wanting—the suggestion that our canonical Romans is in fact a composite document.

(7) Romans as composite. One alternative way of explaining the modulations within the letter body of Romans is to argue its composite nature. If canonical Romans was produced by the artificial conflation of previous shorter letters and texts, perhaps including non-Pauline materials on occasion, the noticeable modulations in the letter body would certainly be comprehensible—the strong transitions into Romans 1–4 (feature XI), and then to Romans 5–8, 9–11, and 12–15 in turn (features XII, XIII, and XV). And Romans 9–11 does arguably flow rather more smoothly in stylistic terms on from Romans 1–4, and Romans 12–15 from Romans 5–8. So this theory treats each element of Romans as contingent but explains the broader text’s modulations in terms of a later editor (who may also have had more coherent concerns).

Unfortunately, however, this theory too fails to satisfy its explanatory riders. It needs evidence at the relevant text-critical seams and generally fails to find it, while supporting evidence for redaction and a redactor is absent as well.49 So the suggestion of multiple preceding texts in Romans just does not seem to be true; it is a false characterization of the letter’s origin. Moreover, this theory does not solve our problems in ultimate terms in any case. All the conceptual tensions

49 See DOG, chapter twelve, § 2.1.
within Paul’s thought resulting from the clash of apparently different systems (and so on) remain. This should not necessarily undermine the plausibility of the theory as an explanation of Romans’ circumstantial and proximate frames. Nevertheless, most of our difficulties—at the intrinsic, systematic, and empirical frames, and in terms of textual under- and overdeterminations—are only relocated in generative terms, not resolved.  

For all these reasons, explanations in terms of composite origin are best abandoned. They serve the useful purpose of highlighting our difficulties in these relations—of the facts of overt modulations in the nature and direction of Paul’s argument in Romans. However, as solutions to those difficulties they have rightly been found wanting. We will follow the majority opinion, then, and treat canonical Romans in what follows as an essentially unified document—one springing from a single situation and contingency.

We turn now to consider some further attempted explanations in rather more detail, because they raise important substantive points about key texts in Romans that ultimately will have to be integrated into any plausible theory of the letter’s origin(s).

(8) Romans as addressing anti-Judaism at Rome. Many interpreters have suggested that Romans 11:17-24 in context (feature XIV) contain an important clue concerning the provenance of Romans as a whole. In 11:13 Paul turns to address

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50 We would still have to speak, then, of multiple contradictions or developments in Paul’s thinking.
a converted pagan audience explicitly: ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς ἐθνεῖσιν.⁵¹ An extended metaphorical argument then follows in vv. 17-24 in terms of natural and unnatural branches and their relationship to an olive tree.⁵² Some of the natural branches in this tree—unbelieving Israel—have been broken off (although temporarily: see vv. 23b, 24b, 25-29), and the unnatural or wild branches that believe—pagan converts—have been grafted in.⁵³ But Paul goes on to encode the position of believing pagans vis-à-vis unbelieving Jews in various terms that relativize any superiority perceptible in this relationship: (1) the pagan converts should fear rather than exult, because the pagan engrafting could be terminated too (an argumentative redirection); (2) pagan converts remain in God’s kindness only by belief, which may contain an elective dimension (i.e., they do not deserve this privileged position, and neither does it depend fundamentally on their efforts: cf. 11:28-32); (3) outside of this belief, even more sternness awaits them

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⁵¹ It seems possible at first in context that this is a dative of respect and hence not an explicit marker concerning a pagan audience, since Paul goes on to speak of his ministry to pagans that might arouse some of his kindred to jealously and salvation (“I speak to you with respect to pagans,” i.e., concerning pagans). However, Paul explicitly marks converted pagans as his audience again in v. 17 (συ... ἄγριέλαιος ὀν...), so the concerns of vv. 13b-14 seem parenthetical and should probably be punctuated and delivered as such.


⁵³ Most interpreters hold the tree trunk and root to be historical Israel, but a minority argues that it is Christ—esp. N. Walter, “Zur Interpretation Von Römer 9-11,” *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche* 81 (1984): 172-95. This rather fascinating question does not need to be settled here.
than befell Jewish unbelievers, because they are wild, not natural branches (an argument a minori ad maius); (4) meanwhile, the natural branches can be grafted into the tree again, because God is able to do so; (5) indeed, this will be easier, because they are natural (a second argument a minori ad maius); and (6) it will in fact happen, something that has been revealed to Paul directly in a μυστήριον; so (7) the pagan converts’ putative superiority is also only temporary, as well as being fragile and undeserved.

In view of the considerable argumentative development, it is clear that these admonitions on Paul’s part are neither parenthetical nor minor. It also seems unlikely that they are merely generic. Although the diatribal style can be directed at abstract and indirectly relevant considerations, we will see in due course that the diatribe in Romans freights directly relevant concerns for Paul in relation to the Roman Christians; it manipulates quite practical issues. So we should grant that this argument potentially relates to a concrete issue in Rome—some form of Christian anti-Judaism among converts from paganism that Paul either knows of or is anticipating. And that such a dynamic would or could have been present in the Christian community there is entirely plausible. The Greco-Roman world was, by modern standards, endemically racist, and marked anti-

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54 Not meaning by this characterization that the ancient world defined its discriminatory categories in the same terms that modern racists do. I refer here to pervasive attitudes of hostility, suspicion, and denigration, directed in the ancient world toward ethnic groups different from one’s own. Cf. Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race?: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); a useful introduction to ethnicity more generally is John Hutchinson, and Anthony D. Smith, ed., *Ethnicity* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press,
Judaism was widespread. So Paul’s anticipation of such an attitude among any Roman Christians converted from paganism (and perhaps even from Judaism in some cases: cf. 1 Thess. 2:14b-16!) requires no further justification; it is a self-sufficient datum.

It is no real surprise, then, to find many interpreters drawing attention to this element within the text as they attempt to explain Romans more broadly. Such concern on Paul’s part is unique, and it goes some way toward counterbalancing the harsh statements that he makes elsewhere about Jews. But at least here he seems to express sentiments similar to the post-Holocaust concerns that inform so much recent Pauline scholarship (and this even if he stops short of fully endorsing “two-track” salvation). In this argument Paul momentarily seems to take the side of non-Christian Jews over against an


55 Judaism was also of course admired by some. However, this was almost certainly a minority position. Anti-Jewishness seems to have been widespread: cf. M. Stern, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism (3 vols.; Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974, 81, 84).

56 So some contingent explanation of this emphasis remains desirable. Alternatively, perhaps the oddity is that this problem is not more apparent in any of his other letters.

57 Most notably, 1 Thess. 2:14-16, that has just been cited, but many other Pauline statements have also been judged harsh. Cf. also, e.g., Gal. 2:14 in context, and perhaps 6:16. And Rom. 15:31 should perhaps also be given due consideration, not to mention 16:20a in context.
arrogant pagan Christianity, a setting that fits much later Christian interpretation like a hand in a glove (and this even if the dynamics in the original situation were rather different). But in grasping this concern in 11:13-32, have we explained the rest of Romans—the crucial point in the present relation? Unfortunately, it is clear almost immediately that this feature cannot necessarily explain more than its own section of some twenty verses.

As we have just seen, Paul addresses the problem of pagan Christian arrogance toward unbelieving Jews in an illustration in which seven mutually reinforcing contentions reframe any such posture. He signals this concern with his previously pagan audience explicitly and admonishes them; however, problems arise if the concern is extended. Modern scholars expect rather more than such a brief treatment when they address this issue; they expect broader accounts of the nature of Israel and of Christianity, and of how those two histories relate to one another after the Christ event. These accounts then inform some position on the excruciating question of Jewish and Christian relations in a post-Auschwitz era—one that will often be complex and nuanced, to the degree that it is resolved at all. But it is difficult to argue that Paul had to supply such extended argumentation; such a claim begs the key question.

. We have no evidence that Paul felt the need to justify this admonition in extended terms. Moreover, what evidence there is seems to stand against this assertion. The presuppositions for Paul’s extended metaphorical admonition are all fairly obvious—salvation in relation to the kindness of God, Christ, belief of some sort, and the converse of this situation (i.e., unbelief), along with a preceding history of some special kind in relation to Israel (that is adequately acknowledged by Romans 9:4-5a). For the sake of argument, then, it could be
Pt 4, Ch. 13, p. 46

granted initially that Romans 9–11 functioned to set out the presuppositions of the later admonition. Romans 9:1-3, 10:1, and 11:1b introduce Paul’s personal concerns directly; 9:4-5 introduces Israel’s privileges; 9:30–10:21 discusses the peculiar dynamic of πίστις in relation to Israel and the pagans; and 11:1a and vv. 2-12 then reinforce the contention of 11:15-16 and 30 that good ultimately comes out of this. Romans 9:6-29 can then be justified as an apology for the scandal of pagan inclusion in these blessings at all. But Paul does not need to include most of these broader arguments in order to make his basic case that converts from paganism should not be arrogant toward unbelieving Jews. The basis for Paul’s admonition in 11:17-24 is fundamentally Christian (i.e., fear for your noninclusion, etc.). Moreover, some of Paul’s broader arguments really hinder his later admonition, which depends secondarily on Jewish historical privilege in 11:13-17. (That privilege underlies the two contentions from minor to major considerations.) Romans 9:4-5a makes the case for Jewish privilege very compactly, but 9:6-29 turns on it, with considerable Jewish backing, while 9:30–10:21 seems to attribute Jewish noninclusion to Jewish recalcitrance. All of this accumulates to suggest the embarrassing conclusion that 11:13-32 functions to defuse any pagan Christian misunderstanding of Paul’s previous argumentation, and not the reverse—i.e., that the more extended argumentation prepares for the later admonition. (This is how the passage is structured in any case in terms of both order and basic length.\footnote{If 11:13-32 are included in Paul’s admonition concerning anti-Judaism—twenty verses and around thirty-seven lines of Greek (UBS\textsuperscript{3})—then seventy verses and around 131 lines of Greek precede and follow this subsection. If 11:13-32 is pressed as an explanation for this entire section of argument, one wonders whether the tail is wagging the dog.})
In support of our gathering suspicions, we should note that Paul’s admonitions are not generally prepared for in this way—with extended salvation-historical preambles. It could be countered that since Paul is not writing in Romans to a congregation that knows him, he must supply extensive teaching here that could be presupposed in other situations, so it is not really surprising that we lack evidence of such preparation from those other texts. However, this appeal pushes debate into a realm where no verification or falsification is possible. We have no evidence that Paul prefaced his admonitions elsewhere in these terms, because we do not possess much evidence of Paul’s original oral preaching and teaching. We are left with a category containing one possible instance, and it is the instance currently in dispute. Moreover, it is assumed here that Paul’s preparation for such an appeal is fundamentally salvation-historical. And there is very little evidence of such argumentative preparation elsewhere in Paul at all.

Given the difficulties apparent in extending the explanatory force of the concern suggested by 11:13-32 as far as chapters 9–11, it is obvious what the main problems are with this datum as an explanation of Romans as a whole. There is no evidence that the explanatory force of this subsection should be so extended. Problems arise as it is so extended (because many of Paul’s arguments do not seem to prepare properly for its concerns). And the resulting argumentative

59 A difficulty that is especially important if interpreters want to link this feature with XI more strongly. Moreover, a further explanatory tension can be generated that is noted just below. It is very difficult to satisfy features XI, XIII, and XIV, within the same basic appeal: cf. C. H. Cosgrove, "The Justification of the Other: An Interpretation of Rom 1:18-4:25," Society of Biblical Literature 1992 Seminar Papers (ed. Eugene H. Lovering; Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 613-34.
structures within the subsection and the letter seem unbalanced if not inverted. (Basically, Romans does not obviously build toward 11:17-32, although this pericope is easily read as a correction to the overenthusiastic appropriation of 9:6-11:16.). Finally, we should mark that this explanation allows powerful modern hermeneutical concerns to be met, which surely must raise our historical-critical suspicions still further. Many interpreters would be comforted if Paul was functioning in this way, and so functioning rather like themselves, but this begs one of the most important questions in the whole realm of Pauline scholarship—whether the apostle was fundamentally a salvation-historical thinker, and one attuned, moreover, to post-Holocaust concerns.\textsuperscript{60} Such assertions court obvious dangers of anachronism and so need to be proved more than most and not merely assumed.

In sum, then, an emphasis on either present or potential anti-Judaism among the Roman Christian converts from paganism—like almost all the other self-sufficient features—must play some role within any comprehensive explanation of the letter. However, it cannot itself deliver that comprehensive explanation. Romans is not just an elaborate preparation for Paul’s admonition to such Christians to be sympathetic and not arrogant toward unbelieving Jews (however much we might like it to be). Paul does say this, and we may be grateful for it. But perhaps even this rather unusual statement on his part would benefit from a degree of further explanation.

\textsuperscript{60} The qualification here in terms of Paul thinking \textit{fundamentally} in salvation-historical terms should be noted. It is not being denied that his thinking has salvation-historical dimensions; indeed, I would argue that this is necessary. At issue, rather, is the question whether his most basic, controlling notions are salvation-historical. Cf. \textit{Quest}, chs. 3 and 7, 56-68, 132-45.
(9) Romans as contingent, addressing the weak and the strong (or some such). The most obvious feature in relation to which to seek some overtly contingent explanation of Romans is XVI—the presence of some potential conflict between the “weak” and another group as suggested by chapter 14. Indeed, this view seems to enjoy the most support currently of all the theories on offer and so can fairly be designated the “majority” position (and it will also consequently receive a more detailed treatment).61 This approach exists in numerous subtle variants, often depending on the degree to which other features are incorporated into a particular account, but all are based at bottom on the situation broadly perceptible in Romans 14.62

61 “Majority” being used here in a relative, not an absolute, sense.

62 Klein notes the earlier support of H. Preisker, H. W. Bartsch, and W. Marxsen (“Paul’s Purpose,” RD, 35). To these representatives we should add the rather maximalist account of Paul F. Minear (The Obedience of Faith. The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans [London: SCM, 1971]); the classic version by Wolfgang Wiefel (see “The Jewish Community in Ancient Rome and the Origins of Roman Christianity,” RD, 85-101); and the more recent advocacy of the view by James Dunn (Romans 1-8 [Dallas, Texas: Word, 1988], esp. xliv-liv); N. T. Wright (”The Letter to the Romans,” 406-8); A. J. M. Wedderburn (The Reasons for Romans [SNTW; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988]; cf. also “Purpose and Occasion of Romans Again,” RD, 195-202); Fitzmyer, Romans, esp. 76-78 (although he also endorses other theories); and Esler (Conflict and Identity in Romans). (Many more figures could be named here.)

Watson also advocates this position—cf. Francis Watson PJ&G, 163-91; cf. also “The Two Roman Congregations: Romans 14:1–15:13,” RD, 203-15. But he nuances it distinctively. Watson argues in PJ&G that the intra-Christain tensions evident in Romans are directly related to external relations between the law-free church emerging at Rome—a sect—and the synagogues—the parent body. But there is no direct evidence of this vital additional dynamic. It also ignores the
There two types of Christians are treated who seem also to exist in a potentially problematic relation to one another—“the weak” and “the strong.”63 The former distinguish foods and days (cf. vv. 2 and 5; they possibly also make distinctions concerning wine: cf. v. 21); the latter do not. Paul exhorts the weak not to “judge” the strong, and the strong not to “despise” the weak, although he clearly sympathizes with the fundamental posture of the strong (cf. esp. v. 14a). But if the strong go on to despise the weak or—worse still—to cause them to stumble through their own uninhibited behavior, then Paul views this as a serious shortcoming.

However, the broader relevance of this extended admonition to a concrete situation at Rome has been challenged. Indeed, “the Romans debate” began in large measure because of Robert Karris’s suggestion in 1973 that these instructions by Paul be treated in generalized terms, to which Karl Donfried replied emphatically in the negative. And Donfried was almost certainly correct to argue for a degree of specificity here.64 Paul is not known personally to the Roman Christians and so has to tread rather softly in his admonitions, hence presumably the chapter’s slightly blander tone. Moreover, the very fact that his probable arrival of law-free Christianity in Rome in some close association with Paul and his coworkers. The claim that this radical form of early Christianity has been in Rome for some time independently of the radical Pauline mission—the crucial point for Watson’s thesis to work—needs justification, and none is forthcoming.

63 “The strong” are not so designated until 15:1—a point worth noting but not overemphasizing.

advice in 1 Corinthians is so pointed counts against the suggestion that it is a
generalized topos there, and only included in Romans for that reason; at Corinth
Paul is clearly targeting a particular situation in that congregation caused by
different postures toward certain Jewish practices, and ultimately by a
complicated mission history. Confirming this contingency, the “topos” does not
appear in any other noncontingent loci in Paul’s letters where we might
otherwise expect it in such terms—for example, in the paraenesis of Galatians, 1
Thessalonians, and Philippians.

But Karris’s observations were not without force. Paul’s treatment is
significantly shorter and more generalized in Romans 14 than it is in 1
Corinthians 8–10, and this ultimately requires explanation. If a long and rather
specific discussion in 1 Corinthians cannot explain the entirety of that letter and
is, furthermore, not prefaced by extended theological discussions, why should
we believe that a shorter, blander discussion so prefaced can explain Romans?
We may concede, then, that the discussion in Romans 14 refers ultimately to an
actual situation at Rome, but the extension of that feature to a comprehensive
explanation has clearly been problematized by Karris’s case. The problem seems
less urgent at Rome than at Corinth, hence (in part) Paul’s noticeably softer,
briefer, and more generalized treatment.

Nevertheless, many scholars insist on making the attempt to explain
Romans comprehensively in terms of the weak and the strong, and not without
reason. It allows, among other things, for useful connections with some of the
other important features in Romans that have already been noted. Links with
features VII and XV are not too difficult to establish, supported by I, II, and IV.
That is, Paul’s unusual instructions in chapter 16 to the Roman Christians to
greet one another are now comprehensible within a broader concern for the healing of divisions at Rome. A process of mutual greeting—involving travel, meeting, hospitality, and so on—is a strategy cleverly formulated to facilitate unity. And chapters 12–15 are concerned frequently throughout with unity as well. The same theme then reemerges with special force in this major subsection’s conclusion (which is arguably the letter body’s conclusion as well)—15:1-13. A prayer for an implicitly unified hope, joy, peace, and understanding, concludes the entire letter body in v. 13. So feature XVI can arguably be extended relatively easily to explain XV well. An acceptance of Paul’s apostleship by the Roman Christians (II)—without which his exhortations would lack authority—and a concern on Paul’s part for those pagan converts who seem to be experiencing disunity (I), are then clearly also explicable in this broader relation.

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66 Paul emphasizes a unified service and discernment in 12:1-2 and then urges a humble, not arrogant, appreciation of giftedness in the broader context of the single body of Christ in vv. 3-8. Verses 9-16 are a set of generalized but essentially harmonious exhortations probably organized around the central virtue of love (v. 9a).

67 The strong are to follow Christ’s example and please not themselves but the weak, and to receive one another as Christ received them. Moreover, Christ served the Jews in order to fulfill that tradition and to extend God’s mercy to the pagans (and this in fulfillment of numerous scriptural sayings).
Moreover, Paul’s more generic desires to visit and to strengthen the Roman Christians (and so on)—feature IV—are also understandable in relation to this agenda. So feature XVI can encompass most of the motifs in the letter frame, along with the important data underlying feature XV in the letter body. Clearly, one important explanatory dimension within the provenance of Romans seems to have been grasped in all this.

But there is a great deal that remains unexplained. Moreover, once again, when this self-sufficient feature is pressed beyond certain obvious boundaries in the data to a more comprehensive function, its explanatory power seems to decline if not evaporate. I detect one principal set of difficulties here, and two further, more minor problem. 68

The principal difficulty surrounding the elevation of feature XVI to a comprehensive level is that it does not seem able to explain the rest of the letter body in Romans—features IX through XIV. Why does Paul craft such a complex, modulated, abstract, and Jewish preamble, in largely unparalleled fashion, for his later exhortations, which are themselves noticeably blander than in 1 Corinthians? Indeed, 1 Corinthians is especially problematic in this relation. Paul clearly crafts a considerable amount of reinforcement there for his

68 Although I also do not detect a problem where many other scholars do. That is, it does not seem necessary to identify these parties precisely for the broader explanation to hold good. For Paul to write a letter oriented in these terms, he needs only to know of a destructive relationship between two groups who are separated by their posture in relation to standard Jewish practices. He then encodes these groups into the letter’s admonitions. Hence, we do not need to grasp the empirical situation in Rome precisely in order to understand the letter as a rhetorical composition and event.
recommendations to the weak and the strong, constructing a chiastic discussion that pivots around an account of his own renunciations, flexibility, and discipline (1 Corinthians 9). So that evidence points both to a lower degree of urgency in the Roman situation (which is not to deny that the problem exists) and to Paul’s evident lack of any need to provide an extensive abstract preamble of the sort just noted. It might be replied that the Corinthians already know Paul and his teaching and so do not require this additional material as the Romans do. But several considerations suggest that this objection is invalid.

The Corinthians have not necessarily yet been exposed to the language and argumentation of Justification. That claim depends on an approach to Pauline biography that has already been challenged (i.e., it is based on a naïve acceptance of the narrative sequence supplied by Acts and so ends up placing Galatians first in the sequence of extant Pauline letters). A good biographical case can be made that the Justification discourse evident at times in Paul’s letters actually lies later than 1 Corinthians. So Paul has probably formulated this particular set of admonitions independently of the Justification discourse. More importantly, the discussion in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10 nowhere references this underlying abstract theological material (i.e., material similar to Romans 1–11). It actually tends to supply a different set of theological rationales from that material, where it does so, as we have already noted. Nor does the discussion in Romans 14 reference this earlier material significantly (except in certain limited respects that will be discussed in more detail shortly). 69 And all of these

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69 In one sense we are raising here an additional criterion incumbent on this type of explanation. It seems reasonable to ask for subunits that are ostensibly dependent on other
indications point in the same direction: what evidence we have concerning Paul’s practice suggests that he does not preface admonitions to congregational unity in terms of the weak and the strong with extensive, abstract, Jewish theological discussions that ostensibly ground those admonitions.\textsuperscript{70} The only argumentation that Paul needs in order to address the congregational tensions apparent in Romans 14 is Romans 14 (perhaps supported by the rest of the paraenesis in Romans 12, 13, and 15).

Even if the foregoing case could be made, it could only explain one of the three preceding subunits—the theological preamble that grounded the later discussion. The reasons for Paul’s inclusion of the other two units would remain opaque. So the all-important modulations within the letter body of Romans would remain unexplained in any case; two of the preceding three major subunits would still be undetermined.

The question of appropriateness arises here as well. Romans 14 is a tactful account that seeks to defuse possible recriminations between two groups with subunits for their theological rationale to provide some linguistic and argumentative evidence of that dependence; Paul should at points explicitly flag up the argumentative relationship through linguistic markers and/or theological and argumentative summaries. In the absence of any such connections, it is fair to query whether a conceptual relationship exists. What secondary, dependent discussion takes place in Paul that does not at some point mark that dependence overtly?

\textsuperscript{70} It could be replied that precisely because the Romans are not like the Corinthians, who know Paul well, they require the extensive theoretical preamble that underlies Paul’s later practical arguments. However, there is no strong evidence that Paul tutored the Corinthians with Justification arguments. Nor do his discussions in 1 Corinthians or in Romans reference that material directly.
different evaluations of the importance of key Jewish practices—Sabbath and festal observances, and the consumption of properly prepared meat and wine.\footnote{It could be argued on the basis of Romans 14 alone that non-Jewish practices might also explain the underlying situation, most notably, Pythagorean temporal and dietary instructions. However, given the broader concern of Romans with Jewish questions, the most likely explanation of its provenance (which we consider shortly), the most probable origins of the Roman Christian house churches, and their explicit marking in Romans 16, a Jewish explanation does seem the more likely one.}

Without conceding the theological position with respect to nonobservance, Paul seeks to fashion a flexible and sensitive posture for both parties. It needs to be asked, then—as a further criterion—if the conventional construal of the preceding subunits actually contributes constructively to these goals (a point already touched on in chapter eleven).

If earlier subunits are explicable as the appropriate theological foundation for these later exhortations and postures, as advocates of the centrality of feature XVI urge, do they actually fulfill this function? In fact, Paul’s widespread aggression in the earlier sections of the letter against the importance of many standard Jewish practices seems to cause problems in this regard. By the end of chapter 4—according to its conventional construal—Paul has undermined the needs for law observance, for circumcision, and for direct (i.e., biological) descent from Abraham. Moreover, the Jewish Scriptures have been co-opted to support this program. Thus, Judaism, as it understood itself, has been almost totally undermined.\footnote{So we return here to a point already noted in relation to Romans 9-11, and apparent in Cosgrove’s study, “The Justification of the Other.”} By the end of chapter 10, moreover, the bulk of Israel is not even
saved (at least, currently)! And divine election for Israel has been redefined in relation to its prior history so that it now includes direct converts from the pagans!

A difficult rhetorical dynamic is now generated for this theory. Paul seems in Romans 14 to seek to mitigate any dismissive actions by the strong against the weak. The former are not to despise the latter because of their continued endorsement of certain Jewish practices. Similarly, the weak are not to judge the strong. If the preceding argumentative material is fundamentally explained by these admonitions, however, along with the situation that underlies them, then Paul has been clumsy. He has prepared for his later complementary and flexible admonitions by devastating the theological rationale underlying one party and massively reinforcing the position underlying the other. If Paul’s preceding arguments hold good, the strong seem entitled to despise the weak, while the weak are simply foolish to judge the strong. And these realizations point us in an intriguing direction.

As a systematic preamble to the admonitions in Romans 14, the letter’s rhetoric is basically incompetent (if not completely implausible). However, if this relationship is reversed, then the letter’s rhetoric instantly becomes comprehensible; Paul’s earlier attacks on standard aspects of Judaism could create

73 There is also a difficulty with the way these arguments and later constituencies have been coded. The opening arguments of Romans devastate a law-observant and arrogant judger. This is not quite the depiction of “the weak,” however, that Paul later supplies. They are not a group of confident, learned pedagogues who base their actions on instruction and Scripture, but a group afflicted by the pangs of conscience. This lack of correlation further complicates any claim that Romans 1–3 prepares for the discussions of chapter 14.
a situation of “strong aggression,” and so Romans 14 might be added as a necessary constraint on that destructive result. (The earlier sections will of course require some independent explanation.) In short, Romans 14 seems to function better rhetorically as a constraint on preceding argumentation, mitigating its potentially harsh application, and not a climax to a preceding argumentative preparation—and just as we have seen Romans 11:17-32 functions best as well.

Our suspicion that feature XVI cannot plausibly be pressed to explain the entire letter is confirmed by two more minor sets of observations.

While it is plausible to suggest that some establishment of Paul’s apostolic authority must take place for his admonitions to the strong and the weak at Rome to be effective (along with their ostensible theological preamble, which requires acceptance as well), a close reading of Paul’s developments of his apostolicity suggests that this explanation is not entirely adequate. An explanation in terms of Romans 14 and feature XVI entails that Paul’s apostleship is a necessary presupposition for the later discussion’s effectiveness. However, Paul actually encodes his apostleship as—at least in part—the cause of his communication with the Roman Christians. This stronger, generative role is evident in both the letter’s opening and its closing (and we have already noted some of the evidence for these assertions).

Paul begins to establish his apostleship from his initial declaration that he is the letter’s sender—literally, from the letter’s first word. He is the sole author of Romans, and he immediately expands this statement with genitive, participial, and prepositional phrases and clauses that articulate his apostleship and gospel in terms of scriptural legitimation and a christological focus. Verse 6 then includes the addressees, the Roman Christians, within this divine gift and call,
along with any others “in Rome who love God and are called holy” (v. 7a). The gospel is reintroduced almost immediately at the outset of the thanksgiving paragraph to ground Paul’s constant remembrance of and intercession for the Romans (v. 9). He wishes to visit them in order “to see” them, “to impart a spiritual gift” to them, and “to strengthen” them, all of which should be a mutual encouragement (vv. 11-12). His second reference to a desire to visit (in v. 13) is then expanded in terms of the desire to have a harvest among them as he has had among the rest of the pagans. Paul is “obligated” to this constituency—whether “Greek, barbarian, learned, or illiterate” (v. 14). Hence, both references by Paul in the proem to his desire to visit Rome are explicitly grounded in his service to the gospel, which is immediately to say as well—in terms of the information he has supplied in the letter’s address—in his divine apostolic call to proclaim that gospel.

Exactly the same argumentative dynamic is evident in the letter closing. Paul begins to segue out of the letter body in 15:14, but in so doing he speaks immediately—albeit somewhat apologetically—of his divine gift and priestly duty to the pagans. Hence, this is what undergirds his actual writing of the letter in explicit terms: “I have written to you rather boldly at times so as to remind you of things because of the gift which has been given to me by God, namely, that I should be a sacred minister of Christ Jesus to the pagans with the holy duty of [his] divine proclamation …” (15:15-16a, DC). Paul’s discussion of his apostleship continues—as we have already seen—through v. 23 and includes the troublesome claim that, in fulfillment of Isaiah 52:15, he proclaims Christ where he has not yet been seen or heard. The same apostolic theme then underlies 15:27, 29, 16:4, and 17, and arguably reemerges in 16:25-26 as one of the letter’s final
statements. Indeed, in 16:25 the text states that Paul’s gospel and proclamation strengthen those pagans who submit to it, and who also believe and understand it.

So it seems clear that Paul’s apostleship, which includes God’s divine call to him to proclaim Christ to the pagans, seems in some sense to be a generative force for Romans. Both the letter opening and the closing place that apostleship at the basis of Paul’s desires to visit and to write to the Roman Christians. It is consequently more than a mere presupposition for certain ethical admonitions. It is encoded in causal terms; it explains those desires in some sense. Hence, any explanation that can take account of this dynamic will benefit from the text’s explicit encoding of Paul’s motivations. And since a comprehensive explanation grounded in Romans 14 seeks, precisely, to generate the letter in relation to that situation in Rome, it must struggle in this relation.

We should note further that feature II—Paul’s apostleship and gospel—is not merely somewhat redundant (i.e., as a causal factor) in a comprehensive explanation in terms of feature XVI, but its development in terms of the non-interference clause of 15:20—feature III—is entirely opaque. Paul gains nothing argumentatively by including this development of his apostleship; indeed, he causes trouble for himself by inviting the obvious retort that he therefore has no business evangelizing or admonishing at Rome!

A final observation: a generative role for Romans 14 suggests that the entire letter is grounded in a serious deficiency at Rome, one serious enough to warrant a letter and complex enough to warrant a sophisticated and extended discussion. However, Paul’s characterizations of the Roman Christians are generally positive. Although he clearly believes that a visit by him will be of
benefit, he does not characterize the Roman Christians in fundamentally negative terms themselves. He praises the “worldwide” reporting of their fidelity, and in longing to see them and strengthen them concedes immediately that this will result in a mutual encouragement because of a shared fidelity (1:12). Indeed, precisely because his visits and writing are grounded in his own apostolic call, he does not ground the letter in Roman deficiencies. It is his obligation to preach that necessitates a visit and a harvest (vv. 13-15). His letter also consequently takes place in the mode of “reminding”; it is even “rather bold at times” (15:15).

Certain passing remarks in the letter body confirm this impression. As is well known, the Roman Christians “have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which [they] were entrusted” (6:17b), thereby being “set free from sin” (6:18); they also “know the law” already (7:1). The letter frequently attests to a rich scriptural competence, at least on the part of some. Paul also has nothing but praise for the Christians that he names in Romans 16. In particular, Junia and Andronicus are “prominent among the apostles,” have been in Christ longer than Paul, and have also been imprisoned like him—a key marker of Christian authenticity and dedication.

We may accept of course that epistolary flattery is both common and wise. Paul has no desire to alienate the Romans by criticizing them; they do not know him, so any aggression on his part would be foolish. Ancient etiquette also demanded compliments. He is trying to create a sympathetic hearing. However, there is no hint of deficiency or negativity in any of these remarks, and this is disquieting. On the one hand, there is now no direct evidence in the letter at all outside Romans 14 for its ostensible principal cause—the conflicts within that community. On the other hand, there is a level of flattery in relation to the
Roman Christians that, if Romans 14 is causal, arguably approaches the untruthful. Indeed, it is worth noting that Paul can be reasonably blunt in his other letters when he feels that it is warranted! (One suspects that the absence of any such honesty from Romans cannot be entirely explained in terms of a lack of prior friendship; moreover, Paul does in fact already know some of the Christians at Rome quite well—certainly Prisca, Aquila, and Epaenetus.) At the least, it seems fair to suggest that an explanation that can account for the largely positive remarks by Paul about the Roman Christians (that is, arguably except in Romans 14) should be judged superior to one that cannot.\footnote{Feature XIV could also be introduced here—pagan Christian anti-Judaism. And I concede the presence of this in some sense at Rome, but would not yet concede that it concretely characterizes Roman Christians per se. Still, it is certainly possible counterevidence and should be noted. Its relevance is discussed immediately below.}

It seems, then, that a comprehensive explanation of Romans in terms of feature XVI is in difficulties. Too many features of the data remain unaccounted for in relation to any such explanation, if they do not contradict it (whether gently or overtly)—II, III, IV, and probably most if not all of IX through XIV.\footnote{It might be argued that a statement of the gospel should precede the admonitions of Romans 14 to ground them theologically, but I have suggested that this is implausible. However, a concession in terms of Paul’s rhetorical incompetence can partly rescue this position. A multiple theory might also mitigate this shortfall partly as well; see more on this immediately.} But this is not to say that one important element within the broader explanation of Romans has not been grasped. Feature XVI can account for its surrounding subunit in chapters 12–15 and much of the letter closing, which are important
matters (i.e., features VII and XIV). Hence, the sense is growing that another important subordinate element within the broader explanation of Romans has been identified—a sustained concern with congregational unity. (This should be added to Paul’s evident concern with the possibility of Christian anti-Judaism, which also relates more broadly to the issue of unity.) However, the key explanatory dynamic for the letter still seems to lie beyond us. We turn, then, to consider one further attempt to grasp it. Could it lie in some combination of theories and features that we have already considered separately?

(10) A multiple explanation. The most popular such theory probably revolves around a combination of features XIV and XVI—anti-Judaism among converted pagans and possible conflict over Jewish issues between the weak and the strong. But any assessment of the validity of this combined position is complicated by the status of the historical reconstruction that is usually offered to support it.77

This explanation develops from an ostensible expulsion of the Jews from Rome by the emperor Claudius in 49 CE (cf. esp. Acts 18:2). An elegant, although rather complex, account of the development of Christianity at Rome can be supplied using the possible sociological consequences of this event that creates—largely simultaneously—a scenario of divided Jews and pagans at Rome, and of separate and alienated groups of Jewish and converted pagan Christians as well.

76 It might also prove the best explanation for Klein’s observation that Paul seems, rather unusually, to avoid calling the Roman Christians an ἐκκλησία, which would have implied their unity.

77 See esp. the accounts of Wiefel, Dunn, and Wright, already noted in relation to hypothesis 9 above.
This ostensibly generates features XIV and XVI at the same time—pagan Christian anti-Judaism, and tension between pagan and Jewish Christians. And this apparent explanatory coup in historical terms generates its own momentum in favor of the combined theory.\(^{78}\)

A critical scrutiny, however, reveals numerous points of fragility, if not a dependence on claims that are either unfounded or overtly incorrect. In my view, this reconstruction is best abandoned. But this does not entail that the multiple explanation it supports needs to be abandoned as well (as I once thought). Both features XIV and XVI are essentially self-sufficient; they need no such external reconstruction in order to justify their presence in early Christian congregations, whether at Rome or elsewhere, and so be addressed by Paul in a letter as potentially problematic. The problem of weak versus strong arose at Corinth independently of any expulsion, and the existence of broader pagan anti-Judaism in any ancient city needs no justification. So the criterion of plausible simultaneity that must be satisfied—as for all multiple theories—is not failed if the usual narrative that undergirds this particular explanation is jettisoned. But

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\(^{78}\) The theory posits that Claudius expelled all the Jewish Christians from Rome, along with the Jews (in 49 CE). The converted pagan Christians remained behind, not being subject to the edict. Claudius’ edict supposedly lapsed upon his death (in 54 CE), at which point the Jewish Christians returned. But they were now a somewhat alienated minority within the Roman church—one with different traditions. And they were also viewed with still more suspicion by the surrounding pagan populace than they had been prior to their expulsion. The pagan Christians may have even been tempted to ratify this broader pagan view (being converts from paganism themselves, with no local Jewish Christian correctives).
this realization does render the issues surrounding that reconstruction something of a distraction, so it will not be treated in much detail here.\textsuperscript{79}

In short, we should concede that it is quite possible in historical terms that a combination of issues underlay features XIV and XVI in Romans, and nothing more than this really needs to be said by way of broader historical reconstruction. But does this powerful multiple theory solve all our difficulties and supply the comprehensive explanation that we have been looking for in relation to the letter itself?

Unfortunately, it does not. The combination of these two theories explains more of Romans than one in isolation—hence, doubtless, its widespread endorsement—but large parts of the letter are still not covered—notably, features II through IV and IX through XII.\textsuperscript{80} Essentially, a multiple theory—given a basic plausibility in terms of simultaneity—is only as good as the sum of its parts. And if the strengths of one of the component theories do not overlap perfectly with the weaknesses of another, and vice versa, thereby eliminating all the

\textsuperscript{79} Further details in this relation can be found in Dixon Slingerland, \textit{Claudian Policymaking and the Early Imperial Repression of Judaism at Rome} (South Florida Studies in the History of Judaism 160; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997).

\textsuperscript{80} Feature II concerns Paul's apostleship, which remains unexplained as a causal factor by any emphases on anti-Judaism at Rome. The non-interference clause (III) also remains opaque. Moreover, the lack of any widespread signals from Paul of overt deficiencies among the Roman Christians further problematizes this theory—evidence related to feature IV. (Emphases on features XIV and XVI can beg the question at this point.) Similarly, the multiple abstract and Jewish units in the letter body preceding chapters 9–11 have not been explained either—features IX through XII and chapters 1–8. Clearly, these are serious deficiencies. It seems, then, that we cannot simply multiply our way out of our difficulties.
weaknesses, we must continue our search. Moreover, both these theories and their key subsections, when pressed, hinted that our expectations were possibly reversed (the tail wagging the dog, so to speak). When considered in the broader context of the entire letter, these subsections and their generative features—XIV in the context of XIII, and XVI in the context of XV—worked better as rhetorical constraints and corrections to difficulties raised, rather than as climactic points to which everything else was building. And this may well prove a significant pointer to the one theory that ultimately does explain Romans.

Why is Paul so concerned in Romans to defuse possible anti-Judaism—and this repeatedly? He seems to bend over backward at times, creating multiple reasons and metaphors to try to ensure that his earlier arguments do not devolve into insensitive behavior toward either Jews (so 11:17-32) or Jewish Christians (so 14:1-15:13). Similarly, a sustained concern with unity is apparent, extending in particular through the letter’s final quarter, and again with particular reference to Jewish practices. It is time to consider in detail the one theory that in my view can explain these emphases, along with the rest of Romans.
§ 4 A successful theory—Romans as an attempt to negate the influence of hostile countermissionaries at Rome

At this point I simply want to suggest an explanation for Romans’ circumstantial frame that, as far as I can tell, satisfies all the relevant criteria—the only theory that seems to be able to do so. This suggestion is not original (although perhaps I will press it further than has generally been the case, in terms of its implications). It has been made periodically since the inception of the modern historical-critical period, although as far as I can tell it has never enjoyed great salience.⁸¹

Fundamentally, Romans was written for the same reasons that Galatians was written—to defend Paul’s gospel against the depredations of certain hostile countermissionaries. Moreover, the significant differences between these two letters are more apparent than real—the similarities are well known—and all are explicable in terms of the different relationship that Paul had with the Roman Christians, most of whom did not know him or his gospel (or this debate). He had of course founded and then probably also revisited the Galatian Christian congregations. (These contentions will be expanded shortly.) So this theory of Romans’ origins builds primarily from feature VIII—Paul’s caustic warnings in the letter closing against false teachers (16:17-20), the only feature in the data that seems self-sufficient or independently valid and capable of expansion in a way that can plausibly explain all the other issues.

An explanation of Romans as an engagement primarily with false teachers has probably been obscured in the past by many factors—perhaps in particular by the prevailing “systematic” reading of Romans as Paul’s self-expression,

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Das objects to this reconstruction—that he calls “apologetic”—on several grounds (Solving the Romans Debate, 43-49): (1) it cannot account for the “climactic place of Rom 9-11” (feature XIII); (2) it also cannot explain the maintenance of Israel’s position in that discussion over against Gentile arrogance (XIV); (3) Paul’s paraenesis in Romans 12:1–15:13 is not comprehensible in this relation either (XV and XVI); and (4) Paul does not provide “any indication that the Romans had objections to his message or harbored suspicions about him because of a supposed reputation for controversy in the East” (42: cf. VIII). Later he also argues (5) that the figures addressed in Rom. 16:17-18—who “serve… their own appetites”—are not plausibly identified with the Teacher(s), who advocated Jewish law-observance (cf. VIII again). (Unfortunately, this issue is slightly misrepresented. I do not equate the Teacher(s) with “the weak” of Romans 14: cf. Solving, 44-45.) All these concerns are addressed in detail in what follows.
abetted by a false reconstruction of Paul’s biography. But Romans is best understood as an attempt by letter to forestall an attack on Paul’s gospel in Rome, so it is a full-fledged engagement with “another gospel that is really no gospel at all” (cf. Gal. 1:6b-7a, DC)—a quite concrete circumstance. As such, the letter does contain an account of Paul’s gospel, as conventional readers have always suspected, but it contains much more than this; it is frequently an offensive operation that attacks the opposing gospel, while it seeks as well—more defensively—to rebut the criticisms that the advocate of this opposing gospel has directed (at times quite ingeniously) at Paul’s. In view of this fundamental dynamic, we can in large measure explain the letter’s rather abstract argumentation, its concern with various Jewish questions, and its complexity. The letter is by turns aggressive, apologetic, and expository, because all of these rhetorical functions were a necessary part of any effective, persuasive advocacy of Paul’s position in the highly contested setting of Roman Christianity, as he understood that situation to be developing.

In elaborating this theory, I will first point to the key pieces of evidence in the letter that underlie it. Then, second, I will show how this dynamic explains all the other previously opaque pieces of data (a discussion that also continues the process of attestation). It will become apparent that this explanation of Romans has the signal virtue of being able to appeal to evidence overtly in the text that is, moreover, capable of being expanded into a comprehensive explanation of the entirety of Romans in all its modulations and complexity—the only datum that can be successfully so expanded. Finally, third, I will consider possible objections to the theory, addressing certain methodological and text-
critical concerns and investigating briefly the biographical and historical questions raised.
4.1 Internal evidence

Paul tends to conclude his letters in almost as stereotypical a fashion as he begins them, by running through several habitual speech acts:

- a peace benediction;
- a hortatory section (that can precede the peace wish);
- greetings, including more specifically
  - greetings,
  - a kiss greeting, and
  - an autograph greeting; and
- a grace benediction.
- Further optional elements are also often present, whether a doxology, an expression of joy, a letter of commendation, and/or a postscript.

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82 See esp. Jervis for a detailed account of the letter openings and thanksgiving paragraphs: The Purpose of Romans. The openings contain: (1) a sender formula including (a) the name of the sender (and co-sender / s), (b) title / s (apostle / servant), and (c) a short descriptive phrase indicating the source of the title / s; (2) a recipient formula including (a) an identification of the recipient (usually using ἐκκλησία), and (b) a short phrase positively describing the recipients' relationship to God; and (3) a greeting formula including (a) a greeting (grace and peace), (b) a recipient (to you), and (c) a divine source (from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ).

These final comments by Paul can contain especially significant information about the intended function of the letter that they conclude. So, although 16:17-20 occurs at the end of Romans, it is not for that reason marginal so much as located in a place of strategic importance.\(^8^4\) It would in fact be the last piece of substantive instruction that the Roman Christians would hear from Paul. Following this, only greetings and a grace wish occur definitely (although the position of the latter is confused, and might also constitute a doublet\(^8^5\)), along with a possible doxology. The short subsection also begins with an important verb, παρακαλῶ, which occurs here for the third time in this form (cf. 12:1 and 15:30\(^8^6\)). While Jervell exaggerates its importance, suggesting that its appearance in 15:30 is programmatic for the entire letter, its significance should not for this reason be underplayed. Paul follows customary ancient epistolary practice in using it to foreground significant matters for the letter’s audience. It is a strong exhortation.

Following this verb—and ultimately in dependence on it—Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to be wary of certain troublemakers. He describes them

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\(^8^4\) It has been queried whether this subsection was originally a part of Romans. This issue is considered briefly in § 4.3 below—“Possible objections.”

\(^8^5\) The text-critical evidence is complex. The Western tradition (principally D, F, G) tends to place a similar grace wish after v. 23 instead (and some MSS place the wish after v. 27). Gamble and Jervis suggest that a doublet was present (and I am inclined to agree with them): see Gamble, *Textual History*; and Jervis, *Purpose*.

\(^8^6\) It occurs absolutely in 12:8. Cf. also 1 Cor. 1:10; 4:16; 14:31; 16:15; 2 Cor. 2:8; 5:20; 6:1; 8:6; 10:1; 12:8; Phil. 4:2; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1; 5:11, 14; cf. also Eph. 4:1; 2 Thess. 3:12; cf. BDAG, pp. 764-65.
very carefully. He first employs the verbs σκόπω and ἐκκλίνω ("watch out for" and "shun") and then crafts a complex phrase that characterizes these figures initially in schismatic terms; they cause factious dissensions (τοὺς τὰς διχοστασίας... ποιοῦντας; cf. 1 Cor. 3:3 v.l.; Gal. 5:20; cf. also 1 Clement 20:4; and Hermas, *Similitudes*, 8, 7, 2; 8, 7, 6; 8, 8, 5), and temptations or enticements (σκάνδαλα) "contrary to the teaching which you learned." Paul then deploys further elements from the ancient polemical discourse in relation to philosophical opponents (especially Epicureans), accusing these figures of pandering to their own appetites—literally, to their bellies or κοιλία—and of not serving Christ. Moreover, they "deceive the innocent in heart" (ἐχαπτάτῳ τὰς καρδίας τῶν ἀκάκων) "through smooth speech and false eloquence" (διὰ τῆς χρηστολογίας καὶ εὐλογίας). The verb of deception recalls 7:11, which is in turn a probable echo of the work of the serpent as Eve describes it in Genesis 3:13 (and that Paul transposes into the work of Sin in Romans 7). Paul then expresses his confidence that the famous submission of the Roman Christians, their ἕπακοι, will lead to their "wisdom concerning the good, but innocence concerning evil." |

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87 Cf. also χρηστολόγον in Julius Capitolinus, *Pertinax* 13—"a smooth talker" (cited in BDAG, pp. 1089-90; cf. also εὐλογία, pp. 408-9).

88 And this raises the possibility in turn that Rom. 16:20 echoes Gen. 3:15—the crushing of Satan under the feet of the Romans recalling Eve’s crushing of the serpent’s head. See more on this just below.

89 Some scholars detect a wisdom discourse here and at other points in the pericope (esp. in Paul’s use of ἐκκλίνω, ἀκακός, and σόφος: cf. Dunn, *CR*, pp. 900-907; Dunn could also have pointed to the apocalyptic tenor of “Satan”). They may be correct, but I am not sure of its overt
He concludes the subsection by stating that “the God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet” (20a), following this assertion according to some manuscript traditions with his characteristic grace wish (although it may well be a little out of place here).

It is important to appreciate that this is not a generalized exhortation to avoid false teachers whoever they might be. Paul does not usually write general exhortations to avoid false teachers. And on the few occasions that he does, such warnings are clearly signaled as generic. So, for example, an exhortation to avoid “dissensions” (διχοστασία, and so not in fact false teachers per se) occurs in a interpretative significance. If an echo of Matt. 10:16 is detectable (where ἀκέραιος occurs as well: cf. v. 19), then this could constitute a rather wicked instance of subversion—the Teacher’s proverb perhaps being turned against him (again: see DOG, chapter fourteen). But Paul thematizes wisdom in relation to the gospel in Romans in any case, so such echoes may be no more than this. An entirely practical and local reading is also possible—that the Roman Christians should be wise enough to recognize the goodness of Paul and his letter, but innocent and pure of the evil practiced by the dissenters.

There are no direct linguistic signals of a connection between 16:20 and Gen. 3:15; hence, the echo, if it exists, must be fundamentally narrative. Nevertheless, Dunn suggests that Gen. 3:15 was a staple of Jewish hope, citing Ps. 91:13; Testament of Simeon 6:6; Testament of Levi 18:12 [to which we should add Testament of Zebulon 9:8]; and Luke 10:18-19 (a text that includes a note of joy, like Rom. 16:19-20) [and to which we should also add 1 Cor. 15:25 and 27, citing Ps. 8:6b—a further element within the theme]; and supported by TDNT 5:81, Michel, Käsemann, and Stuhlmacher (who notes the foregoing: cf. Römer, 223), and Cranfield (Romans IX–XVI, 905). Apart from Ps. 91:13, this seems to be a Jewish Christian discourse, however, that does not affect the claim being explored here. It seems that Paul is alluding to an earlier Jewish Christian tradition concerning Christ, which counterposed Psalm 8 to the garden of Eden (reading that Psalm messianically of course).
vice list in Galatians 5:19b-21a; consequently, explicit signals are sent here to the Galatians that this list of behaviors is generalized. But Paul’s numerous exhortations to avoid false teachers almost invariably have specific false teachers in view. Furthermore, although scholars differ in the importance that they ascribe to it, all agree that false teachers are a major element within Paul’s biography and consequently in the interpretation of much in his letters. Hence—and perhaps most importantly—it seems significant that this subsection is very close in diction, syntax, substance, and tone to Paul’s warnings to the Philippians to avoid false teachers, who in that setting seem clearly to be specific figures. Added to this, we should now note that this subsection is carefully

91 Cf. 2 Cor. 10:12–12:13; Gal. 4:17; 5:7-12; 6:12; Phil. 3:1-19; 1 Thess. 2:1-12; cf. Col. 2:4, 8, 16-19; 2 Thess. 2:1-12.


93 See Phil. 3:17-19; cf. also 1:15, 17; 3:2. This connection is explored in detail in Sandnes’s graceful study, Belly and Body. Philippians 3 is examined in detail here—and this agonistic reading justified—in DOG, part five, chapter twenty-one. The suggestion by Das that the figures attacked in Phil. 3:17-19 are generic is ultimately unconvincing. None of the other figures criticized in Philippians are! (Solving the Romans Debate, 47, n. 194.)
crafted; it provides a surprisingly detailed portrait of the teachers that Paul has in view. They are characterized by several key elements.\textsuperscript{94}

Paul characterizes them initially as opposed to the teaching that the Roman Christians learned. We will explore this rather cunning characterization in more detail shortly. Suffice it for now to note that this marks these figures as overtly opposed to something important—if necessary, to the point of dispute and counteropposition. Not surprisingly, Paul impugns their motives and authenticity; they are not genuine servants of Christ but, rather, create temptations for genuine Christians through flattery (etc.), and the apostle ultimately implies that they are nothing more than servants of Satan. We gather from this that Paul himself is firmly opposed to these figures. Nevertheless, it is likely that they are Christians in some sense. Unless they lay claim to this identification, Paul’s repeated warnings about their deceptive qualities, as well as his denial that they are servants of Christ, are pointless.\textsuperscript{95}

We learn from this subsection, further, that they are eloquent. Paul describes them twice as possessing a manipulative eloquence; they have

\textsuperscript{94}Keck would add that Paul’s consistent use of definite articles in v. 17, and the correlative adjective τοιούτος in v. 18—“those who ...”—is a further indication that specific teachers and teaching are in view (\textit{Romans}, 375; echoing an earlier endorsement by H. W. Schmidt). Michel argued that this was simply a part of the style of such exhortations; however, I am not sure that this is accurate (as noted by Dunn, \textit{Romans} 9–16, 904). Certainly, these indicators are consistent with the presence of specific teachers and teachings.

\textsuperscript{95}Non-Christian figures, moreover, would enjoy no initial legitimacy among the Roman Christians. That Paul perceives them as a threat to the Christians in Rome implies directly that they are themselves Christians. Keck concurs (\textit{Romans}, 376).
χρηστολογία and εὑλογία. It is this facility that creates in part their deceptive aspect that Paul emphasizes here so much. They create “temptations” or “traps” (v. 17) and “deceive” (cf. v. 18b). It is likely, then, that they are learned. Linguistic competence of this level probably denoted a rhetorical education or its equivalent. Moreover, they “serve their own bellies.” This may simply be a piece of generalized ancient polemic; however, it opens up an important possibility. It may refer, slightly more specifically, to the presence of an underlying philosophical discourse of self-mastery. Various philosophers—sometimes echoed in turn by philosophical Jews⁹⁶—offered liberation from the appetites or belly by adopting and practicing the appropriate techniques and systems. It was therefore an especially pointed retort to attribute to such ostensible masters a continued slavery to the appetites. This retort in Romans 16:18 could then indicate the presence in Romans of an underlying dispute over just this issue—how are evil passions mastered?—along with a dispute with someone opposed to Paul’s system. It is by no means definitive proof that such an argument is present, but it is entirely compatible with such a dispute (and Paul makes exactly the same charge in Phil. 3:19). And this is of course an educated discourse—one circulating among essentially philosophical figures (i.e., including among sages). The educational status of the false teachers and their possible quasi-philosophical

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⁹⁶ Cf. Testament of Moses 7:4-7 (which is directed to gluttony per se); 3 Macc. 7:11 (a generic reference to transgressors); and Philo, On the Virtues, 182 (which encompasses both senses) (Dunn, Romans 9–16, 903).
system seem to reinforce one another at this point. (Later indications from the
text of Romans 1–4 will strongly confirm these indications.)

We should now return to the point at which we began and note how Paul
characterizes these figures. Although it is clear that this is a matter of deep
concern to Paul, he characterizes the dissensions and temptations of the false
teachers initially in relation to the teaching that the Roman Christians themselves have
learned (an important point not often noted by the commentators). But those
auditors bring certain identifications to this relationship from earlier in the letter
that should then draw them to equate their opposition to these false teachers with
Paul’s. And at this point we begin to grasp one of the letter’s central rhetorical
strategies.

We have already seen how Paul frequently praises the Roman Christians
for their many good qualities, and in fact he does so repeatedly here again,
characterizing them as submissive, and hopefully also as wise and innocent, not
to mention ultimately triumphant and peaceful. Moreover, he noted in passing in
6:17b that they “have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to
which [they] were entrusted” (ὑπηκούσατε δὲ ἐκ καρδίας εἰς ὃν παρεδόθητε
tύπον διδαχῆς). Similarly, in 15:14, as he makes his transition to the more
practical concerns of the letter closing, Paul states that he is utterly convinced
that the Roman Christians are full of goodness and knowledge and capable of

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97 It is also possibly significant that Paul links them with “Satan,” literally, “the accuser”
(he uses the definite article). If it retains its literal force, this characterization may denote the
rather aggressive, judgmental tone that will emerge as a central feature of the Teacher’s
discourse: see DOG, chapter fourteen. The Teacher browbeats, threatens, and judges his auditors,
so this reference by Paul to the primary accuser seems entirely apposite.
instructing one another. But he goes on to describe the reason for his writing in this relation (in v. 15): he has written—and perhaps overly boldly—to remind them of this gospel, and his divine ratification can provide additional confirmation of its power and authenticity. According to this argument, Romans is little more than a reminder of what the Roman Christians already know independently of Paul; these two “texts” should be identified. And consequently, those who depart from what Paul says in Romans depart automatically at the same moment from what the Romans already know and have been taught—“the gospel they learned.” Thus, Paul’s opposition to the false teachers, which is described so caustically in 16:17-20, must now by definition include the opposition of the Roman Christians as well, and vice versa. And Paul has thereby drawn the Roman Christians, in terms of their loyalty to their original teaching, into his current opposition to the false teachers who are being vilified in 16:17-20, and in relation to whom the Roman Christians are so sharply warned. It may be helpful to present this argument in terms of its main propositions.

Paul begins with two separate situations, both of which are true:

(i) Paul opposes a certain false teacher and his teaching.  
(ii) The Roman Christians have submitted to a form of the gospel.

But Paul wishes of course to introduce the subject of (ii)—the Roman Christians—into the action of (i)—opposition to the teacher and his teaching. This is his ultimate rhetorical objective both here and in the rest of Romans. So he argues:
(iii) The letter just written to the Romans is in direct continuity with the original Roman gospel (it is an act of “reminding” only).
(iv) The Roman Christians have submitted to this letter (and they are characterized by this praiseworthy virtue of submission).
(v) This letter and gospel oppose the false teacher and his teaching.
(vi) Therefore, the Roman Christians must oppose the false teacher and his teaching (and in the terms set out by the letter to the Romans). This action is now merely an extension of their original submission to the gospel, which is well known.

It is an artful move in rhetorical terms—both useful and diplomatic. In the first instance we should note that a genuinely helpful interpretative strategy might now have been revealed in relation to other parts of the letter. If Paul is only “reminding” the Roman Christians of what they already know in much of Romans, we might expect him to build his case through the letter—when he is addressing them directly—from shared material, gradually adding his own distinctive commitments and claims to this original Roman gospel by degrees. In

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And it is therefore unnecessary to endorse Wilckens’s far-fetched explanation that Paul includes the warning against false teachers at this late point because he has only just heard about them (Römer, 3:143)! Any connection with the weak and the strong is also unlikely. Schreiner observes correctly that “[i]n that text [i.e., Romans 14] tensions between strong and weak believers in the Roman churches are adjudicated. Here [in 16:17-20] a menace from outside the community is anticipated” (Romans, 801). Mark Nanos makes a similarly unlikely suggestion—that Paul is urging continued submission to the Apostolic Decree: cf. The Mystery of Romans (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 216-17. Setting aside the fragility of the biography that underpins this claim, it ignores the rhetorical strategy that Paul encodes in the letter overtly. (Nanos does, however, perceptively note the relevance of 6:17.) Byrne notes this rhetorical move on Paul’s part briefly (Romans, 18-19).
this way he would not merely pay lip service to the claim of remembrance but would actualize it. (It will be especially important to recall this possibility in chapters fifteen through seventeen, when we address 1:16-17 and 3:21-26 in detail, but it is possibly even apparent in this pericope, as Paul arguably builds some of his exhortations from the wisdom tradition as that was shaped by Jesus.)

But this perception can also be seen to link up with an important element in the proem. That is, while Paul’s real reason for writing Romans, along with the clever encoded strategy freighting that goal, are clear in the letter closing, we would expect some hint of this strategy to be present at the outset as well. And the motif of “strengthening” provides the appropriate point of contact. One of Paul’s stated desires in the opening thanksgiving paragraph was to strengthen the Roman Christians; indeed, this was the point of giving them some spiritual gift, and would result in mutual encouragement through a shared fidelity:

\[ \text{stronger} \text{ Christians} \]

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(Rather intriguingly, this motif then recurs in the letter’s final disputed doxology at 16:25 as well.) And this notion of “strengthening” conforms exactly to the strategy Paul develops elsewhere in terms of supplementing something that the Roman Christians basically have already, but in relation to some future threat or trial. Hence, it is an entirely appropriate opening indication to the Roman Christians of how he intends his letter to function among them, since he cannot yet visit them.\footnote{Romans 15:15-19 also arguably supplies an extended definition of Paul’s gift of priestly service to the pagans in relation to Christ, mediated and corroborated by the Spirit; this material illuminates nicely the short phrase \( \chi\rho\iota\sigma\iota\mu\alpha \) \( \pi\nu\epsilon\upsilon\mu\alpha\tau\iota\kappa\omicron\) that he uses in 1:11.}
Further clues corroborate the presence of this concrete underlying concern in Romans with certain false teachers. In particular, 3:8 contains a pointed and revealing aside.\textsuperscript{100} Paul speaks there—twice in fact—of being “slandered” by “some” “whose condemnation is deserved” (so his posture toward these figures is the same as it is in 16:17-20; they are enemies, fighting for the other side). Paul is apparently being accused by these figures of libertinism. And libertines in the ancient world were figures who could not control their own appetites; they were \textit{slaves to their bellies}! Hence, this statement in 3:8 does not merely signal the presence of actual figures behind some of the charges that Paul is conscious of when he composes Romans; it overlaps fairly precisely with the figures described in 16:17-20. But it is also presumably no coincidence that just this issue—libertinism—is addressed at length in Romans 6 (cf. Gal. 2:17; 5:13; 6:7-9).

\textsuperscript{100} Stuhlmacher is essentially alone among the commentators in noting the significance of this verse and connection (\textit{Römer}, 222-23). Dunn (\textit{Romans 1-8}, 137), endorsed by Das (\textit{Solving the Romans Debate}, 48), has opposed this reading, arguing that the issue of libertinism is characterized too vaguely to denote a concrete opposing position. But the vagueness of the allusion is part of a deliberate rhetorical strategy on Paul’s part that is not as yet fully apparent in the letter (see more on this just below). The further charge that libertinism is a corollary of Paul’s own exposition, and therefore does not arise from an opponent, is problematic on a number of counts. It is \textit{not}, strictly speaking, a corollary of Paul’s exposition; this is why he opposes it so vehemently! Hence, not surprisingly, it does not occur wherever Paul is involved in exposition of his gospel (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 15:1-8), but only where that gospel is being contested by orthopractic Jewish Christians, i.e., in Galatians. Moreover, even if it is a possible misunderstanding, nothing prevents that misunderstanding from being used against Paul by those who oppose him. In other words, Dunn’s claim here is a non sequitur; where he needs a necessary and exclusive causal connection, he has only a possible one (and then only arguably so), so the counter-argument collapses.
Consequently, this small statement in 3:8 may provide us with a priceless insight into another of Romans’ basic dynamics. Since 3:8 links a set of programmatic questions from elsewhere in Romans specifically with the charges of certain malevolent opponents, an explanation is thereby potentially generated for many of the other programmatic questions in Romans as well. They may derive from the debate unfolding between Paul and these hostile figures, who seem, like him, to be learned disputants. Paul cannot of course assume the specific contours of this debate before the Roman Christians (the original Romans debate); it must be presented more formally and intelligibly to them in terms of various issues and contentions, hence the text’s many questions. Indeed, this is the appropriate point to turn and consider whether this expanding rhetorical dynamic can explain all the features that we have previously identified in the frame and the body of Romans, some of which have caused us such difficulties. If it can do so, then it will enjoy a distinct advantage over the other theories that we have previously considered, all of which stumbled badly at this point.
4.2 Explanatory power

If Paul thought that teachers preaching a gospel opposed to many of his own most important concerns were approaching Rome, he would surely have seen this as a dire threat. Rome was the strategic location within the empire in any terms. Hence, such figures could not only turn any pagan converts in Rome from Paul’s system but could block all further expansion through that strategic center, while presumably pursuing their own agenda from the empire’s very heart. This would have been a nightmare scenario for Paul in evangelistic terms. It is therefore entirely understandable why the divinely appointed apostle to the pagans would want to prevent this situation from developing among any converts from paganism currently at Rome, thereby explaining features I and II in Romans. And given that the collection had to be taken from Corinth to Jerusalem by Paul first (feature VI), delaying his journey to Rome directly, the need for a letter to be sent to Rome must then have seemed doubly necessary. But we have also explained why Paul nuanced features I and II as he did. He is almost unremittingly positive in his characterizations of the Roman Christians, both so as not to offend them and to build from their competence to his in an act of reminding. His apostolic call to the pagans clearly does basically underlie his concern for the Romans; his authoritative understanding of the law-free gospel that saves them is about to be challenged in a crucial locus. Thus, his desire to strengthen them (feature IV) is explicable as well. But we can even explain the notoriously problematic motif of 15:20 at this point—Paul’s “non-interference” clause (feature III)—although it will be helpful to introduce the Spanish mission at this juncture as well (feature V).
We have already seen that Paul seems to develop his apostleship in 15:15b-21 in a self-contradictory manner, asserting that he preaches where Christ has not yet been named in fulfillment of Isaiah 52:15b. He then immediately speaks of his desire to evangelize Spain, hopefully being sent on his way there by the Romans (see vv. 23-24). The questions consequently arise why Paul is either writing to the Romans and/or visiting them, given this caveat, or why he defines his apostleship in this unhelpful manner. But if we introduce the issue underlying feature VIII and the possible intrusion of false teachers at Rome, a clever rhetorical strategy can be detected.

We must first appreciate that Paul feels compelled to establish his particular gospel at Rome in the face of this opposition. Clearly, this is important. However, he does not know most of the Roman Christians and has not founded that congregation. So, as we have just seen, he fashions a rhetorical conceit in the letter opening and closing, suggesting that he is merely reminding the Romans of what they already know. Of course, he is doing rather more than this, but in explicit terms he would claim only to be strengthening that community; he is adding a spiritual gift to the many gifts they already possess, thereby participating in a process of mutual encouragement. The deliberate introductions of features III and V now both enhance this agenda and problematize any arrival by his opponents.

In defining his apostolic call as a scripturally corroborated orientation toward new constituencies, Paul is able to tempt the Roman Christians to listen to him and accord him due respect in view of his divinely ratified authority and capabilities—but also affirm that he is not actually imposing that authority on them. He is only passing through Rome, as his divine mandate dictates, on the way
to Spain, a land not yet evangelized and so in keeping with his apostolic
definition. (The two features fit together, then; they are part of a single rhetorical
strategy.) The Roman Christians hear that Paul is a figure predicted in the
Scriptures, no less, and are presented with the stunning way that God has acted
through him in other missions among the pagans: signs, wonders, and miracles
have been performed. And this both persuades them of his authority and makes
them want him to visit so that they too may receive from him. But at no point do
the terms of this visit spill over into an imposition of apostolic authority on the
Romans by Paul himself. They are benefiting from him in passing, so to speak, in
just the manner that they are currently benefiting from his reminding. Paul’s
angle of approach is thus entirely diplomatic. This apostle cares about the Roman
Christians and has much to offer them, but he is not dominating them—and will
not dominate them even in visiting, since this will be a mere transit.

But Paul’s careful definition of his apostolic call does not just preserve the
diplomatic terms in which he has couched his letter; it creates a set of
conundrums for any rivals who might be arriving in Rome, and especially if they
define themselves in apostolic terms, as seems likely (cf. Gal. 1:1, 6-9, 11-12).

If they seek to impose their own apostolic authority on the Roman Christians—
perhaps trumping Paul’s with “letters of recommendation” or some such—then Paul’s practices of gentle reminder and help in passing seem preferable;
they dignify the Romans and present a more humble—but still clearly

\[\text{Cf. Martyn, Galatians, 93-94, who argues that “[t]he Teachers themselves do not claim to be apostles (contrast Paul’s opponents in 2 Cor 11:13), but they do claim to represent the apostles in the Jerusalem church…” (94).}\]

\[\text{Cf. 2 Cor. 3:1b.}\]
powerful—apostolic emissary. Moreover, if they seek to vilify Paul’s typical arrogant power mongering, then this polemic is instantly refuted. And any requests for money and support will seem selfish and dubious next to Paul’s altruistic talk of a large gift for the poor in Jerusalem, requests for support for a mission to the Spanish (i.e., for others), and additional requests merely for hospitality for Phoebe and for prayer (Rom. 15:23–16:2). Finally, these opposing teachers can also be challenged in terms of their apostolicity: why are they too not fulfilling the Scriptures and preaching where Christ has not yet been named?! Why are they staying in Rome? True apostles do not act in such a fashion. (Do these figures even have a scriptural corroboration?!) Thus, the entire apostolic strategy proves to be carefully constructed and rhetorically skillful (and this turns out to be an ongoing feature of the argument, as we will see in due course; most subsections are crafted to deliver more than one rhetorical advantage simultaneously). Moreover, features III and V can now be seen to function together within a diplomatic characterization of Paul’s apostleship that is exactly congruent with Paul’s basic letter-writing strategy in terms of remembrance.

It is not really necessary to explain why Paul mentions his forthcoming visit to Jerusalem—feature VI; as we noted earlier, it is this exigency that prevents him from traveling to Rome directly. Moreover, his solicitations of prayer are entirely understandable given the risks involved. However, it is worth noting that we have in fact validated a large part of Jervell’s appealing explanation without relying on the more implausible aspects of that case, and

\[103\] Cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 4:19-21.
recognizing this allows us to consider some of the features that lie just ahead of us—principally IX through XV. (The sole remaining unexplained feature of the letter frame—VII, mutual greeting—is best postponed until we consider XIV and XV, as we have already intimated.) It is worth noting, moreover, that these include the features that have generally proved impervious to attempted explanations.

Jervell’s argument has an excellent feel for the shape and tenor of the letter body in Romans and, moreover, supplies a plausible setting for that material, even if Jervell is not able to prove the validity of that setting. Romans in his view possesses “the characteristics of a speech with marked apologetic, and to a lesser degree, polemic tendencies. In other words, we find here a presentation of Pauline preaching—yet always defensive and intent on clarifying possible misunderstanding.” He adds that “[v]ery often questions mark the beginning of [its] discussions.... The abruptness and the structure of the letter are explained by the fact that Paul is on the defensive and must be apologetic” (RD, p. 61). We have summarized these aspects of the letter principally in terms of features IX through XIV—the abstract and Jewish nature of the letter body, with at least three significant internal argumentative modulations. Jervell notes that these features are all plausibly located in relation to Jerusalem, because “[t]he group around James probably never accepted Paul’s teaching completely (Gal. 2:12; cf. also Acts 21:18)” (RD, p. 59).

In my view, Jervell’s instincts are accurate at these points, but—like Stendahl—his case is slightly misdirected and falls short of definitive proof. He grasps correctly that the letter body is not a systematic exposition of Paul’s teaching, as we have already seen; too many key notions in Paul’s Christian
thinking are omitted, and the flow of the argument in Romans is at times anything but obviously systematic. Hence, although abstract, it seems more polemical, responding to various agendas that are often prompted by difficult questions. Moreover, these questions resonate with what we can assume were queries being placed in Jerusalem, largely because they resonate with many of those either addressed by Galatians or implicit in Paul’s position in that letter. And there were overt historical connections between the Galatian crisis and Jerusalem. Hence, Jervell is essentially pointing here to the appropriateness of Romans to the earlier Judaizing crisis—which, certain hints imply, is far from over. It is not implausible, then, to suggest the letter’s orientation to Jerusalem, even if that suggestion is ultimately unprovable and also suffers from other weaknesses. But we can now see why Jervell’s claims seem so intuitively appropriate.

It is not that Paul is going to face these questions primarily at Jerusalem (although he might); it is that the previous debates in Jerusalem are about to arrive in Rome, with the arrival of the false teachers there. This is the rhetorical dynamic that explains so much of Romans, and that Jervell’s position resonates with (without quite grasping). But can Jervell’s intuitions—suitably reformulated—be proved?

Part of the relatively simple argument that undergirds this thesis has already been supplied. We have noted that Romans seems to have been written to counteract the agenda of certain false teachers at Rome. We have observed, further, that they accuse Paul of libertinism—while he seems to accuse them of slavery to their appetites—and that this charge resonates with a set of questions that Paul explores more abstractly at a later point in the letter. But we can now add a further important layer to this description. The agenda of much of Romans
is so similar to the agenda of much of Galatians that the identification of the
groups of false teachers lying behind those two letters seems unavoidable—that
is, the same group of contentious Jewish Christians is in view. This point does
not need to be labored. It is widely recognized that Romans and Galatians
overlap markedly in substantive terms.

The letters to the Galatians and the Romans share numerous motifs,
questions, methods, terms, and arguments. They both emphasize apostleship
(although Romans rather more subtly, as we have seen). Both speak of significant
interactions with Jerusalem (although Galatians in retrospect, Romans in
prospect). Both deploy a famous terminological antithesis between ἔργαν νόμου
and πίστις framed by δικαιο- terms, and this is a distinctive configuration among
Paul’s letters. But both also supplement this with a marked use of participatory
terminology and argumentation (a less distinctive usage). Baptismal motifs
figure centrally in this participatory material, as does the Spirit, and some
terminology of “Father” and “Son.” In these passages alone among Paul’s letters,
Christians cry “Abba, Father.” The argument often proceeds by way of diatribal
exchanges, and alternatively makes its case in relation to series of brief scriptural
quotations. Abraham is a key figure in both letters, especially in relation to
Genesis 15:6, but accompanying this text in both letters are Habakkuk 2:4 and
Leviticus 18:5 (and these texts arguably supply much of the letters’ key
terminology). The end of the age is also prominent, and a strong eschatological
dualism (i.e., the presence of both ages, often intersecting within the Christian).
The letter body of both epistles concludes with a fairly generalized paraenetic
section oriented toward the renewal of the Christian mind by the Spirit over
against existence in the “flesh.” Paul’s exhortations then revolve at one point in both these subsections around the fulfillment of the law in the “love command” of Leviticus 19:18. Polemical comments about intruders and troublemakers are also apparent—comments that identify them as troublesome Jewish Christians.\(^{104}\)

This is a not inconsiderable list of similarities, and it has prompted numerous interpreters to posit not merely substantive and contingent similarity but \textit{temporal} proximity (thereby raising questions that will be addressed in more detail just below). Suffice it for now to state, however, that this extensive substantive overlap suggests that the same basic situation lies behind Romans and Galatians—false teachers promoting a certain teaching that Paul regards as deeply destructive.

That teaching and the teachers themselves are overtly identified together in Galatians. And in Romans we have identified certain false teachers, along with the agenda of the false teachers in Galatia—their teaching—in much of that letter’s body. Equations between these two dimensions in Romans and then, beyond them, with the same situation in Galatia therefore seem highly likely. (Certainly, they seem more likely than any other explanation, once question-begging responses have been excluded.)\(^{105}\) And this explains feature X—an explanation that will be strengthened momentarily as we move on to consider

\(^{104}\) We return to this claim in \textit{DOG}, part five, chapter twenty. Suffice it for now to note the documentation of E. P. Sanders, \textit{Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People} (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 42-43, 45-48, 148-49.

\(^{105}\) These important inferences speak to Das’s concerns that neither 16:17-20 nor Romans as a whole address Jewish Christian Teachers overtly—concerns 4 and 5. The important rhetorical reasons for Paul’s sublety and indirection in Romans have also already been supplied.
features XI through XIV. The Jewish agenda in Romans is explained by the Jewish commitments of the false teachers that Paul is opposing, which are complex and range across various questions. But this identification can now also be extended a little in historical terms.

Paul’s heated excursus in Philippians 3 also fits this trajectory well (specifically, 3:2-19). The same terms, and the same vilification of ontologically enslaved opponents, are evident in this text as well as in Romans and Galatians—an essentially vicious characterization of that opposition (v. 2), a concern with circumcision that is allied with the Spirit over against rooted in the flesh (vv. 3-4a), an account of Paul’s Jewish background (an overlap with Galatians; cf. vv. 5-6 and Gal. 1:13-14), the characteristic δικαιο- and πιστ- terms functioning in a strong opposition (vv. 6b, 9), and a powerful emphasis on participation in Christ (vv. 9a, 10-11). Just after this Paul’s focus becomes eschatological, although this is interwoven with an ἀγών motif (an overlap with Romans; cf. vv. 12-16, Rom. 9:30–10:4), and he utters warnings again about false teachers who seem extraordinarily similar to the figures profiled in Romans 16—ὁ νῦν τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια, ὁ νῦν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ (as we have already seen; see also vv. 17-19; cf. Rom. 16:17-20; note, the emphasis on τέλος resonates also with Rom. 10:4, and on shame, with numerous other points in Romans—see i.a. 1:16; 9:33b; 10:11).
These overlaps are again remarkably comprehensive and suggest that the same situation probably lies behind this letter, at least in part. But Philippians seems to look back on an earlier warning that was also presumably more comprehensive. It falls obviously, then—at least at first glance—into a sequence after Galatians, which looks like an earlier salvo within this trajectory. (Romans looks more considered and hence later; the respective positions of Romans and Philippians will be considered in more detail shortly, along with Romans’ more “considered” character, which is a significant development.)

If Philippians pushes the trajectory of this strand of false teaching later, then Galatians denotes that certain events have also taken place earlier in other locations. Paul records two important incidents in Galatians that clearly precede that letter and are closely connected with the same debate. Furthermore, those two incidents are linked. In Galatians 2:1-10 Paul recounts an important visit to Jerusalem, where Peter, John, and James recognize both his and Barnabas’s apostleship to the pagans. Galatians 2:11-14 then recounts briefly a confrontation between Peter and Paul at Syrian Antioch—with Barnabas in the background, along with “some from James.” Whatever the specifics—and they are important and will be discussed shortly—these two incidents link the conflict in Galatia with a conflict in Antioch instigated by certain figures originating with James in Jerusalem, and with a meeting in Jerusalem itself, where Paul stands firm against figures he characterizes as “sneaking false brothers,” “spies,” and “enslavers” (2:4, DC).

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106 A case needs to be made, largely in view of this material’s distinctive nature and function, that it is an integral part of canonical Philippians; for further details see DOG, part five, chapter twenty-one.
A basic trajectory in the entire dispute is now discernible (and it explains still further the appeal of Jervell’s thesis). A particular group opposed to Paul’s missionary program is first observable in Jerusalem, although they do not necessarily originate there. They then travel to Syrian Antioch and Galatia. (The exact order of these visits does not matter at this point; nor does the degree of their authorization by James—although they do seem to be so authorized in Antioch; nor does a precise identification of Galatia.) Galatians presumably follows, a communication with Philippi, and then Philippians 3. And it seems plausible to locate Romans toward the final point in the trajectory as well. If we place these events in a geographical arc—partly for simplicity’s sake—then the following broad trajectory for the overarching debate results:

Jerusalem → Syrian Antioch → Galatia → Philippi → Rome

It seems reasonable to conclude that the same basic problem is present and debated in relation to all these locations in sequence, prompted by the operation of the same group of opponents (with the important caveats to be noted shortly). The development of the trajectory in historical terms is complicated by the fact that the opponents and Paul might not themselves be physically present in a given location as the debate arrives, hence the phenomena of various letters. But the arrival of letters tends to follow or anticipate the arrival of people fairly closely! Hence, it seems a broadly accurate sequence—a sweep of events rather than a specific, point-by-point progression.

Paul’s particular opponents here have of course usually been known in the past as the “Judaizers,” largely in dependence on the apostle’s use of this
verb in close relation to them in Galatians 2:14 (...πῶς τὰ ἔθνη ἀναγκάζεις ἴονδαίζειν:). But this designation is not entirely appropriate.\textsuperscript{107} It is better, then, to follow Martyn’s more neutral designation of these figures as the “Teachers,”\textsuperscript{108} and I will nuance this definition further here only in terms of singularity.\textsuperscript{109} Paul will turn out to focus much of Romans on a single Teacher—presumably, a particular figure who led the small group that was hostile to Paul. And it must be emphasized that he is a Jewish Christian, so the entire debate unfolds “in-house,” between different Jewish Christian understandings of the pagan mission and its implications. (Paul himself of course repeatedly characterizes this group as deviant.) It is, in short, Paul’s debate with the Teacher that explains much of Romans—and a great deal more in his life besides—the detailed explanation of which we can now undertake.

If the basic situation underlying the composition of Romans is similar to that underlying Galatians (and the rest of the trajectory), then it is time to address the evident differences that have been summarized previously in terms of features IX through XIV (although feature X has now been resolved, namely, the Jewish agenda in Romans; this can now be seen to derive from the particular Jewish concerns of the Teacher, who is himself a Jew, although in some Christian variant). Much of the letter body of Romans contains relatively abstract material debating Jewish questions and undergoing significant internal transitions. And this is explicable in terms of two important qualifications of the earlier

\textsuperscript{107} The difficulties are discussed in DOG, part five, chapter twenty-one.

\textsuperscript{108} Martyn, Galatians, passim.

\textsuperscript{109} Later, with the added material from parts of Romans reread, we will be able to deepen Martyn’s portrait of this figure and his soteriology.
arguments and discussions in Jerusalem, Antioch, Galatia, and perhaps also Philippi. The debate is now taking place in a very different setting, as it threatens to unfold at Rome. And the debate itself has moved on. Paul and the Teacher now know one another’s strengths and weaknesses well, having in effect fought through several previous rounds. The discussion is much more informed. These two developments explain the differences between Romans and Galatians nicely, along with most of the remaining features of the Romans data.

The Roman Christians have not been privy to the actual debate that has previously unfolded in Galatia, Syria, and Jerusalem. It is possibly completely new to them (or, if it is not, perhaps it exists as little more than an uninformed rumor). Moreover, Paul cannot be sure whether his opposition will arrive in Rome before or after his missive, although presumably it is better for him if his letter reaches Rome first. So he cannot even presuppose the presence of the system that he is engaged with when his letter arrives. Hence, for both these reasons, he must present the key issues in this debate in a more formal way than he has previously. The Roman Christians must be able to understand what is at stake. (He must also resist appearing angry and dominant, because this would create further rhetorical vulnerabilities.) This explains the abstract quality of the discussion, along with its progression primarily in terms of stated questions and issues—feature IX—but it does so without sacrificing contingency. Paul spells everything out in relatively neutral terms so that the Roman Christians can understand all the debate’s dynamics and issues merely by studying the text of

\[110\] That is, his relationship with the Roman Christians must be delicately nuanced, so he cannot proceed too personally. We might say that the polemics of the debate’s previous rounds have created vulnerabilities before a more distant and impartial audience.
Romans—and so they will find no reason to be offended by his more polemical moments. This careful, expository composition nevertheless remains directed toward an entirely practical task with localized consequences—informing the Roman Christians of the issues at stake between Paul and the Teacher in a suitably slanted way.111

However, the debate has also moved on. Both Paul and the Teacher are well aware of each other’s systems and have developed pointed criticisms in relation to one another, many of these linked to key scriptural texts. They have, moreover, almost certainly adapted their own positions to these unfolding criticisms, so a great deal of rebuttal is now part of the situation. And this evolving dynamic explains many of the substantive differences from the argumentation of Galatians, which is very similar but not identical to Romans. Material specifically relevant to the Galatian Christians has been dropped,112 as

111 These exigencies should be added to the need already noted that Paul not appear dominant or overbearing, and especially to Christian groups who do not know him and have not been founded either by him or one of his coworkers. Ben Witherington III is sensitive to this dynamic: “The art of persuasion had to be pursued differently in a letter written to those who were not Paul’s converts and thus not inherently under his authority, compared to letters written to those who were Paul’s converts and who recognized that they were…. [Hence] [i]t will not do to judge Romans and its rhetoric in the same sort of way one would judge Galatians or 1 Corinthians. While this letter is partially an attempt to establish rapport with and authority over the Roman Gentile Christians, it is not an example of [sic] exercise of the authority we would see where Paul already had a power relationship” ([with Darla Hyatt] Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004], 2).

112 For example, imagery rooted in an upper-class household and/or in local Galatian Cybele cults.
has argumentation deemed weak or vulnerable or misdirected. Meanwhile, additional defensive discussions have been added, covering vulnerabilities and awkward implications. And a much more penetrating and informed attack on the Teacher’s gospel can now be expected.

These similarities and differences create the basic contingency for Romans in the light of which the peculiarities of much of Romans’ letter body can be explained in a new way (features XI through XIV). Romans contributes to an ongoing argument; it is consequently a rhetorical act shaped by a broader, quite specific debate unfolding before a largely uncommitted and uninformed audience. As such, it must respond to a complex rhetorical agenda that includes far more than a mere presentation of Paul’s own position. For simplicity’s sake, we can note three basic rhetorical tasks that Paul faces in the letter body: (a) he must certainly present his own position—the law-free gospel to the pagans (which is done as an act of reminder); but (b) he must respond to the most deadly criticisms that his opponents have made against this gospel, defending it and rebutting various pointed accusations; and (c) he should probably indulge in reciprocal activity himself, attacking the various inadequacies in the gospel of his opponents, trying to discredit it.¹¹³ These potential rhetorical dynamics allow

¹¹³ There are ultimately dialogical and circular dimensions operating to blur the precise application of these dynamics. Note also that these dynamics explain why Romans is not a systematic presentation of Paul’s theology, with many supposedly vital topics treated superficially, if at all—the Eucharist, Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, and so on. Only certain aspects of Paul’s gospel, and the Teacher’s, are at issue.
us—essentially for the first time—to provide a comprehensive, plausible explanation of features XI through XIV of the letter body of Romans.\textsuperscript{114}

The shifts in Paul’s discussion are potentially explicable as he shifts between these three tasks, expounding his own position, responding to assumed criticisms of that, and then going over onto the offensive, attacking various assertions by his opponent—tasks A, B, and C. The modulations between the first three major subunits in Romans—as well as, to a degree, within them—are therefore comprehensible as a function of the several goals and the resulting rhetorical dynamics of the text.

Detailed evidence must come later, and I will concentrate in what follows on one strand. Suffice it for now to note, then, that Paul’s Justification texts have usually been read in the past as A statements—that is, as relatively systematic statements of his own position—because no other suitable approaches have been provided. But I suggest now that they are better read (i.e., they generate fewer problems) in terms of task C. That is, the arguments work best not primarily as expository but as critical; they attack an opposing gospel—quite brilliantly at times—only hinting in passing at the shape of Paul’s position (although they are of course compatible with it ultimately). If a function in terms of C is mistaken for A (or indeed B for A) then the interpretative consequences are potentially disastrous. Paul is interpreted in terms of the image of his opponent! But we must now try to reverse this trend, considering the outline of an opponent in the

\textsuperscript{114} As such, it will not be merely an account of Paul’s self-expression. The voice of the Teacher will appear in Romans reasonably frequently, lest the Roman Christians be unprepared to repudiate it when it arrives in person. Hence, we will have to mirror-read Romans, at least to some degree (and the methodological issues here will be addressed shortly).
various twists and turns that Paul lays with impressive detail before the Roman Christians in Romans 1–4 (and, later on, in relation to his other Justification discussions).

In Romans 5–8, however, we make a transition from certain key questions prompted by the Teacher to the exposition of Paul’s own soteriological concerns. (After all, the Teacher’s gospel lies in ruins by this point.) So a discussion in terms of task B segues into task A, as denoted by feature XII. I will suggest in due course that two particular questions generate this transition (see esp. chapter seventeen). It must suffice for now to note that Paul seems concerned to address the interrelated questions of eschatological assurance and ethical effectiveness in this section of Romans. The Teacher’s gospel links these two issues tightly together in a way that Paul finds theologically offensive. However, even if they can be prised apart and reset in more responsible theological locations, they remain important questions that go to the heart of Paul’s own saving system as well. And so in Romans 5–8 he addresses them, essentially chiastically. The saving act of God in Christ through the Spirit overcomes any ethical incapacity on the part of an otherwise enslaved humanity (at least by way of inauguration)—as the only effective antidote to human sinfulness—and guarantees the coming fullness of that salvation. So Paul can pivot at this point in terms of task A to address two important queries from his opponent—task B.

And what of Paul’s concern in chapters 9–11 (generating feature XIII) to supply a detailed, scripturally corroborated account of the inclusion of the pagans within salvation, and to account simultaneously for the temporary exclusion of many Jews? This account is now understandable, as is, moreover, Paul’s evident concern to prevent this inclusion of pagans spilling over into an
arrogant condemnation of unbelieving Jews (feature XIV). Implicit in Paul’s gospel is a potentially appalling distortion of salvation-history—one that, if true, could immediately discredit him. Many pagans are, according to his narrative, being included within Israel, although not in any recognizably Jewish form, while the majority of Israel are not so included. And this all adds up at first glance to a treasonous gospel by Paul; he has effectively turned his back on his own people. But it also seems palpably absurd—a massively counterintuitive deviation in the expected historical course of salvation. A resulting pagan Christian arrogance toward unbelieving Jews might then seem to be the last straw—a final absurd posture.

Romans 9–11, along with the specific concern with pagan Christian anti-Judaism in chapter 11, is therefore conceivable as a clever extended response to this cluster of interrelated charges—discussions again in terms of task B. These arguments attempt to justify pagan inclusion in salvation, Jewish exclusion (although a temporary one), and the need for ongoing pagan humility if they are so included. Moreover, they emphasize throughout Paul’s passionate concern for his fellow Jews, as against disregard or treachery. Judgments of the validity of Paul’s arguments have varied, but they are at least fundamentally

\[\text{115 A careful comparison between these arguments and Galatians might even suggest that Paul has crafted these particular positions in response to the criticisms of the Teacher since an earlier round of the discussion. It is unlikely that Paul’s posture toward unbelieving Israel is completely unconsidered, but there is nothing like controversy to sharpen consideration! Other Pauline texts also suggest that he could be much harsher toward Israel, when the contingent need required. Hence, Romans 9–11 seems, to a significant degree, contingently formed as well. See more in this relation in DOG, chapter nineteen.}\]
comprehensible in such terms as a contingent text at Rome; they respond fairly systematically to a salvation-historical critique of Paul’s gospel, and therefore in terms again of task B (which is not to deny that they integrate well with his basic position).\textsuperscript{116}

In sum, Paul’s debate with the Teacher does seem able to explain much of Romans—especially features IX through XIV. Paul wrestles with the Teacher’s sophisticated opposing Jewish Christian system through Romans 1–11, but before an audience that knows neither of them especially well, and certainly not much of this debate.\textsuperscript{117} It is this peculiar contingency that explains most of the letter body’s peculiar dynamics. But it explains more than this as well; it links up plausibly with the explanations that we have already noted probably underlie the remaining features in the data of Romans—XV, XVI, and VII.

A desire for the maximum degree of solidarity in the Roman Christian community is entirely understandable as a rhetorical objective on Paul’s part, given the imminent arrival of the Teacher. Paul has been painfully aware since his difficulties at Corinth that any division within a Christian community provides an opportunity for an unscrupulous visiting teacher to exploit; it is a gift to any such interloper. Those dissatisfied with Paul are ready to form an alternative base of operations within the community, and the retrieval of such a divided situation could be very difficult indeed. Hence, Paul is rightly concerned

\textsuperscript{116} So my suggested reading actually provides an excellent explanation of Romans 9–11, along with its short exhortation in terms of possible pagan Christian arrogance, thereby speaking to Das’s first two critical concerns.

\textsuperscript{117} The methodological issues raised by this approach are addressed in the following section—§ 4.3.
that the Roman Christians present a united front to the Teacher. But the very geography of their situation seems to have created obstacles in this regard for the Roman Christians, along with their rather different missionary histories. There were potential fissures within the community at Rome that could be exploited. So in the text underlying features XV, XVI, and VII, Paul moves to address them, insofar as he can with a letter. He urges those with different attitudes toward certain Jewish practices, especially various dietary and temporal observances, to be sensitive to one another and not fractious, judgmental, or despising. These exhortations are not so pointed as to be rude and intrusive, but not so bland as to lack all specificity. Precisely this division (among others) had created strife at Corinth (one of the previous locations of Prisca and Aquila, it should be noted, and presumably of their particular Christian praxis as well, which may have been quite “strong”). They nestle, furthermore, in the midst of other exhortations designed to foster unity. Significantly, then, Paul also (probably)\(^{118}\) counsels the Roman Christians to be obedient to the government, in effect avoiding involvement in civic protests. Such activity could presumably result in community divisions as well (on the protest’s wisdom or appropriateness) and/or political repression, which might even culminate in the withdrawal of privileges and expulsion, thereby creating very difficult circumstances for Paul’s missionary goals and accentuating divisive pressures on the Roman Christians. Rome had a history of such disturbances.

But Paul also urges mutual greetings—a process of visiting, hospitality, and so on—that could concretely foster greater solidarity in the Christian

\(^{118}\) The voice of the Teacher is arguably discernible in this paraenesis at certain points.
community at Rome, which seems to have been scattered in various tenements through the poorer suburbs of that vast and crowded city. The fulfillment of this wish would take some doing, but it would also contribute practically to the community’s united front against any destructive interlopers. In sum, features XV, XVI, and VII in Romans seem entirely understandable as a set of practical subordinate rhetorical objectives within the broader ambit of Paul’s desire to combat the arrival of the Teacher at Rome. The Teacher’s system had to be opposed, Paul’s promoted, and the Roman Christians prepared as best they could to resist his inroads. Unity was therefore an important goal within the overarching rhetoric of the letter. And although this effectively introduces a multiple explanation, no difficulties in terms of simultaneity are evident. It is the basic exigency of the Teacher visiting Rome that creates Paul’s persuasive needs in relation to two programs and the need for unity. Furthermore, the pending visit by Paul to Jerusalem with the collection (feature VI)—which overrules even the need to get to Rome—further explains the letter’s dispatch at just this juncture.

And at this point it seems that all the features discernible in the data of Romans—I through XVI—have finally been explained. Moreover, in so doing, important new interpretative possibilities have been opened up vis-à-vis the text.

Romans 1–11 is a debate with the Teacher. We must therefore learn to ask different, rather more flexible, and—above all—rhetorical questions of this

119 And the need for this strategy also defuses Das’s final critical concern (i.e., 3)—that Paul’s paraenesis is inexplicable in an apologetic reading. It is, on the contrary, entirely comprehensible in such a situation.
material: how does it work as an argument?! (rather than just as an exposition). Where is the position of the Teacher expounded—not entirely fairly, of course—as against the position of Paul? Where is Paul developing defensive and offensive rebuttal, hence second-order questions, as against his own most basic principles? What are the particular argumentative goals of each major and minor subsection, given that Paul is seeking to win the Roman Christians over to his views in competition with the opposing system of Teacher? (and especially given that the Teacher may be the origin of the program denoted by “works of law”). In essence, the entire methodological apparatus of rhetoric and argumentation can now be deployed in relation to the analysis of Romans, and especially of chapters 1–11. This new appreciation of the provenance of Romans, in short, opens up possibilities for new detailed interpretative strategies as well (and I will lay out a specific strategy at the beginning of the next chapter). But before turning to these questions, some potential objections must be noted.
4.3 Possible objections

I can imagine three initial objections that ought to be addressed briefly before we begin our detailed analysis of Romans 1–4 as an argumentative engagement with the Teacher and his gospel—certain methodological, interpolative, and biographical and historical concerns.\textsuperscript{120}

\textit{(1) Objections in methodological terms.} Certain protests have rightly been raised against appeals to opponents in explanation of much that Paul wrote. Perhaps most famously, John Barclay has detailed the difficulties that such “mirror-reading” can involve and has offered a set of useful controls on this process.\textsuperscript{121} It is not sufficient, he points out, merely to reverse a particular Pauline assertion and claim that an opponent lies behind this mirror image, and it is even less acceptable to return and interpret large parts of the remaining text in the light of this ostensible reconstruction, perhaps overriding alternative readings in the process (a viciously circular interpretation). Barclay does not repudiate the notion of opponents within Pauline interpretation (as he has sometimes been falsely represented as doing), but he certainly sounds a note of warranted

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{120} Criticisms of the actual mechanics of the explanation—largely by Das—have already been addressed in passing. That is, it should be apparent by now that this explanation appeals to solid readings of certain texts, and also satisfactorily explains all the other features of the text. Moreover, no cogent problems are discernible in the theory’s workings. So at this point only the more programmatic methodological objections remain.}

caution, and he is not alone in doing so.\textsuperscript{122} Will my reconstruction here fall foul of these strictures?

In fact, I would argue that a rhetorical reading of Romans in terms of an opponent offers just the controls that Barclay is looking for (thereby enhancing the slightly ad hoc list of imperatives that he originally supplied). Paul has deliberately formalized his opponent’s teaching in Romans so that the Roman Christians can understand it. The shape of the argument therefore allows a highly controlled reconstruction of that opposing position. We need first simply to list the various conclusions that Paul repudiates with his different arguments in Romans and to ask whether they converge on a recognizable system—and in fact they do gather into a recognizable soteriology, with its own internal coherence. That program can then be further assessed in relation to various layers of sources—elsewhere in Paul’s letters where the same opponent is probably in play, elsewhere in the New Testament (especially if writings can be found that represent this opposing point of view, or stem from it), and elsewhere in Judaism (although qualified here by the deviant Jewish Christian nature of the program), as well as Greco-Roman sources. The result of this process of five distinguishable assessments is a richly controlled portrait of an opposing system: (i) a convergence in terms of the different rhetorical targets in Romans; (ii) an assessment of the internal coherence of the system emerging from those combined targets; (iii) a comparison of that system with the same opponent’s treatment elsewhere in Paul; (iv) the possible detection of further attestation to

\textsuperscript{122} See esp. Sumney, \textit{Identifying Paul’s Opponents}. Others have moved beyond warnings to outright repudiation, asserting instead that Paul’s texts be interpreted without reference to opposition. However, this is simply unhistorical.
the system in the rest of the New Testament; and (v) the possible detection of Jewish and/or Greco-Roman texts that also articulate the system, or elements in it (perhaps extending here to direct involvement in that system as a known precursor text).

These five controls do not need to be applied seriatim every time that we interpret an argument in Romans. They tend to operate simultaneously in interpretative terms. (Their enumeration here is in terms of epistemological priority.) But they are all generally present, controlling the unfolding interpretation. Some further caveats should now be added to them.

First, this portrait should not be used to override difficult readings elsewhere that do not seem to fit it. It can adjudicate between equally well-attested readings but must not narcotize a superior reading. Such circularity must still be resisted. And, second, it must be appreciated that the resulting portrait is in the first instance only of an encoded opponent. Paul’s depiction of his opponent in Romans is limited both by his rhetorical concern to present that opponent in an essentially biased way to the Roman Christians and by his own limited knowledge of that opponent (although we have noted earlier that those limitations have been receding for him). It is not therefore a portrait of the actual empirical opponent. Progress toward that descriptive goal can be made only if other sources more closely related to the opponent can be isolated, although this is possible at the fourth and fifth levels of our controls. Indeed, I would suggest that we do have documents from the hand of this opponent’s leaders and later tradition in the New Testament; we also almost certainly possess Jewish texts that the opponent relied on heavily. But demonstrating these claims in detail lies
outside the purview of this book. We must satisfy ourselves here largely with what Paul wanted the Roman Christians to think about the Teacher.

There are, however, rhetorical considerations that encourage the accuracy of this portrait (at least in ideal terms). If Paul paints an absurdly inaccurate portrait, he risks a loss of credibility and rhetorical effectiveness before his audience, and he thereby undermines his own ethos. The Roman Christians might see Paul as biased and venomous rather than the Teacher as foolish. Paul must consequently portray the Teacher with sufficient fairness so that the Roman Christians recognize this figure along with Paul’s essentially accurate description of him. They must believe that he is making valid criticisms of a genuine position. Beyond these thresholds, Paul can manipulate that depiction. However, this is a surprisingly constrained and subtle interpretative space.\(^{123}\)

In short, the position of an encoded opponent can almost certainly be recovered from Romans, which offers a richly controlled setting for that recovery. However, these controls will admittedly need to be employed regularly and carefully so as to avoid the pitfalls that can await much discussion of “opponents” in Paul’s texts and their putative “gospels.”

(2) Objections in interpolative terms. A potentially fatal objection to my suggested explanation of Romans is the thesis that 16:17-20 is interpolated—a claim that has

\(^{123}\) Much ancient polemic did not take place in a relatively neutral arena, and so did not need to observe such parameters. Biased arenas allow unfair and intensely hostile portraits of opponents.
been made not infrequently.\textsuperscript{124} If it is correct, then my explanation’s most overt piece of evidence is eliminated, and the broader account of Romans’ provenance would struggle to establish itself. However, the evidence underlying this objection is really too weak to sustain it.

The main reason for excluding this subsection is—a little ironically—that scholars do not know how to interpret it in the broader context of the letter. They find it to be a shockingly abrasive intrusion that is out of step with the more moderate and ecumenical tone of most of Paul’s previous argumentation. It is also opaque in its own right; it has no apparent function in its present locale. In view of this suddenness, incomprehensibility, and aggression, the text is excised. But closer examination suggests that this is a fragile set of contentions.

Excising a piece of text on the grounds that it does not fit a broader theory of a letter’s provenance is clearly methodologically muddled. The data of the text should underlie the broader explanation, and not vice versa. Indeed, if this relationship is inverted, then most theories of provenance will ultimately be justifiable (because the data contradicting them can simply be excised!). And here the vicious consequences of this muddled procedure are especially apparent. On the grounds of a theory that is almost certainly implausible in ultimate terms (because all the explanations of Romans not ultimately revolving around 16:17-20 have demonstrable weaknesses), the critical piece of data underlying the only

\textsuperscript{124} Most recently, Jewett has added his impressive voice to this position (\textit{Romans}, 985-96, esp. 986-88; cf. also “Ecumenical Theology for the Sake of Mission,” 105-6), noting in addition the advocacy of Baur, Erbes, Knox, Schmithals, Ollrog, O’Neill, Byrne, Brändle and Stegemann, and Boismard (986, n. 5). Keck should now be added to this line of interpretation as well (\textit{Romans}, 375-79).
theory that is plausible in ultimate terms is being excluded and that theory thereby abandoned! Here, then, a false theory overrides the key piece of evidence in the only true one.

But we should also note that, with the development of the view that Romans responds to the gospel of the Teacher, a satisfactory role for 16:17-20 has been provided. It is therefore not “impossible to explain the extreme change of mood, [and] the angry tone of denunciation”; this is exactly how Paul characterizes the Teacher—who is the underlying problem in Romans—elsewhere. Indeed, the shift in tone is further explained as soon as it is grasped that Paul is warning the Roman Christians about a third party, whereas he has been engaging more directly with them throughout the rest of the letter (but cf. 3:8b). We have already noted the various considerations prompting Paul to conduct himself graciously vis-à-vis the Romans. But there are far fewer such constraints on his conduct toward his opponents (other than those just noted). And it is well attested elsewhere that Paul could be particularly cutting concerning his opposition (Gal. 5:12!), and could also make such remarks at the end of his letters, when pithy parting shots are called for (cf. 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 6:12).

The most weighty evidence for interpolation derives from the section’s ostensibly rare vocabulary and phraseology—and there is a certain initial

125 Jewett, Romans, 986.

126 As Dunn notes correctly, Paul “was by no means averse to a final polemical thrust…” (Romans 9-16, 901). So the suggestion that this subsection is inappropriate in its immediate context is not really correct; it misunderstands the nature of Paul’s letter endings, and overlooks the important evidence from other letters of similar activity.
plausibility about this contention. Jewett draws at this point especially on Ollrog’s earlier case that seven hapax legomena or instances of unique usage are detectable in Romans 16:17-20. Several other scholars also suggest that various elements in the style and phraseology of the sub-section are unPauline. And these are considerations that ought to feature in any theory of interpolation.

127 Jewett summarizes Ollrog’s list—ἐκκλίνειν, χρηστολογία, ἄκακος, ἀφίκεσθαι, συντρίβειν, ἐν τάχει, and εὐλογία (“Ecumenical Theology for the Sake of Mission,” 106, n. 69; cf. Romans, 987). ἐκκλίνειν occurs, however, in Rom. 3:12 when Ps. 14 is cited. And although Ollrog and Jewett contend that εὐλογία is used in a nonPauline way to mean “well-chosen words,” the assertion that it is therefore unPauline is hardly probative (cf. Rom. 15:29; 1 Cor. 10:16; 2 Cor. 9:5, 6; Gal. 3:14; cf. Eph. 1:3). Similarly, denying Paul the alpha-privative form of κακός is hardly convincing (cf. in Romans alone 1:30; 2:9; 3:8; 7:19, 21; 12:17, 21; 13:3, 4, 10; 14:20). ἀφίκεσθαι, συντρίβειν, and the expression ἐν τάχει (not to mention ἄκακος), are all well-attested in the LXX. Hence, that 16:17-20 is distinctive may certainly be granted, but that it is for this reason necessarily unPauline is to stretch the evidence too far.

128 The use of διδαχή to denote a body of teaching, and σκάνδαλον in the plural, are supposedly atypical, as is the phrase “serve our Lord Christ” (τῷ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν Χριστῷ [οὐ] δουλεύοντι). Συντρίψει is future, whereas Pauline blessings generally use the optative. “Obedience” is ostensibly used in an unparalleled way, “because it is unconnected with either faith or the gospel” (“Ecumenical Theology,” 106, n. 70). And the expression “the God of peace” is used in a way inconsistent with the use of peace in Rom. 5:1; 14:17; and 15:33.

But these arguments are forced as well. It is part of Paul’s strategy in Romans to connect his gospel with the body of teaching—the διδαχή—that the Romans have received (cf. 6:17). Paul can hardly be refused a plural form, and knows and uses the signifier σκάνδαλον widely (cf. merely in Romans, 9:33; 11:9; and 14:13). The unusual phrase “serve our Lord Christ” occurs almost verbatim in Col. 3:24, which is at least an attested part of Pauline tradition, but may constitute evidence from Paul himself. That any combination of words should be excluded from
But they are fragile if they occur in isolation. Other explanations are often possible (and precisely as we will see shortly for 1:18-32 in the following chapter, and for 3:21-26 in chapters fifteen through seventeen, where equally marked shifts in vocabulary, tone, and style, are not ultimately indicators of interpolation). Moreover, the differences are not as marked as advocates of interpolation suggest. It is difficult to say with certainty that 16:17-20 is that distinctive for Paul, once the exaggerated claims concerning its composition have been laid to one side. (And the further suggestion, that a “plausible redactional rationale” can be offered for the subsection, is now hardly probative.)

Keck observes that Paul does not counsel the literal “avoidance” of false teachers anywhere else. But this too is understandable in Romans. Elsewhere, false teachers seem to be present with the community already, or fast approaching it; they should therefore be expelled or resisted. However, in Rome, given the scattered nature of its Christian community, the most practical course

Paul’s highly flexible uses of Christ’s titles looks dubious in any case. The verb συντρίψει occurs in an assertion, not a final blessing, and so need not be in the optative (and in koiné, the future indicative and the more uncertain moods were often interchanged in any case: cf. Rom. 5:1). “Obedience” is not always directly connected with either faith or the gospel in Paul, and is, in any case, a leitmotif in Romans: cf. 1:5; 5:19; 6:16 (twice, occurring along with the cognate verb, and at no point in direct relationship to either faith or the gospel); 15:18; cf. also 16:26. And finally, while the action of the “God of peace” in 16:20 crushing Satan underfoot is arguably inconsistent with some of Paul’s central theological tenets (as noted esp. in DOG, chapter three, § 3.10 and the Excursus there), it is by no means incompatible with some of his more aggressive eschatological statements (cf. elsewhere only in Romans, 12:18-21; 13:1-7). In this connection, the establishment of “peace” can be anticipated in terms of an aggressive military victory by God over his enemies: cf. 1 Cor. 15:25, 28, 54-55, 57. (Whether it ought to be is another question.)
of action would be to avoid going to any meeting arranged to meet the Teacher (presumably in another, perhaps rather distant, tenement), thereby “avoiding” or “shunning” him.\(^{129}\)

However, perhaps the most important difficulty for the interpolative case is the fact that, although the immediate setting has numerous text-critical seams, no such seams surround this pericope.\(^{130}\) The pacific nature of the textual tradition must raise doubts about the suggestion that 16:17-20 should be excised.\(^{131}\)

In short, when interpreters abandon the evidence of 16:17-20 as an interpolation, not only do they abandon the narrow path to interpretative accuracy, but they effectively close and bar that path to everyone else. In view of the weakness of the supporting evidence, however; it is really this suggestion that ought to be abandoned.

\(3\) Objections in biographical and historical terms. It might be suggested that the scenario I offer to explain Romans—the pending arrival of the Teacher at

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\(^{129}\) Keck adds that the final unique assertion of v. 20a that Satan will soon be crushed under the Roman Christians’ feet is difficult to integrate “into the thought of the rest of the letter, which never mentions Satan, [and] requires too much exegetical dexterity to be convincing” (\textit{Romans}, 378). But the saying has a clear argumentative rationale where it is located. The false teachers are deceptive servants of Satan, allied with Sin, as the echoes of Gen. 3:13 and Rom. 7:11 in v. 18a suggest. And this sentiment is entirely Pauline: cf. 2 Cor. 11:13-14.

\(^{130}\) Cf. the text-critical situation regarding 16:25-27, which is overtly confused; yet the subsection \textit{still} has its defenders in terms of authenticity.

\(^{131}\) Positive evidence of authenticity also includes Paul’s use of \textit{δότι} in v. 17. And the use of \textit{ὕπακοή} in v. 19, as has already been noted, echoes a theme throughout the letter.
Rome—is implausible in biographical and historical terms. The evidence actually falsifies it or, at least, renders it improbable; such opponents cannot lie behind Romans, if Paul’s life is reconstructed correctly. This objection is essentially conservative, for reasons that will become apparent shortly. But there are several subordinate claims that must hold good if the basic retort is to prove valid.

First, this countervailing approach reconstructs Paul’s life primarily in accordance with the information provided by the book of Acts. Acts must be deemed not merely episodically but sequentially accurate. All its information must be correct, whether concerning the incidents that involve Paul, their sequence, or their exact chronological disposition (and hence this approach is generally favored by more conservative interpreters, although it is not limited to such readers). Given this set of commitments, Acts provides a hard framework for the reconstruction of Paul’s biography, into which the various letters can be inserted. And the consequences for the provenances of Galatians and Romans are significant (as we have already briefly seen, in chapter six). These two letters must now be separated by a distance of some years and by many events.

Acts speaks of five visits by Paul as an apostle to Jerusalem, and two of these occur before he has undertaken missionary work beyond the southern part of the province of Galatia, which Paul and Barnabas reach during their “first missionary journey” (Acts 13–14). Galatians must therefore be positioned just after this period of activity but before the third visit to Jerusalem, which takes place in Acts 15 (and this visit also precedes any further missionary work by Paul to the west; Paul and Barnabas travel up to Jerusalem from Syrian Antioch on this third visit to the Jewish capital, because they seem to have been based there since the end of the first missionary journey). Galatians itself speaks clearly of
two preceding visits to Jerusalem (cf. 1:18-20; 2:1-10), and of two only, so it must be located in this early position, and it does fit this locus well in certain respects. The inclusion of pagans in “the Way” law-free is certainly an issue at the time in Acts; indeed, just this issue seems to be debated in Jerusalem on Paul’s third visit, at “the conference,” which seems to take place just after Galatians has been written.

Romans, however, clearly looks toward Paul’s final visit to Jerusalem, recounted in dramatic fashion beginning in Acts 19:21. It must therefore be composed much later in the story (and in fact close to most of Paul’s other principal letters) when Paul is at Corinth, just prior to his departure for Jerusalem with a group of church leaders and the collection (cf. Acts 20:4; Rom. 16:21). Consequently, it must be written just before the fifth such visit noted by Acts.

And some time seems to have elapsed between these two visits. Acts itself supplies an interval of around three years that Paul must spend in Asia and Ephesus between these two points (cf. 19:8, 10, 22; 20:31). Moreover, he must undertake all the evangelism of the second missionary journey and the first half of the third before he returns to Jerusalem on his final visit—preaching in Macedonia, Achaia, and Asia, at the least (that is, the events of Acts 16–19).\(^\text{132}\)

In addition, we should note that reasonably firm dates can be generated for these various visits by calculating their chronological distance from the main historical marker that the book of Acts supplies—Paul’s trial before the governor

\(^{132}\) Acts notes missions on these journeys (at least) in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Ephesus. And a mission in Troas should also be assumed, although not necessarily by Paul (cf. Acts 20:5-12; 2 Cor. 2:12-13 [the parallel text being Acts 20:1-2!]).
Gallio in Corinth, recounted in Acts 18:12-17. This can be dated with reasonable precision by a fragmentary inscription from Delphi, and arguably cross-referenced as well with a possible dating of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Claudius, which seems to be mentioned in Acts 18:2 when Paul first arrives in Corinth, and the chronological interval of eighteen months that the text supplies for that mission in v. 11. Ultimately, significant chronological pressures can be

133 The fragmentary inscription from Delphi that mentions Gallio—see (i.a.) Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum 2, no. 801 D, or Fouilles de Delphes, III, Epigraphie, 4:286, l. 6—is referenced chronologically in l. 2 by the 26th acclamation of Claudius as imperator (κυρίας). (His tribunician year—the twelfth—is reconstructed.) The dates of the 24th and 27th are known independently, suggesting that this inscription was erected at some point between mid-51 and mid-52 CE, although probably in the latter half of this year (cf. the concise discussion by Robert Jewett, A Chronology of Paul's Life [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 36-38, 126-29). Gallio may consequently have been proconsul of Achaia either in 51-52 or 52-53 CE. (It is not impossible but rather unusual to hold a post in a senatorial province for more than one year. Gallio also seems to have fallen ill and left his post early, attributing his sickness to the place and not his own health: cf. Seneca, Letters, 104.1.) The conservative case requires the former option—51-52. An expulsion of the Jews from Rome is mentioned by Acts and Suetonius but dated only by Orosius (ca. 385-420 CE). This notoriously unreliable historian places that event in Claudius’s “ninth year,” or January 25, 49 through January 24, 50 CE (Historiarum Adversus Paganos, 7, 6, 15-16): [15] Anno eiusdem nono expulsos per Claudium urbe Iudaeos Iosephus refert. sed me magis Suetonius movet, qui ait hoc modo: “Claudius Iudaeos inpulsoe Christo adsidue tumultuantes Roma expulit” (adding [16] quod, utrum contra Christum tumultuantes Iudaeos coherceri et conprimi iussert, an etiam Christianos simul velut cognatae religionis homines voluerit expelli, nequaquam discernitur). But Orosius attributes this information to Josephus falsely and claims to prefer the account of Suetonius, which is actually undated. (Orosius is therefore most probably confusing Josephus’s account of the earlier Tiberian expulsion with this supposed expulsion under Claudius—a similar
generated on other parts of Paul’s story by this marker, but these can arguably be negotiated. And this yields a date of around 48 or 49 CE for the composition of Galatians, and around 56 CE for Romans. So these two letters now seem to be separated by some time and a great deal of activity. Two further elements must now be added to this developing picture.

This paradigm generally expects Galatians to address the issues raised by Paul’s Jewish Christian opponents (often known as “Judaizers”, although we prefer here the more neutral designation “Teachers”) through a clear statement of the gospel, conceiving that generally in terms of Justification theory. That is, the Teachers ask Paul’s pagan converts to assume full law observance in order to be saved (so they ask them “to judaize,” or, to become Jews), a program epitomized above all in the acceptance by any converted pagan males of circumcision. Paul then repudiates this demand by deploying the gospel of Justification, which attacks Judaism per se. Such law observance is of course counterproductive, generating only the realization of sin and of the consequent need to be saved by faith alone. So this paradigm tends to argue that Paul responds to the Judaizing question by deploying Justification theory, since this is held to set out Paul’s principal positions on Judaism and salvation. Galatians’ use of the relevant terminology and argumentation is therefore identified as an especially coherent analysis, catalyzed by the Judaizing questions but expositing the gospel per se. And it follows from this early identification that any similar material in Romans is also evangelical—a statement of the gospel—now mistake perhaps to that of Suetonius himself. The Tiberian expulsion, which is well attested, took place in 19 CE.)
separated from the contingency that elicited it in Galatia. Paul can simply state the gospel as he understands it if he wants to; it does not need a Judaizing controversy to be called forth, since its opening categories apply to everyone, without exception. In short, this early location of Galatians identifies Paul’s Justification texts with the gospel so that any later deployment by Paul of that material can be identified in such terms with no further justification.

A particular understanding of Paul’s call is also usually invoked alongside this reconstruction of Paul’s missionary work. Acts emphasizes Paul’s “conversion” rather more than the apostle himself seems to, with three separate accounts (and we have already examined them in chapter five). But Galatians certainly appeals to the conversion story in some sense as well (see esp. 1:12-16). Advocates of this broad approach to Paul therefore generally introduce a construction of the event in terms of Justification, deriving additional reinforcement for a reading of Galatians and its ostensible presentation of the gospel in such terms. A line is thereby drawn from Paul’s conversion, through the Judaizing crisis at Galatia, and on to Paul’s final, major and most systematic letter, Romans, in terms of Justification theory. This particular thread is held to be discernible at all these critical points (creating something of an alternative history to the arc of false teaching sketched in the previous major subsection).

The problems that arise from this biographical reconstruction for my earlier suggestion concerning the provenance of Romans perhaps now seem to be more psychological than necessary, but they are real. Galatians and Romans are separated here by perhaps as many as eight years and by much activity. They speak, moreover, of Paul’s gospel; this is the material that they hold in common. Hence, the overlap in substance between Galatians and Romans that I have
pointed to as an indicator that a common opponent is in view is explained, rather, by their common exposition of Justification, an essentially “coherent” explanation. The two different situations lying behind these letters—Paul’s first and last—both elicit an account of the gospel from Paul, and an understanding of Paul’s conversion in such terms reinforces these claims. The Teachers, furthermore, have presumably been dealt with since the apostolic council of Acts 15, at which point the early church came to a clear agreement about the key issues, and Acts even denotes these figures (in all probability) as operating “without authorization” (cf. οἴς οὐ διεστελέμεθα in 15:24). From this point onward, the early church has been acting in perfect accord (while prior to this point it was functioning at cross-purposes, unawares). There is therefore no justification for introducing Jewish Christian Teachers into the explanation of any of Paul’s letters other than Galatians, which were, after all, written at a much later point. In short, the Judaizing crisis is limited to Galatians, the commonalities between Galatians and Romans are explained coherently, as Paul’s conversion also suggests, and the two letters are separated by the best part of a decade. The positing of the Teachers behind the composition of Romans is therefore simply not plausible.

It must suffice for now to note two sets of problems with the foregoing argument.

(i) As we have already seen in chapter five, the entire scenario rests on a violation of the fundamental methodological principle operative in relation to any biographical accounts of Paul—the priority of the
apostle’s own letters over all other evidence, including Acts (because they are firsthand, not thirdhand, sources). The foregoing case works backward, although in this case unhealthily. If the letters are examined first, as is appropriate, then it seems more likely that Galatians and Romans were composed fairly close together (a point that will be elaborated in chapter twenty). Moreover, the series of five visits by Paul to Jerusalem recounted by Acts looks more literary than real; Paul’s letters mention only three (cf. Gal. 1:18–2:10; Rom. 15:25–32). Meanwhile, various pieces of evidence suggest that even for Acts, the Judaizing crisis did not subside after the apostolic conference, recounted in Acts 15.\footnote{Most significantly, Acts is silent concerning any reception of the collection by the early church in Jerusalem, although it knows of alms given by Paul to the temple (cf. 24:17). It is also silent about support from the early church during Paul’s two years of imprisonment in Caesarea (24:27). Some of the book’s final comments also seem pointed (28:21-22). The implication, then, is that Paul’s radical gospel was not accepted at this point even by early church leaders in Jerusalem—presumably James. Paul himself attests to the dangers of his forthcoming visit to Jerusalem in Rom. 15:31. He asks for prayer not only for rescue from those who do not believe in Judaea, but that ἡ διακονία μου ἢ εἰς Ἰερουσαλήμ εὐπρόσδεκτος τοῖς ἁγίοις γένηται κ.τ.λ.} We have also already adduced numerous reasons for resisting any construal of Paul’s conversion in terms of Justification theory; the available evidence just does not support this assertion, and various key pieces of evidence stand against it. (Acts never describes Paul’s conversion in terms of Justification theory.) So much that the countervailing biographical case asserts seem fragile if
not simply invalid, and the whole structure rests on a false principle. But these are not its only problems.

(ii) The case also rests on invalid argumentation. First, it does not follow that the Judaizing problem necessarily receded with the passage of time; this is a non sequitur. Hence, even granting the basic contours of this biography, it is still legitimate to suggest that the Judaizing problem returned later in Paul’s ministry in relation to Rome as a phenomenon operating in more than one wave, so to speak. Nothing stands against this, and it is arguably also more realistic in historical terms. (Are any complicated problems solved completely after one major agreement?!) Even this biography concession that Galatians was elicited by the Teachers, so there are no real difficulties suggesting that they lie behind Romans as well. Second, the assumption that the letter to the Galatians establishes Paul’s gospel in terms of Justification against this threat—thereby drawing all similar material into that coherent definition—begs the key question rather baldly. As we will see in more detail in chapter twenty, but have also already suggested, Galatians is, in and of itself, insufficiently detailed to establish Justification theory at all, let alone as Paul’s primary mode of response to Judaizing questions. Moreover, the Teachers do not necessarily raise the question of Judaism directly; this is an assumption, not a necessity. We must then, in effect, wait and see what Paul argues vis-à-vis the Teachers in Romans in order to understand his earlier case in Galatians better. (This is not to minimize the importance or
distinctiveness of Galatians in this relation, but it is to point to the considerable superiority that Romans possesses in terms of information and specificity.) So, once again, this particular case gets things the wrong way around.

Far from constituting a cogent objection to our unfolding scenario, this objection itself seems to be in need of revision. It turns out to be an ineffective rejoinder. And with its refutation, all the immediate objections to my developing suggestion seem to have been defused. We are free, then, to turn to its more detailed development in the chapters that follow, beginning with an overview of the specific interpretative strategy that it facilitates, and then applying that strategy in detail to the text of Romans 1–4.