

# Faith and Self-Detachment from Cultural Norms: A Study in Romans 14–15

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The last few decades have witnessed an unprecedented surge of scholarly work on Romans 14–15, in the hope that we may here discover precious information about the believers in Rome, and may thus uncover some of the factors which occasioned Paul's letter to the Romans. Some have doubted our ability to reconstruct Roman conditions from this passage, on the grounds that Paul's paraenesis here is a generalised reprise of his arguments in 1 Corinthians 8–10<sup>1</sup>, or is deliberately oblique and thus opaque, in a context where his authority is not yet established.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the consensus opinion, for good reason, now holds that Paul here addresses current issues of dispute in the Roman churches: there is enough detail particular to this text, on a topic discussed at length and congruent with the main themes of the letter, to suggest that Paul here engages with issues peculiar to Rome.<sup>3</sup> There is also now almost universal consensus that the topics addressed in these chapters concern the practice of the Jewish Torah, especially the rules of *kashrut* concerning 'clean' and 'unclean' food (14,1–2, 14, 20), the honouring of the Sabbath (and Jewish feasts/fasts?; 14,5–6), and (perhaps) Jewish anxieties concerning idol-dedicated wine (14,21).<sup>4</sup> Older

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- 1 See especially R.J. Karris, *Romans 14:1 – 15:13 and the Occasion of Romans*, in K.P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (revised edition), Edinburgh 1991, 65–84; W.A. Meeks, *Judgment and the Brother: Romans 14:1 – 15:13*, in: idem, *In Search of the Early Christians: Selected Essays*, New Haven 2002, 153–166. For a detailed response to Karris, see M. Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1 – 15.13 in Context* (SNTSMS 103), Cambridge 1999, 25–37.
  - 2 See J.P. Sampley, *The Weak and the Strong: Paul's Careful and Crafty Rhetorical Strategy in Romans 14:1 – 15:13*, in: L.M. White / O.L. Yarbrough (ed.), *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, Minneapolis 1995, 40–52.
  - 3 Thus this text is of importance to almost all current reconstructions of the Roman churches and of Paul's reasons for writing to Rome; see, e.g., P. Lampe, *Die stadtrömischen Christen in den ersten beiden Jahrhunderten* (WUNT 2/48), Tübingen 21989; A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans*, Edinburgh 1991; F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective* (revised edition), Grand Rapids 2007. Although it has been superseded, an important impetus to this reading of Romans 14–15 was given by P.S. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans*, London 1971, 8–22.
  - 4 I have discussed the social context of these chapters in full elsewhere: see J.M.G. Barclay, 'Do we undermine the Law?' *A Study of Romans 14.1 – 15.6*, in: J.D.G. Dunn (ed.), *Paul*

views that the eating of vegetables only (14,2) reflects ascetic or vegetarian trends in the Roman churches, and that the honouring of ‘days’ (14,5) betrays superstition regarding unlucky days in the calendar, have now largely given way to the more plausible thesis that Paul is describing the practice of Roman believers who, out of regard for the Mosaic Torah, declined to eat meat (or drink wine?) considered ‘unclean’ in Jewish terms at community meals provided by Gentile believers, while upholding Jewish practices regarding the holiness of the Sabbath.<sup>5</sup> There are well-known parallels for such behaviour (e.g., Dan 1,8–16; Esther 14,17LXX; Josephus, Vita 13–14), and Paul’s distinctively Jewish labelling of food as κοινόν (14,14) points unmistakably in this direction; it also fits the conclusion of Paul’s discussion (15,7–13) and the focus of the rest of the letter on the address of the ‘good news’ to both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>6</sup> This is not to say that the meat-abstainers and Sabbath-honourers were all Jews (Gentiles are known to have admired and imitated such practices), or that those taking the opposite view were all Gentiles (Paul places himself among them; 15,1). But there is every reason to believe that these disputes concerned the degree to which Jewish practice was or was not integral to faith in Christ.<sup>7</sup>

The resolution of these questions allows us to analyse the forms and implications of Paul’s argumentation in these chapters, topics still given comparatively little attention.<sup>8</sup> I have analysed elsewhere the way in which Paul’s ar-

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and the Mosaic Law (WUNT 89), Tübingen 1996, 287–308, reprinted in J.M.G. Barclay, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (WUNT 275), Tübingen 2011, 37–59 (hereafter cited from the latter location).

- 5 Reasoner, *Strong and Weak* (see n. 1), has shown how such practices in the Roman churches might have resonated with wider trends in ascetic or vegetarian practice in Rome, and in the ‘superstitious’ observance of special days, but he has not altered the consensus about the specifically Jewish character of the issues among Roman believers.
- 6 For full discussion, see N. Schneider, *Die “Schwachen” in der christlichen Gemeinde Roms*, Münster 1996, 95–120; V. Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen in Korinth und in Rom: Zu Herkunft und Funktion der Antithese in 1Kor 8,1 – 11,1 und in Röm 14,1 – 15,13* (WUNT 2/200), Tübingen 2005, 337–386.
- 7 The arguments advanced by Nanos that the “weak in faith” are non-Christian Jews (M. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul’s Letter*, Minneapolis 1996, 85–165) have failed to persuade: for rebuttals, see, e.g., Reasoner, *Strong and Weak* (see n. 1), 131–136; R.A.J. Gagnon, *Why the “Weak” at Rome Cannot be Non-Christian Jews*, CBQ 62 (2000) 64–82. Paul makes clear that both sides in this dispute behave “in honour of the Lord” (14,6.8) who is clearly identified here and elsewhere as Christ (14,9); he associates his contemporary non-Christian Jews not with πίστις but with ἀπιστία (11,23).
- 8 See, however, the important discussions by D.G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference. A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics*, London 2005, 182–203 and T. Engberg-Pedersen, ‘Everything is Clean’ and ‘Everything that is not of Faith is Sin’: The Logic of Pauline Casuistry in Romans 14.1 – 15.13, in: P. Middleton / A. Paddison / K. Wenell (eds.), *Paul, Grace and Freedom. Essays in Honour of John K. Riches*, London 2009, 22–38. Of course the commentators analyse Paul’s arguments and principles, but not always with focused attention on the issues addressed here.

gument protects Torah-observance, and thus the practice of Jewish Christianity, but also legitimates the neglect of the Torah, and thus relativizes the absolute claims of the Torah as the God-given rule of life.<sup>9</sup> What has yet to be clarified is why Paul addresses the differences among the Roman believers as a matter of *relative strength or weakness in faith*, that is, why he uses the terms ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ (14,1–2; 15,1), why he applies them to faith, and what constitutes the difference in his eyes between stronger and weaker faith.<sup>10</sup> To illuminate these issues would shed light on what Paul means by ‘faith’ and how it relates to diverse forms of cultural expression. I shall argue here that the difference between strong and weak faith is the degree to which faith, although always expressed in culturally specific practice, is disaggregated from any one cluster of cultural norms. In a fashion comparable to the Stoic redefinition of value, the stronger the faith the more it allows the recalibration of worth in Christ to render indifferent any standards of worth (inherited or adopted) not derivable from the Christ-event. This makes allowance for, and even welcomes, cultural diversity in the community of believers, but puts a premium on the capacity to adapt one’s behaviour where necessary through a form of detachment generated by the *unconditioned* ‘welcome’ of Christ. After observing some of the key terms used in these chapters (I), and the Christological framing of the issues (II), we will assess what characterises weakness or strength in faith (III and IV), and will draw conclusions regarding Paul’s vision of the Christian community and the importance of faith in undergirding its capacity for cultural diversity and social adaptability (V).

### I. Faith, Weakness and Strength

As soon as he mentions the disputes in the Roman congregations, Paul frames the matter in terms of *faith*. The Romans are urged to welcome the person who is ‘weak in respect of faith’ (ὁ ἄσθενῶν τῇ πίστει; 14,1), while the differences of opinion regarding food are described in similar terms: ‘one person believes (ὅς μὲν πιστεύει) that he can eat anything, while the one who is weak (ὁ δὲ ἄσθενῶν) eats (only) vegetables’ (14,2). Thus πίστις is strategically associated with *both* points of view, and although, when he uses the label ‘strong’ (δυνατοί; 15,1) Paul does not expressly describe such people as ‘strong in respect of faith’, the opening phrases of chapter 14 imply as much. πίστις is identified as a central issue in this matter in 14,22–23: the πίστις that they have is to be kept to themselves in the sight of God (14,22); the person who is in

9 Barclay, ‘Do we Undermine ...?’ (see n. 4), 52–59. I suggested that the paradoxical effect of Paul’s treatment of these issues was to undermine the social and cultural integrity of Torah-observant believers in Rome, a thesis developed by Watson in his claim that this was not just the effect of Paul’s argument but also his direct intention (Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles [see n. 3], 180 n. 50). The present essay addresses this issue from a different angle.

10 The fullest recent discussion of these matters is by Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen* (see n. 6), 437–449.513–518.

doubt (ὁ διακρινόμενος) about the validity of their action when they eat is condemned, because that is not ‘from faith’ (ἐκ πίστεως; 14,23). In a generalising statement, Paul declares that ‘everything that is not from faith (ἐκ πίστεως) is sin’, and in the paragraph that concludes this discussion (and the body of the whole letter) Paul prays that God would fill them with all joy and hope in believing (ἐν τῷ πιστεύειν; 15,13).

The language of ‘faith’ in these chapters is mixed with that of cognition or conviction. Each person should be convinced in his/her own mind (ἐν τῷ ἰδίῳ νοῷ πληροφορεῖσθω; 14,5); the significance of days is a matter of assessment (φρονεῖν; 14,6); Paul knows and is persuaded (οἶδα καὶ πέπεισμαι) that nothing is unclean in itself (14,14); and what one eats or drinks should be a matter of what one decides (κρίνειν; 14,5.13) or judges to be right (δοκιμάζειν; 14,22). Notions of cognition and evaluation clearly enter into what Paul means by πίστις, as they do elsewhere in this letter, where faith is a matter of ‘knowing’ (6,9) and ‘reckoning’ (6,11), generating a whole new ‘mindset’ (φρόνημα; 8,5–7; cf. 12,1–3). But this does not mean that we may translate πίστις in chapters 14–15 as ‘conviction’ or ‘confidence’, downplaying its primary meaning, ‘faith’.<sup>11</sup> Paul is drawing out the cognitive entailments of faith in Christ, but it is *faith* he is discussing here, not something else. In contrast to 1 Corinthians 8–10 he does not here discuss differences of viewpoint in the language of ‘conscience’ (συνείδησις), but uses the same terminology of πίστις that is central to the argument of Romans. The phrase ἐκ πίστεως (14,23 *bis*) is of course a *Leitmotif* in this letter, from the citation of Habakkuk in 1,17 onwards (cf. 3,26.30; 4,16; 5,1; 9,30.32; 10,6), and it is implausible to suggest that Paul now uses it in a different sense. Moreover, the notion of strength and weakness in faith (which was also a matter of ‘conviction’; 4,21) was used earlier in this letter in relation to the faith of Abraham (4,19–22): he was not weak in respect of faith (μὴ ἀσθενήσας τῇ πίστει; 4,19) but was made strong in respect of faith (ἐνεδυναμώθη τῇ πίστει; 4,20) since he was not in doubt through unbelief (οὐ διεκρίθη τῇ ἀπιστίᾳ; 4,20). The multiple linguistic echoes of this passage in Romans 14–15 argue strongly against a change in meaning in the terms πίστις and πιστεύειν.<sup>12</sup> If Rom 4,19–22 helps us see one sense in which faith can be weaker or stronger, Romans 14–15 enables us to appreciate another (see further below).

11 Pace C.E.B. Cranfield, *Some Observations on the Interpretation of Romans 14,1 – 15,13*, CV 17 (1974) 193–204, partly modified in *idem*, *The Epistle to the Romans II* (ICC) Edinburgh 1979, 697–698; cf. J.A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (AncB 33), New York 1992, 688–689.698–700; K. Haacker, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (ThHK 6), Leipzig 1999, 280.

12 For the link between these passages, see A.T. Lincoln, *Abraham goes to Rome: Paul’s Treatment of Abraham in Romans 4*, in: M.J. Wilkins / T. Paige (eds.), *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church. Essays in Honour of Ralph P. Martin* (JSNT.SS 87), Sheffield 1992, 163–179.

At the opening of this discussion Paul refers to a representative of one opinion regarding food as ὁ ἀσθενῶν (14,1.2). The participial form (rather than the adjective, ἀσθενής) seems to be related to the fact that (on this first appearance) it is qualified by the dative (of respect) τῇ πίστει (cf. 4,19): Paul never uses the adjective ἀσθενής with a dative of respect.<sup>13</sup> In 15,1 he refers to the same people with a different term, the adjective ἀδύνατοι, though the connection is clear since they are referred to as having ‘weaknesses’ (ἀσθενήματα). In that verse Paul also characterizes those of the opposite opinion as ἡμεῖς οἱ δυνάτοί, notably including himself in this group. It has been suggested that Paul has adopted the labels ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ from the Roman believers themselves, and specifically from the ‘strong’, who used it pejoratively to mark their superiority to the ‘weak’.<sup>14</sup> The case has been argued in detail by Reasoner, who maintains that i) Paul ‘knew what was going on in Rome’; that ii) he elsewhere characterises himself as weak not strong (e.g., 1 Cor 4,10) and ‘we should not expect Paul to call himself ‘strong’ if he were making up the labels here’; that iii) ‘the nicknames ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ come with no introduction’, which would suggest that they were already well known to the audience; that iv) ‘it is hard to believe that Paul would label groups ‘strong’ or ‘weak’, thus risking a misreading or caricature of his addresses, in a church that he was trying to win for support’; and v) the terms were current in the city of Rome, designating different levels of social status.<sup>15</sup>

Against this hypothesis, we should note that Paul does not use the labels in a consistent fashion (as noted above, the labels for ‘the weak’ vary between 14,1–2 and 15,1), which suggests that these were not pre-fixed labels or ‘nicknames’. If the terms were indeed strongly prejudicial (or even polemical), and known to Paul as such, it would be very strange for him to adopt them in a context where he is demanding that the strong *do not* despise the weak (14,3). Elsewhere, he uses the terms ‘weak’ and ‘weakness’ with a wide variety of reference (e.g., Gal 4,13; 1 Cor 4,10; 2 Cor 11,30; 12,9–10; Rom 5,6), but often speaks of believers as ‘weak’ without demeaning overtones (1 Thess 5,14; 1 Cor 1,27;

13 Some manuscripts add another use of the verb (ἀσθενεῖ) in a string of one or more additional verbs after προσκόπτει at 14,21 (e.g., **8<sup>c</sup> B D G**).

14 E.g., U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer III (EKK VI/3)*; Zürich u.a. / Neukirchen-Vluyn 1982, 111: ‘Die Benennung ἀσθενῶν τῇ πίστει in 14,1 ist ja zweifellos nicht eine Selbstbezeichnung dieser Leute, sondern eine polemische Bezeichnung von seiten ihrer Gegner, mit der sie ihre Verachtung ihnen gegenüber zum Ausdruck bringen’. For a full list of those who advance this opinion, see Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen* (see n. 6), 445 n. 674.

15 Reasoner, *Strong and Weak* (see n. 1), 55–58; followed by, among others, P. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul’s Letter*, Minneapolis, 2003, 341. Esler notes, however, that ‘it is interesting that Paul adopts this language from the Roman congregation even though it reflects the stereotypical viewpoint of the strong’ (341). This is more than ‘interesting’: it is an argument against the hypothesis that the labels derive from usage among the believers in Rome.

9,22; 12,22; 2 Cor 11,29).<sup>16</sup> ‘Weakness’ in conscience was a notion he had used repeatedly in discussing the issue of food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8–10, a passage with many conceptual overlaps with Romans 14–15:<sup>17</sup> the phrase comes readily to Paul’s lips in 14,1–2 for the good reason that he had thought along similar lines while writing that earlier letter.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, as we have seen, earlier in Romans Paul had drawn a distinction between weak and strong faith in relation to Abraham (4,19–22). There is every reason to believe that it is Paul himself who applies the terms ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ to the opinions over food and days in Rom 14–15. We shall explore below how he can do so without encouraging a sense of superiority or pride among the strong – just as elsewhere he can consider himself ‘strong’ (2 Cor 12,10; Phil 4,13) only in dependence on a Christ-created reality.

We should note, in fact, that Paul elsewhere entertains the notion of differences in degree in relation to faith. He was concerned about the Thessalonians and wished he were present to put right ‘what is lacking in your faith’ (τὰ ὑπερήματα τῆς πίστεως; 1 Thess 3,10); similarly he was hopeful that the Corinthians’ faith might grow (αὐξομένης τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν; 2 Cor 10,15). In Romans itself, he can speak of a μέτρον πίστεως (12,3) and ἡ ἀναλογία τῆς πίστεως (12,6), phrases which might suggest that the faith of believers is not uniform.<sup>19</sup> Since elsewhere Paul can speak of degrees of maturity or progress (1 Cor 2,6; 3,1–3; 14,20; Phil 3,12–16), he could surely imagine differing degrees to which faith in Christ had recalibrated the thinking and reshaped the practice of believers.<sup>20</sup> Before considering what this might mean in the context

16 Although such labels could be used in the city of Rome, as elsewhere, to designate differences in social status, there is no evidence that their use in Rom 14–15 relates to status, and no reason to regard them as ‘marked’ by a specifically Roman context (*pace* Haacker, Römer [see n. 11], 278). Reasoner makes much of Horace’s reference to a Sabbath-scrupulous person as ‘weak’ in Horace, *Satires* 1,9,68–72, but the text is obscure and without parallel. For Paul’s use of the language of weakness, see Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen* (see n. 6), 450–508.

17 Weak conscience: 1 Cor 8,7.10.12; the weak: 8,9.11; 9,22, the first two in the same article + participle form as found in Rom 14,1–2.

18 So, rightly, Gäckle, *Die Starken und die Schwachen* (see n. 6), 437–449.

19 Cf. the special degree of faith necessary to move mountains (1 Cor 12,9; 13,2). Interpreters differ on the meaning of Rom 12,3, although most find here some notion of variable kinds or degrees of faith (see, e.g., J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16* [WBC 38B], Waco 1988, 723–724). However, some insist that the phrase indicates the *equal* portion of faith given to all (e.g., C.E.B. Cranfield, μέτρον πίστεως in Rom 12,3, NTS 8 [1962] 345–351; Wilckens, *Römer III* [see n. 14], 11–12). Goodrich has recently argued that πίστις here means not ‘faith’ but ‘trusteeship’ (J.K. Goodrich, ‘Standard of Faith’ or ‘Measure of Trusteeship’? A Study in Romans 12.3, CBQ 74 [2012] 753–72).

20 See J.P. Sampley, *Faith and its Moral Life: A Study of Individuation in the Thought World of the Apostle Paul*, in: J.T. Carroll / C.H. Cosgrove / E.E. Johnson (eds.), *Faith and History: Essays in Honor of Paul W. Meyer*, Atlanta 1990, 223–238.



of the Roman disputes, we must attend to the way in which Paul frames the position of believers in the course of Rom 14–15.

## II. *The Recalibration of Value in Christ*

It is striking that Paul depicts the participants in this debate not by reference to their ethnicity (Jewish or non-Jewish) but by reference to their relationship to Christ. Because they all participate in faith, to varying degrees, they all derive what is salient about their identity from Christ, and not from anything else that could be said about them (age, gender, ethnicity, social status or whatever). They are thus to look on one another as ‘siblings’ (14,10.13.15.21; rendered such through the Spirit of Christ; 8,9–16.29), or as ‘household slaves’ (οἰκέται) who belong to Christ (14,4). In this latter capacity they are responsible to Christ, and in the last resort only to him. Who are they to judge another person’s slave? Each person’s master will determine his/her worth (14,4). Thus the essential question to be asked about their behaviour is not whether it is or is not in accord with the Torah (which is never mentioned in these chapters), but whether it represents their loyalty to their Lord/Master (κύριος; cf. 14,18). Judgements about days and about food are to be made with reference to ‘the Lord’ (κυρίῳ; 14,6–9). Before he gets to describe his own opinion, or to give any positive advice (to the strong), Paul lays the ground-rules for any Christian practice: it must arise from allegiance to ‘the Lord’ (or to God). Paul can appreciate that different, even opposite, practice may fit this criterion: one person eats ‘to the Lord’ since he gives thanks to God; another refrains from eating ‘to the Lord’ and also gives thanks to God (14,6). Both life and death are now oriented ‘to the Lord’ (14,7–9), whose death and resurrection form the crucial identity-shaping events (14,9). This is indeed a good way of describing what it means to live ‘from faith’ (ἐκ πίστεως; 14,22–23). Although they differ in the ‘strength’ of faith, the behaviour of both the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ is oriented to Christ, and as such (and not on any other grounds, such as its Jewish or other heritage) worthy of the utmost Christian respect.

But this orientation arises out of a prior and more basic fact about each believer. The Roman believers are to welcome one another to their communal meals (14,1)<sup>21</sup> because it can be said of the strong, but also of each one: ‘God/Christ has welcomed him’ (14,3; 15,7). Inasmuch as they stand ‘in Christ’, believers are the objects of God’s creative activity and commitment: they are ‘the work of God’ (14,20) whose Master is powerful enough (δύναται) – whether they are weak or strong – to sustain them (14,4). What is more – and this is crucial for the logic of this passage – they have been welcomed by God/Christ

21 The verb προσλαμβάνεσθαι probably has this social meaning (cf. Phlm 17), and the disputes over food are most likely to occur in this specific setting (see Barclay, ‘Do we Undermine ...?’ [see n. 4], 41–42). Schneider has made a case for associating these shared meals specifically with acts of worship (Die Schwachen [see n. 6], 136–146); cf. Gäckle, Die Starcken und die Schwachen (see n. 6), 383–386.

without regard to previous worth (whether positive or negative), but solely on the basis of the love or calling of God. Paul's reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus (14,9) clearly alludes to the saving events depicted earlier in the letter: the (weak) believer is the one 'for whom Christ died' (14,15). From earlier chapters we know that Paul has discounted all previous evaluations of worth – the worth of having or knowing the Torah, of 'wisdom' or ethnicity, of birth or moral achievement (1,14; 2,17–29; 3,9.29–30; 9,6–18) – on the grounds that the grace of God in Christ bears no relation to the 'value' of its recipients (11,5–6).<sup>22</sup> Christ died for the weak, the ungodly and the sinful (5,6–8), that is, without regard for worth. This utterly incongruous grace neither rewards nor reinforces previous standards of worth; it therefore subverts the authority of every value system, and every configuration of norms, except those derivable from the Christ-event itself. If God did not recognise those norms in his distribution of the salvific gift, they cannot retain their normative status for those reconstituted by grace. If the believer 'stands' in grace (14,4; cf. 5,2), not on the basis of Torah-observance nor on the basis of Torah-neglect, but on the basis of God's unconditioned gift, neither the Torah, nor its flouting, can be reckoned of absolute value. Just as elsewhere Paul can insist that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision are worth anything (τι ἰσχύει), only faith working through love (Gal 5,6; cf. 6,15)<sup>23</sup>, so here neither keeping kosher nor not keeping kosher, neither observing the Sabbath nor treating every day alike can be accorded superior value. In each case, both options are 'devalued' not in the sense that they are rendered of negative value, but in the sense that they are deprived of ultimate value; they are possible, but non-necessary forms of service to Christ, since they were not criteria employed by God in 'welcoming' the believer in Christ. By contrast, love, righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit *are* of ultimate value (14,15.17), because they are integral to the meaning and effect of the Christ-event (see 5,1–6 for all these terms; cf. Gal 5,5–6.22–23). To live 'from faith' is to stake everything on receiving one's worth from the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. 6,1–11).

There are strong resemblances here between Paul's structure of thought and the Stoic theory of value with its demotion of what were normally considered 'goods' to the status of matters of indifference (ἀδιάφορα).<sup>24</sup> Like the

22 The one apparent exception – the advantage of the Jew (3,1–2; 9,4–5; cf. the 'first' in 1,16; 2,9–10) – turns out not to be so: even Jews are 'under sin' (3,9) and their unique status consists in the fact that Israel always was, and still remains, constituted by the unconditioned calling of God (9,6–18; 11,28–29).

23 When ἰσχύει governs a direct accusative, as here, its sense is either legal (to validate something; cf. the intransitive in Heb 9,17) or financial (to be worth something; e.g., Josephus, Ant. 14,106; see BDAG 4; LSJ ἰσχύω III.2). So rightly, F. Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (HThK 9), Freiburg/Basel/Wien 1974, 352.

24 For an exploration of the parallels, see J.J. Jaquette, *Discerning What Counts: The Function of the Adiaphora Topos in Paul's Letters* (SBLDS 146), Atlanta 1995. For application to Romans 14–15, see Engberg-Pedersen, *Everything is Clean* (see n. 8). Paul places this



Stoics, Paul has adopted an alternative system of value or worth (ἀξία) in which a single good (for Paul: salvation in Christ; for the Stoics: virtue) puts all other ‘goods’ into a different and lesser category: these are now fundamentally unimportant, even if they may be preferable or non-preferable according to their contingent usefulness for the only true good. Thus, for the Stoics, health, wealth, beauty, reputation, noble birth, even life itself – matters of the highest value in the Graeco-Roman world – are to be considered of no ultimate consequence, bringing neither benefit nor harm for the virtuous person.<sup>25</sup> This cuts both ways: they are neither to be chosen *nor avoided*, since either course of action would accord them a value they do not deserve. This Stoic recalibration of worth is based on a rigorous assessment of what is ‘natural’ – what is intrinsic to the universe and to human wellbeing within it. Paul’s reassessment of values derives from an event, the unconditioned ‘welcome’ accorded to every believer in the death and resurrection of Christ. This has the capacity to question every criterion of value, ‘natural’ or constructed, bringing every evaluation of worth under the critical assessment of the new reality created in Christ (cf. 12,1–2).

#### IV. Weakness in Faith

That ‘the weak in faith’ are to be welcomed (14,1), within the welcome of Christ (15,7), indicates that Paul regards their faith as genuine: they are to be treated with respect (out of respect to Christ) as believers, the product of God (14,20). Moreover, Paul reckons that their kosher- and Sabbath-observant practices are performed out of loyalty to Christ: their decisions on food are made ‘to the Lord’, and are undertaken in thankfulness to God (14,6). Such observances are certainly compatible with faith in Christ. Whereas participation in idolatry, or in sex with a prostitute, were utterly incompatible with Christ, and could not be performed in honour of Christ or in gratitude to God (1 Cor 6,12–20; 10,14–22), there is nothing about kosher-rules or Sabbath-observance that Paul considers intrinsically incompatible with loyalty to Christ. That orientation is

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reconfiguration of value within a different symbolic matrix, formed by a gift-event which re-evaluates every value.

- 25 See Diogenes Laertius 7,102 (= SVF III, 117). The Stoics *also* held that some indifferent things may be preferred (προηγμένα) over others, the basis of preference (or ‘selective value’) being their capacity to act as indirect aids to the only true good, virtue. This instrumental function gives wealth or health, in normal circumstances, a certain pragmatic value (they could be considered ‘serviceable’, the ‘material’ for virtue), but the Stoics insisted that indifferent things had no intrinsic moral worth: they were not desirable for their own sake (*per se*) and circumstances might well bring it about that they should *not* be preferred; see Diogenes Laertius 7,104.109; Stobaeus II, 82.84–85 (SVF III, 119.121.124.128). For contemporary discussion, see G. Lesses, *Virtue and the Goods of Fortune*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy 7 (1989) 95–128; E. Schütrumpf, *Verteidigung natürlicher Streben – zu den Vorstufen der stoischen Ethik*, AuA 39 (1993) 48–63; T. Brennan, *Stoic Moral Psychology*, in: B. Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, Cambridge 2003, 257–299.

crucial, and the last thing Paul wants is for the ‘weak’ to act outside of the conviction that what they do is done in honour of God/Christ (14,5).

What is characteristic of the ‘weak’ is that these cultural traditions are *integrally connected* to their faith in Christ. It is not that they consider kosher-observance an alternative or additional ground of salvation: if they believed that such practices were the means of participation in Christ, Paul would hardly have dealt with them so gently, after all that he has said earlier in this letter.<sup>26</sup> They do not believe in Christ *and* in certain practices, but they believe in Christ *through* the practice of customs which they cannot dissociate from what it means to serve Christ. The kosher- and Sabbath-rules are, for them, so closely interwoven with their faith-response to the Christ-event that to depart from them would be, for them, an abrogation of that faith. The Christ-event is for them of supreme and definitive significance, but the food- and day-traditions are integral to their response to that event, a constituent element of their faith.

Paul recognises this as a valid form of faith (he has met plenty of Jewish believers who think and act likewise), and he is extremely anxious lest pressure exerted by the ‘strong’ cause these ‘weak’ believers to act against their faith – and thus to give up their commitment to Christ. He is concerned lest the ‘strong’ put a ‘stumbling-block’ in the path of the ‘weak’ (14,13.20–21), since this would cause not just ‘offence’ but serious ‘damage’ (14,15). What concerns him is that the ‘strong’ may pressurise the ‘weak’ to act against the convictions intrinsic to their faith in Christ, so that in abandoning kosher- or Sabbath-observance they will also abandon Christ. What is at stake is nothing less than ‘destruction’ (ἀπόλλυμι; 14,15; καταλύω; 14,20) of the believer as a believer, a work created by God (14,20). Although all the imperatives in 14,13–22 are addressed to the ‘strong’, the generalising comments in 14,22b–23 apply to both parties in Rome and serve to highlight the seriousness of the issue.<sup>27</sup> ‘Blessed is the person who does not judge/condemn himself (ὁ μὴ κρίνων ἑαυτόν) in what he approves’ (14,22b). Since it is the ‘weak’ who are inclined to ‘judge’ those who eat ‘unclean’ food (κρίνω; 14,3.10), what Paul imagines here is the disaster ensuing when the ‘weak’ turn such judgement on themselves, once, under pressure, they have eaten non-kosher food. ‘The person who is in two minds (ὁ διακρινόμενος)<sup>28</sup> when he eats is condemned (κατακέκριται), because this is not from faith (ἐκ πίστεως); for whatever is not from faith is sin

26 Pace Barrett, their weakness is not a failure to recognise that people are justified by faith in Christ alone, rather than by vegetarianism or sabbatarianism (C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, London 1971, 256–257). That Paul recognises them as living ‘from faith’ (14,23) indicates that the Christ-event is the ground of their identity.

27 See M. Theobald, *Studien zum Römerbrief* (WUNT 136), Tübingen 2001, 503–504.

28 For this meaning of διακρίνομαι, see Rom 4,20; Mk 11,23; Jas 1,6: it suggests ‘doubt’ in the sense of an attitude uncertain of its own half-convictions (Cranfield, *Romans II* [see n. 11], 727: ‘doubtful about the rightness of the action he proposes’).

(ἀμαρτία) (14,23). There is no need to limit the scope of the latter statement.<sup>29</sup> Paul expects that every act performed by believers arises from, and coheres with, their new identity in faith. The ‘weak’ can and do keep kosher-rules out of faith in Christ; but if they cannot also *disregard* kosher rules out of faith in Christ, to pressurise them to do so would be to lead them into sin and to bring about their ‘condemnation’.<sup>30</sup>

This suggests that what Paul means here by ‘weakness’ in faith is not limitation in quantity (they do not have *less faith* than the ‘strong’), nor inferiority in quality (their faith is not less ‘pure’ or less ‘rational’ than that of the ‘strong’). Nor does he regard the faith of the ‘weak’ as insecure or vacillating: doubt or wavering in faith is precisely what he does not want to induce, and he assumes that the ‘weak’, like the ‘strong’, act, as they should, out of full conviction (14,5). The only respect in which they are ‘weak’ is that their faith is *vulnerable*. Because the faith of the ‘weak’ is integrally connected to one particular set of cultural norms, it cannot be expressed within other cultural parameters, so that in situations where their cultural norms become problematic or socially impossible their faith itself comes under threat. Their fragility consists, paradoxically, in the strength of the ties between their faith in Christ and its cultural expression in one non-negotiable set of norms: outside of this cultural enclave, their faith is threatened by social conditions which incline them to desert their traditions – and with those traditions, their faith.

Paul does not question their faith, and goes out of his way to create the conditions in which such faith can be practised without threat. He does not require the ‘weak’ to change their behaviour in any respect, but (as we shall see) puts all the weight of obligation on the ‘strong’. The Christian observance of these Jewish traditions is entirely acceptable to Paul, inasmuch as it represents faith in Christ. The one thing Paul *does* require of the ‘weak’ is the recognition that other believers can act quite otherwise (e.g., eating ‘unclean’ food) also in honour of Christ (14,6); they are not to be ‘judged’ for doing so (14,3–4.13). That is a considerable concession, since it disallows any necessary, universalisable connection between ‘honouring the Lord’ and ‘keeping kosher’.<sup>31</sup> Thus the ‘weak’ have to accept that *others* do *not* integrate their faith in Christ with

29 *Contra* Byrne, who insists that believers do many things that do not proceed from faith: ‘one does not brush one’s teeth in faith!’ (B. Byrne, *Romans* [SacPag 6], Collegeville 1996, 419). Schlier rightly insists that the scope is universal, since faith entails obedience to Christ as Lord, which covers every dimension of life (14,6–8) (H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* [HThK 6], Freiburg 1977, 418).

30 It is not clear whether the condemnation in view here is self-condemnation or condemnation by God (cf. Rom 2,1; 1 Cor 11,32); perhaps both are in view (Dunn, *Romans* 9–16 [see n. 19], 828).

31 For the depth of this concession which Paul expects from the ‘weak’, while protecting their right to apply their convictions to themselves, and while expecting the ‘strong’ to accommodate and even adopt their practices, see Barclay, ‘Do we Undermine ...?’ (see n. 4), 54–59.

kosher- or Sabbath-rules, which are thereby relativised in the sense that they are rendered non-universal. But Paul accepts that, *in their own perception of their own behaviour*, these cultural traditions are inseparable from their service to Christ and their gratitude to God.

### V. *Strength in Faith*

The ‘strong’ are also expected to act at all times from faith: if they eat ‘everything’ (14,2) and ‘observe every day’ (14,5), this is permissible on no other grounds than because they do so in honour of God (14,5–7).<sup>32</sup> Paul counts himself amongst the strong (15,1) and makes clear that their policy regarding food arises from the recalibration of value precipitated by the Christ-event: ‘I know and am persuaded *in the Lord Jesus* that nothing is unclean in itself’ (14,14).<sup>33</sup> Such faith is ‘strong’ inasmuch as food-aversion, and the evaluation of food as ‘clean’ or ‘unclean’, is not integrally connected to it – neither positively integral nor negatively incompatible. *The strength in their faith is the degree to which they have been able to dissociate their faith in Christ from every norm or value that is not derived from the good news itself.* Since they cannot live without eating and drinking, their faith will always be accompanied by some alimentary habit or another. But it is their conviction that these habits are not integral to, nor incompatible with, their faith. Thus the kingdom of God is not food and drink, but it is righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit (14,17) because these latter phenomena *are* integral to faith (5,1–6). This distinction has nothing to do with the difference between body and spirit, between the external and the internal, or between the ‘ceremonial’ and the ‘moral’. Paul is clear that the body in all its ‘external’ habits of life is implicated in the reorientation of the life of the believer (cf. 6,12–13; 12,1; 13,13–14). The question is what is, or is not, intrinsic to the Christ-gift; what is characteristic of the ‘strong’ is the degree to which other values, not implied by that gift, have been rendered indifferent.

After the carefully balanced discussion of 14,1–13a, it is striking that the rest of Paul’s discussion (14,13b – 15,7) is directed at the ‘strong’, who are the object of a series of demanding instructions.<sup>34</sup> These go far beyond, but certainly include, the instruction not to ‘despise’ the ‘weak’ (14,3.10). Paul in fact requires that the ‘strong’ accommodate their behaviour at communal meals to the traditions observed by the ‘weak’. If to do otherwise would harm and even destroy their brothers and sisters in Christ (see above), they must refrain from

32 For the notion of ‘the feast of every day’, see Philo, Spec. Leg. 2,42–55; a partially parallel rabbinic idea is discussed by P.J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles*, Assen 1990, 245–247.

33 Pace Engberg-Pedersen, *Everything is Clean* (see n. 8), 46–49, I do not find at work in this passage the notion that the world is God’s world, and for that reason clean (cf. 1 Cor 10,26).

34 For discussion of the addressees of this passage, in debate with Watson, see Engberg-Pedersen, *Everything is Clean* (see n. 8), 29–34.

any food or drink that would cause the ‘weak’ to stumble, even if that means adopting kosher practices that they consider non-necessary for themselves (14,21). This is not a compromise of the good news but precisely its necessary expression: only so can they act in love (14,15) which is the central characteristic and core product of the Christ-event (5,5.8; 8,39; 13,8–10). Like Christ, and because of Christ, their priority is to work for the good of their neighbour (15,1–3), such that their strength is expressed not in getting their own way, but in ‘bearing the weaknesses of the powerless’ (15,1; cf. Gal 6,2).<sup>35</sup> If they are committed in Christ to peace and to the task of mutual construction (14,19), they must eschew disputes and any form of behaviour which would cause others to be destroyed.

Paul can urge this behaviour on the ‘strong’ because he reckons them able to live both kosher and non-kosher lifestyles in honour of Christ. Precisely because such rules are *not* integral to their faith – neither required nor disallowed – the ‘strong’ can adopt either pattern of behaviour, doing whatever is of instrumental use in the service of Christ, as circumstances and social conditions suggest – in this case, what is required by love for a brother or sister in Christ. Paul can instruct the ‘strong’ to adopt kosher rules precisely because these *do not matter* to those whose faith is strong.<sup>36</sup> Paul does *not* regard non-kosher eating habits as in any sense superior: what is superior, as ‘stronger’, is only the capacity to adopt or discard such habits out of recognition that they are not a constituent element of faith in Christ. The ‘strong’ can thus adopt such habits while simultaneously judging them non-necessary for their faith. To all appearances they will behave exactly like the ‘weak’, but their understanding of what they are doing, and why, will be different. They do not need to parade that difference, which might result in denigrating the weak. In that sense, as Paul instructs the ‘strong’, they can keep their faith to themselves before God (14,22).<sup>37</sup> It is only God who needs to know the deeper reasons for their actions (cf. Gal 6,5).<sup>38</sup>

35 For the social connotations of 15,1–3 and the possible ‘reproach’ in becoming the targets of Roman disdain of kosher-practice, see Barclay, ‘Do we Undermine ...?’ (see n. 4), 55.

36 As Horrell notes, ‘it is only from a perspective which regards food in some ‘absolute’ sense as morally indifferent that one can adopt the relativist and tolerant stance we find especially in Romans 14–15’ (Solidarity [see n. 8], 194).

37 If the relative pronoun ἣν is not read (it is missing in D G Ψ and most of the early versions) one would have to read the first clause of 14,22 as a question: ‘Do you have faith? Keep it to yourself before God.’ For parallel Pauline uses of ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ, see Gal 1,20; 1 Cor 1,29; 4,2; 7,12; 8,21; for the parallel notion of keeping one’s boast to oneself (εἰς ἑαυτόν), see Gal 6,4 (see J.M.G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians*, Edinburgh 1988, 160–161). Jewett’s reading of κατὰ σεαυτόν as ‘in accordance with oneself’ is possible, but makes less sense in the context (R. Jewett, *Romans* [Hermen.], Minneapolis 2007, 870).

38 So O. Michel, *Der Brief an die Römer* (KEK 4), Göttingen 1978, 438: ‘Es bedarf nicht der Bestätigung seiner Freiheit durch Menschen, sondern lediglich durch Gott’.

Thus the strength of the ‘strong’ does not consist in their power to impose their views upon the rest, either through verbal persuasion or through the enforcement of uniformity of practice on their terms. They are not strong because they eat everything (14,2), nor will their strength be compromised by reducing their diet to kosher-foods. Rather their strength is evidenced in their bearing of burdens (15,1), that is, in their accommodation of the weak. Their strength is precisely their ability to look and act ‘weak’, as conditions require. They do not have more or better faith, but their faith is more flexible and adaptable than that of the ‘weak’, because it is capable of being expressed within different cultural regimes. They are not more strongly attached to Christ than are the ‘weak’, or more fully convinced about what they are doing. They are simply less vulnerable to external changes in social and cultural conditions, because their faith has been more fully disaggregated from norms and values not implicit within the Christ-event itself.

There are thus both similarities and differences between the characterisations of faith as weak or strong in relation to Abraham (4,19–22) and in relation to rules about food and days (14,1 – 15,6). In the case of Abraham, weakness in faith would have meant an inability to trust that he could have an offspring, given that he and Sarah were as good as ‘dead’ (4,19); strength entailed a conviction that God would do what he had promised, however implausible it seemed (4,20–21). In this case, ‘weak’ faith believes that God will act only through human capacities; ‘strong’ faith disentangles God’s capacity from human capacity, such that God can do the humanly impossible. In the case of Romans 14–15, as we have seen, the weakness or strength of faith does not concern God’s capacity to act or save, but it does concern the degree to which faith is entangled with systems of worth which are humanly derived. In one case, the issue concerns power (God’s power in relation to human power), in the other worth (God’s definition of worth in relation to human definitions). In both cases, faith is stronger to the degree that it allows God’s reality (in power, or in the recalibration of worth) to render indifferent human reality (in power, or in inherited systems of worth). Faith stakes the self on God, and is stronger to the extent that it allows attachment to God to dissolve human attachments, whether in the form of reliance on human capacity or in the form of commitment to human systems of evaluation. Because of their deep structural similarity, Paul can use the same terminology in both cases, without implying that the ‘weak’ in Romans 14–15 are somehow less reliant on the power of God or less confident about the resurrection of Jesus.

## VI. Conclusions

We have come to the conclusion that it is most likely Paul himself who uses the terms ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ to describe the viewpoints of the groups in Rome, since relative strength or weakness in faith is precisely how he figures their positions. These labels do not represent the *quantity* of faith: both groups act out of full commitment and total orientation to Christ, and can be commended only



because they do so. The difference consists in the fact that the faith of the ‘weak’ is integrally attached to a set of cultural norms (concerning food and days), such that they would be unable to maintain their faith in Christ outside of these cultural parameters. Their faith is full and sincere, and they are by no means to be denigrated or despised, but rather supported and protected; the only condition laid upon them is that they recognise the validity of those believers who operate within different (or variable) cultural norms. What distinguishes the ‘strong’ is that their faith in the Christ-event is disaggregated from non-gospel criteria of value, such that they can both disregard and, where appropriate, observe particularities in food-custom without considering either policy a necessary component of their faith. Because this thorough-going recalibration of value arises from the Christ-event, which has disregarded every human criterion of worth, their strength reflects not some superiority in intelligence or virtue only the dissolution of all former systems of value, and thus the depth of their reconstitution in Christ. For this reason, Paul is not afraid that by calling them ‘strong’ he may rebuild structures of arrogance or competitive boasting that he has opposed throughout the letter (cf. 2,17–29; 3,27; 11,17–24; 12,3.16). Those who are strong by definition boast only in the Lord (5,2.11): their strength is precisely their recognition that *nothing* about themselves, their heritage or their inherited systems of value counts before God.<sup>39</sup> They do not consider a non-kosher lifestyle a necessary or superior form of loyalty to Christ. They simply regard both options as non-integral to faith, and therefore available for selection as required by the situational application of gospel values.

The weakness of the ‘weak’ thus concerns their vulnerability when social conditions put them under pressure to change their behaviour; correspondingly, the strength of the ‘strong’ concerns their adaptability in expressing their faith in Christ in a variety of social and cultural contexts. This evaluation clearly reflects the social demands of Paul’s own mission. What he appreciates (‘strength’) is the flexibility that can cross cultural and social boundaries, that can be ‘all things to all people’ (1 Cor 9,19–23) and can survive in all social conditions (Phil 4,11–13). If the radical Stoic theory of value, and its treatment of life-conditions as *adiaphora*, had its origin in the philosophical quest for immunity from the external vicissitudes of life, Paul’s Christian equivalent reflects the requirements of adaptability characteristic of a religious movement which crosses social and cultural borders. Those who cannot cross those boundaries are not to be despised, nor to be forced into cultural relativism, but they register as ‘weak’ on a scale which puts a premium on cultural flexibility.

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39 Gäckle suggests that, after developing a theology of weakness, and with interpreters like Prisca, Aquila and Phoebe in Rome, Paul can count on re-using the strong-weak language from the Corinthian situation without evoking the pejorative overtones which that language would evoke in a Stoic-influenced context (Die Starken und die Schwachen [see n. 6], 444–449).

Where the Stoic theory of value is grounded in a universal philosophy of ‘nature’, the Pauline equivalent is predicated on an unconditioned divine gift, which relativises previous norms under the impact of an event which is of universal significance because it corresponded, in fact, to no human evaluation of worth.<sup>40</sup>

It is not necessary for the success of the Pauline mission that all believers are able to cross cultural boundaries, but it is necessary that some are, and that those who cannot (the ‘weak’) nonetheless recognise the legitimacy of those who do.<sup>41</sup> As we have seen, Paul requires of the ‘weak’ only that they stop judging the ‘strong’, but that is still a significant concession. If they refuse to do this, they will refuse to allow the legitimacy of forms of Christian belief and practice other than those attached to their own cultural norms. It was this concession that Paul fought for, and won, at the Jerusalem conference (Gal 2,1–10) and it was the refusal of this concession, in the practice of Peter and other Jews, that occasioned the Antioch dispute (Gal 2,11–21). By withdrawing from meals with Gentile believers, and thus in effect requiring them to ‘judaise’ (Gal 2,11–14), the Jewish believers in Antioch were elevating Jewish traditions to the position of a universal necessity integral to Christian faith – an intrinsic expression of faith not just for themselves but for non-Jews. For Paul, that is a denial of the ‘good news’, which announces that God reckons worth (‘considers righteous’) not on the basis of Jewish practice (‘works of the Law’) but on the basis of faith in Christ (that is, in living from the truth that the Christ-event is the God-given source of worth; Gal 2,15–21). Peter, Barnabas and the other Jews in Antioch were, in Paul’s eyes, not ‘weak’ but ‘hypocrites’: they knew that Gentile believers did not have to ‘judaise’ but they behaved as if they did, and thus acted clean contrary to ‘the truth of the good news’ (Gal 2,14–16). It is clear from the Antioch dispute and from the Roman problems that common meals shared by believers with different views of the Torah were the most neuralgic occasions created by the Pauline mission, precisely because they were necessary for community-construction but highlighted the differences in cultural configurations of Christian faith. If Paul felt that Gentile converts were being forced to adopt Jewish customs as a necessary expression of their faith, he reacted strongly in the name of the Christ-gift that rendered non-absolute every previous definition of worth (so Galatians). If he felt that they, like he, could adopt those same customs as matters of indifference, necessary for specific occasions or in particular social contexts, while their faith remained unattached both to the observance of those customs and to their disregard, he could en-

40 For the ‘universalism’ that springs from an unconditioned event, see A. Badiou, *Saint Paul: La foundation de l’universalisme*, Paris 1997.

41 Cf. W.S. Campbell, *The Rule of Faith in Romans 12:1–15:13*, in: D.M. Hay / E.E. Johnson (eds.), *Pauline Theology. III. Romans*, Minneapolis 1995, 259–286, here 283: ‘Gentiles must not regard observance of the Jewish law as incompatible with Christian faith, and Jews must not regard it as essential to Christian faith’.

courage a flexible form of behaviour that made allowance for the vulnerability of the 'weak' (so Rom 14–15).<sup>42</sup>

In all cases it is the construction of a diverse but mutually enriching community which remains Paul's goal. As we have seen, his policy recognises the individuality of opinion (Rom 14,14), and even encourages a certain privacy in the faith-relation between the believer and God (Rom 14,22). But this is only to create the optimal conditions for a community of mutual welcome. In this case, the community not only provides collective meta-norms (of solidarity and love) within which diversity can flourish.<sup>43</sup> It also, in its very diversity, creates the conditions in which faith is strengthened by being disentangled from any one social or cultural expression. If Torah-observant believers live and eat only with fellow Torah-observers, it is harder for them to appreciate that the Christ-gift was given without regard to their Torah-determined worth. By mixing their company (e.g., by taking Titus to Jerusalem, Gal 2,1–3), Paul elicits recognition that this is in fact the case. Thus mutual recognition between Jewish and non-Jewish believers is an essential corollary of Paul's good news, as witnessed by his efforts to complete the collection for Jerusalem (Rom 15,25–27). In recognising one another, despite their differences, as authentic believers in Christ, all sides are rescued from repackaging the Christ-gift as a validation of their own cultural traditions. In this sense, the presence of the 'strong' in Rome, to be welcomed without judgement, keeps the 'weak' from lapsing into unbelief, by refocusing their identity on the Christ who unites them with the 'strong'. Conversely, the presence of the 'weak', and the necessary efforts to accommodate their more vulnerable position, strengthens the faith of the 'strong', because in that adaptability their faith is further detached from *both* cultural traditions, their own and those of the 'weak'. Paul's vision of community is not just mutual tolerance, but mutual construction (14,19; 15,2; cf. 1 Cor 8,1; 14,4).<sup>44</sup> One way in which the Romans can *build* each other's faith is by eating together and by welcoming each other, diverse as they are. Thereby they continually regroup and even strengthen their identity as founded upon the unconditioned welcome of Christ.

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42 Since circumcision is a permanent mark of identity, and not (like food customs) easily adopted or reversed as circumstances required, and since it, in Paul's eyes, entailed commitment to the whole Law (Gal 5,3), Paul was unable to recommend to Gentile believers the tactical adoption of circumcision, even though he regarded the presence or absence of this mark of Jewish identity fundamentally indifferent (Gal 5,6; 6,15; 1 Cor 7,17–20).

43 See Horrell, *Solidarity* (see n. 8), passim.

44 Cf. my critical comments on Jewett's Romans commentary in JSNT 31 (2008) 89–111, here 107–109.