As discussed in this morning's lecture, Romans 11 provides graphic imagery by which to investigate the matters of Christian perceptions of and discourse about Jews and Judaism. Tellingly, it is the place where Paul expresses most explicitly his deep identification with and concern about the welfare of those among his fellow Jews who do not share his convictions about Jesus. He discloses these viewpoints specifically to elicit respectful empathy toward them by way of revealing a mystery: things will not turn out in the end as some non-Jews might suppose on the basis of how things presently appear, for "all Israel will be saved [rescued/restored]." Moreover, he makes it clear that rather than judgmentalism or smug conceit, the proper recognition of their own precarious place and dependence upon God's grace bears witness to the fact that everyone, Gentile as well as Jew, stands in need of God's mercy, and thus in need for merciful treatment by each other!

Chapter 11 completes an argument begun in chapter 9, which returns to themes foreshadowed in the first chapters that Paul is not ready to engage until he has completed his arguments in chapters 5--8. Moreover, chapter 11 also sets up the "Therefore" of 12:1 and the chapters that follow. Therein, Paul exhorts the Christ-believing non-Jews of Rome to live in respectful relationships not only with each other, but with all humankind, and most relevantly, with Jews who do not share their convictions about Jesus. Paul explains to these non-Jews how they should imagine the present state of his fellow Jews as also their brothers and sisters in the family of God, as well as their own guest-like place among these Jews (Nanos, 1996).

It is readily apparent why Paul's statements in Romans 11 played a central role in Vatican II's document, Nostra Aetate 4, and other similar statements by Catholic and many Protestant organizations since, which draw explicitly on Paul's language in Romans 11 ("the

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1 The major details of the lecture this morning ("How Christians Talk About Jews: The Problems and Prospects of Paul's Message in Romans 11") reflects the exegetical and hermeneutical discussions available in Nanos 2012b, 3-21.
Jews remain very dear to God, for the sake of the patriarchs, since God does not take back the gifts he bestowed or the choice he made”; cf. Rom 11:28-29). Nevertheless, when we turn to current English language translations and interpretations of Romans 11 with this topic in mind, the very text from which the flowering of these respectful viewpoints on Jews and Judaism take root, we are confronted with language that would seem to cut off the emergence of these developments at their source. Ironically, translations have not caught up with sentiments that Paul's overall arguments are now understood to signify. Some important translations including the RSV, NRSV, and several modern language versions represent choices that are more negative and replacement-theology-oriented than those in vogue earlier, not least when compared to the KJV and ASV, as well as other popular alternatives.²

This seminar offers us an opportunity to explore the translation alternatives I am suggesting, as well as some of the reasons these translations came to prevail in the first place, and why they have not already been changed in spite of very different sensibilities and even theological convictions by the denominations representing many if not most Christians, and what might be done to bring about changes that reflect these differences in future translations.

**Historical Factors**

The way that Romans has been translated into Latin and interpreted by Augustine and Luther, to name but two of the most famous Christian interpreters of Paul, and into many languages since, has had an immeasurable impact on how Christians view Jews and Judaism—negative as well as positive. That influence is substantial not only within the churches, but in Western Society at large, and through missionary efforts and now globalization, in the perceptions of cultures around the world; hence, its direct relevance for today's lecture here in Hong Kong.

It is well known but perhaps not always attended to consistently in the framing of research approaches that neither Augustine nor Luther was really concerned with Jews or Judaism (contemporary or ancient) when they interpreted what Paul had to say in Romans. They were interested in how they could use Romans to develop and champion their views in contrast to those of their Christian rivals, whom they regarded as heretics. This polemical role

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² Details were discussed in the earlier lecture; see Nanos 2012a.
for Romans continued, and continues, in various inter-sectarian battles waged within the Christian church.

In this role, Romans serves as a battleground for demonstrating one Christian group's claims to superior faithfulness to Paul's as well as Christ's teachings over a given rival Christian group's supposed inferior if not antithetical and thus heretical teachings. This dynamic is familiar to most people today in terms of the Reformation, which gave birth to Protestantism's protests of Roman Catholic policies and practices. Of course, there are no Roman Catholics mentioned in the texts of Paul's letters. But there are Jews mentioned there, and the policies and practices of Paul's fellow Jews are central features of his arguments.

As a result, Christians and Christian groups have been waging battles against other Christians and Christian groups by turning the rivals into Jews, and their interpretations and behavior into Judaism. One strategy is to simply accuse them of "judaizing." The epithet generally remains undefined, and apparently need not be defined to be effective. It is applied as if it is self-evidently contrary to being a good Christian, with both the accuser and the accused deeply aware that Jewish values and ways of life are just plain wrong. To be so accused is to be judged to be in the wrong, for whatever reason, even if it has nothing to do with Jewish matters at all. Although no longer reminiscent of original context of Paul's intra-Jewish polemic, but delivered from outside as if Paul wrote of Judaism from outside of it, as if he did not still practice Judaism—it is Jews and Judaism that bear the brunt of criticism. Judaism serves only as the whipping boy en route to the real target, a rival Christian and their way of practicing Christianity. The implications for Jews extend much further, the horrors of the twentieth century have made this only too clear.

The negative role of the Jews in European society can be traced to the Revolt against Rome in the 60's of the current era, in which the Judeans became anathematized as terrorists of the Roman empire, fit to be enslaved if not eliminated, commemorated in the Arch of Titus,
where the victory over the Judeans is still portrayed to this day.

The emperors Vespasian and his son Titus heralded this victory as the signifying campaign of their reigns. They changed forever the ideal standing of Jews as upright subject people, however strange some of their beliefs and practices might have been regarded. It was from Jewish spoils, slave labor, and special taxation that the famous Coliseum was built, as well as the Temple to Jupiter, among other significant public works that commemorated forever, in stone, the conquest of the rebellious Jews.

When Paul wrote to Rome, which preceded these events by a decade or two, Jews were generally celebrated very differently, as strangers to be sure, just like Egyptians and Syrians. Nonetheless, they had been recognized and officially declared to be friends of Rome since the time of Julius Caesar, and granted special rites to practice their ancient customs, including permission to abstain from civic cult to Caesar (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.185-89, the decrees are discussed from 185-267). Romans could trust them to live according to the highest ideals, as outlined in their holy writings. Paul draws upon widely respected reputation of Jews and Judaism in chapter 2 of Romans, to argue from the well known positive stereotype that anyone who would think to call themselves a Jew would be deeply opposed to doing other than they said they would do, that is, to hypocrisy of any sort (cf. Epictetus 2.9.19-21). But many things changed for Jews and Judaism from the time of Vespasian, and later under Constantine, and the eventual Christianizing of the Roman Empire. The negative stereotype of the Jew and Judaism became part of the fabric of Christian rhetoric and policy.

The examples of inter-Christian polemizing of Jews and Judaism can be multiplied endlessly. To name but one, consider how in the sixteenth century Luther finds fault with Jews
in his particular interpretations of Romans, then segues into criticizing his various Christian
rivals, whether Roman Catholic, Anabaptist, or others. Commenting on Romans 2:1, which
refers to "whoever you are," a statement that is ambiguous and that at first sight would seem
to be referring to anyone in general who would judge another rather than themselves, Luther
instead concludes:

This is indeed true of the heathen, yet even in a greater measure of the Jews. The Apostle
therefore at the beginning of the chapter stresses the thought that in his accusation he has in mind mainly the Jews. To them we may compare, in a special degree, the heretics and hypocrites as also our modern jurists and priests, and lastly also those who quarrel among themselves and judge one another, while they do not regard themselves as offenders. Indeed they boast of their being right and even invoke God's wrath upon their adversaries; for certainly the Apostle here did not have in mind merely those who lived in Rome at that time (Luther 1954, 36-37 emphasis added).

In other words, Paul had in mind those who lived in Rome during Luther's time, the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical hierarchy. Their fault in his view, judgmental hypocrisy, is attributed most especially to the Jews. Yet it should be noted here that as Paul's argument unfolds he makes the point that if one would call oneself a Jew he or she would be expected to be the most aware of and sensitive to avoiding hypocritical judgment (vv. 17ff.). A Jew would be well aware of his or her faults but also of being entrusted with God's words for the nations. It is just this Jewish self-perception of responsibility to be true to God's calling to which Paul appeals to instruct non-Jewish Christ-believers in the way of faithfulness.

Several examples demonstrate the kind of judgments and judgmental language toward Jews and Judaism that is expressed in Luther's interpretation of chapter 11 of Romans, instead of the more positive evaluation of Jews and Judaism that one might expect to find there:

- 11:16: “By means of a twofold analogy the Apostle here supplies proof to magnify God's grace and destroy the arrogant (trans.: Jewish) boasting of righteousness.”

The specific referent as "Jewish" is supplied by the translator, who understood it to represent Luther's intent, but that does not change the fact that it is suggested by those who represent Luther's interpretive trajectory. Yet Paul provides no such language here about Jews! Instead, Paul warns non-Jews in rather blunt, confrontational terms that they need to be careful of
arrogance or they will be removed from their new place alongside of Jews as the people of God, who are the natural inhabitants of the metaphorical tree.

- 11:24: “The seed...does not produce a good olive tree, illustrates... that the Jews do not possess the glory – of the Fathers simply because they were the seed of the Fathers.”

The inference Luther draws contradicts what Paul will write later in the chapter and that Luther will explicitly recognize in his comments there (vv. 28-29), as well as what Paul has written already in 9:1-5 about the continued, present gifts to and privileged identity of the Jews who do not share his convictions about Jesus. That is why Paul is engaged in an argument based on his conviction about the final outcome, that all Israel will be restored, from which he works backwards to disclose what this must mean presently, in spite of how things might otherwise appear.

- 11:26-27: “The purpose of the whole passage is to incite the people (trans.: the Jews) to repentance. Even if some among them are cast away, nevertheless, the lump must be honored because of the elect.”

Again, the specific application to "the Jews" is inserted by the translator, but there is little reason to question that this is the referent in the passage. Nonetheless, it is hard to see how one could conclude that this passage is written to incite Jews to repentance! Instead, throughout Paul seeks to incite non-Jews to caution about the temptation toward arrogance lest these non-Jews be removed from God's grace. The can be part of the solution, but even if they fail to take Paul's warning to heart and thus to remain among the people of God, the final restoration of all Israel remains certain.

- 11:28: “The word 'enemies' must here be taken in a passive sense; that is, they deserve to be hated. God hates them, and so they are hated by the Apostles and all who are of God.”

In the lecture I noted the problematic translation decision of the NRSV to add "of God" even though not attested in any Greek manuscripts, and thus to read "they are enemies of God," and its implications, which Luther already made clear long ago. Moreover, Paul's language suggests throughout these chapters that the present situation is by God's design rather than earned, which Luther and many an interpreter is otherwise quick to supply when discussing what is "deserved." Nevertheless, how can Luther or any other interpreter conclude from Paul's argument here that God hates these Jews, or that they are hated by the Apostle Paul, or that
Paul's instruction is meant to lead the non-Jews addressed (as those who now see themselves as "of God") to hate them.

Translation and Interpretation Alternatives
There are many translations alternative available to explore in chapter 11 (and throughout the letter). In the lecture I discussed several of them, especially the two metaphors Paul develops in this chapter, that of the stumbling while running to announce a message, and that of the olive tree. I showed how the Greek may be translated more in keeping with the metaphors around which Paul works his arguments as well as more consistently across the two metaphors and in support of the overall positive characterization of his fellow Jews as suffering a temporary setback but not an end point, as well as to emphasize the precarious place of the non-Jews directly addressed.3

First, I showed a number of problematic decisions in vv. 11-16, including the use of the language of "falling" and "failure" when Paul has already clarified that they have not "fallen" down but rather "lagged" behind, creating a gap into which some non-Jews can now join between them and those Jews (such as Paul) who have not experienced this "delay." Paul’s point is that all will reach the destination, but because of this gap opening among Jews, non-Jews cannot also gain entry. Paul wants to confront any notion that the best interests of the non-Jews are ultimately served by the dismissal of these Jews, even though his positing of the opening for their entrance could have been taken to suggest such a limited good concept at work (someone must exit entirely for someone else to gain entry and attain the goal).

Then I explained why it is probably more accurate to translate the references in vv. 17-21 to the status of some of the Jews in terms of the natural branches not as "broken off" limbs, but as "broken" in the sense of "bent." Although in a distressed state, these branches are still on the tree! Paul works around cognates of the Greek word ekklaō ("broken") in verses 17-21, which can express a temporary state of damage as in bent limbs that parallels his insistence in the previous metaphor of stumbling but not fallen, whereas "broken off," as usually translated, suggests instead fallen rather than merely temporarily stumbling, undermining his overall message. He does not introduce cognates of the Greek word ekkoptō ("cut off") until vv. 22-24,

3 In addition to the essay in the Criswell journal already noted, extensive discussions of the translation and exegetical details are available in Nanos 2010a, 339-76; 2010b, 52-73.
when he changes from describing the state of the non-Jews as a wild shoot among the Jews as the natural branches to the threat to the wild shoot of being "cut off" yet again, this time from the tree into which they have been grafted. Paul threatens such a result for the wild shoot (non-Jews) if it (they) should suppose to have replaced the natural limbs, or to gloat or express indifference or judgmental arrogance toward their present plight instead of faithfulness, gratitude, and service (cf. 12:1ff.). When Paul's *a fortiori* inference arising from his stern warning to the non-Jews is read back into the earlier verses, it confuses the point he otherwise seems intent to make about the temporary stumbling or bending of some of his fellow Jews, that is, the anomalous lack of agreement that is presently being witnessed about the significance of Jesus, and thus whether Israel should be declaring him to the nations as the awaited one. He wants to make it clear that this unexpected development both serves the interests of these non-Jews for a time, and that it will eventually end with their agreement, but his introduction of this stern warning implies that the natural branches have been cut off rather than merely bent. He must then try to save the allegory (in vv. 23-24) by insisting that God can graft the natural branches back in again, that this would be more natural than grafting in a wild shoot in the first place, even though it is anything but natural to cut off branches only to seek to graft them back in again later, which Paul implicitly admits by appeal to God's omnipotence. To make his overall point against any incipient temptation to arrogance among the non-Jews specifically addressed, Paul compromises the allegorical clarity of his portrayal of the Jews temporarily suffering in order for these non-Jews to be incorporated "among them." Unfortunately, this has led, in my view, to a history of mistaken inferences about Paul's concept of the state of his fellow Jews and their replacement by non-Jews (hence, the NRSV translates *en autois* in v. 17 with "in their place" instead of the more natural translation, "among them"). It also leads to the idea that non-Jews have been grafted into Israel, instead of *among* Israelites as fellow members of the people of God, but remaining distinct from Israel, as members of the other nations turning to Israel's God as the one and only God of all the nations too (cf. 3:29-31; 15:7-12; Nanos 2012a, 62-80).

In vv. 25-27, I showed why "hardened" or "blinded" are not likely Paul's intended meaning, but "callused" as in being protected in their presently harmed condition (resulting from stumbling or being bent), and several other alternatives that likely better capture Paul's message here. I also discussed problems and alternatives for several other specific language
choices that follow after Paul's metaphor of stumbling and allegory of the olive tree, including why "enemies" and all the more of being "enemies of God" are not warranted. Instead, the point is that some have been temporarily "estranged" (an adjective that parallels "beloved" in the next clause and alludes to the metaphorical descriptions as stumbling and bent). Moreover, the accusation that they are guilty of "disobedience" is more likely meant to communicate their present state of "not (yet) being persuaded." And they are probably not being presented as "imprisoned" or "shut up" in unpersuadedness (or disobedience), but rather the Jew and non-Jew have been "joined together" in this predicament, and thus together they are equally in need of God's grace, which is the theme of the final verses of the chapter (vv. 30-36).

I hope that we can discuss these in more detail during the time we have together in this seminar. Now I would like to present some reflections on why these translations have so far persisted in spite of changing sensibilities and methodologies.⁴

**Conclusion, and Further Reflections:**

Why do we have this state of affairs? Beyond the many translation and interpretive issues that we could discuss together, and should, we could also discuss probable reasons for the translations and interpretations not changing yet to reflect these new sensibilities and interpretive insights. Below are some suggestions to consider.

**1. Translation committees (and their constituents):**

- Are those who are chosen to serve on the committees generally regarded as likely to be conservative in approach, e.g., not likely to rock the boat with noticeable changes to long repeated word choices? Do the people who want Bibles believe that the language itself is set, although the preferred sensibilities for how it is interpreted or applied may change? Is some combination of expectations of readers and anticipation of those expectations by committees and publishers at play?

- Do the committee members rely upon long repeated and well known glosses for the translations without supposing in many cases that there is the need to undertake new

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⁴ During the discussion, it was made clear that current Chinese translations adopt choices that are equivalent to the traditional English translation choices that I am challenging.
research, e.g., that there are reasons to question whether repeating previous translations represents the best alternatives?

-Do the translation and lexical traditions continue without challenge because the committee members are basically content with traditional conclusions?

-Or is repetition largely the result of "Path Dependence"? John McWhorter explains this dynamic by way of the following example:

In an ideal world all people would spontaneously understand that what political scientists call path dependence explains much more of how the world works than is apparent. Path dependence refers to the fact that often, something that seems normal or inevitable today began with a choice that made sense at a particular time in the past, but survived despite the eclipse of the justification for that choice, because once established, external factors discouraged going into reverse to try other alternatives.

The paradigm example is the seemingly illogical arrangement of letters on typewriter keyboards. Why not just have the letters in alphabetical order, or arrange them so that the most frequently occurring ones are under the strongest fingers? In fact, the first typewriter tended to jam when typed on too quickly, so its inventor deliberately concocted an arrangement that put A under the ungainly little finger. In addition, the first row was provided with all of the letters in the word typewriter so that salesmen, new to typing, could wangle typing the word using just one row.

Quickly, however, mechanical improvements made faster typing possible, and new keyboards placing letters according to frequency were presented. But it was too late: there was no going back. By the 1890s typists across America were used to QWERTY keyboards, having learned to zip away on new versions of them that did not stick so easily, and retraining them would have been expensive and, ultimately, unnecessary. So QWERTY was passed down the generations, and even today we use the queer QWERTY configuration on computer keyboards where jamming is a mechanical impossibility.

The basic concept is simple, but in general estimation tends to be processed as the province of "cute" stories like the QWERTY one, rather than explaining a massive weight of scientific and historical processes. Instead, the natural tendency is to seek explanations for modern phenomena in present-day conditions....
This observation raises the prospect that many of the translation as well as interpretation matters continue to revolve around and reflect the theological concerns and battles of previous eras, most of them arising hundreds (as in the case of the quotes from Luther discussed) if not over fifteen hundred years ago, in cultural settings and social contexts not to mention languages very different from our own. Views of Jews, Judaism, and others were different among virtually all (widely known) Christian translators and interpreters in earlier generations, in general less generous, yet their legacy persists when they are repeated as if assumed to be historically accurate for Paul for "present-time" exegetical and lexicographically driven reasons. Should they not be approached instead as (often mistaken) choices made at different, previous times for how to interpret Paul's language because of the "historical processes" at work in the lives of those earlier interpreters? Should they continue to be repeated without eliciting the recognition that there are other historically responsible exegetical alternatives to explore that would be more in keeping with the "present-time" sentiments of many Christians on these matters?

2. Motives are harder to know, and I resist inventing or judging them, but we should at least consider whether traditional sensibilities still characterize the views of the translation committee participants more than those involved in the council pronouncements on Jews and Judaism we surveyed:

- Does Christian self-identity still depend upon superiority to Jews and Judaism (supersessionism), as well as "in their place" (replacement) theology expressed in the unwarranted turn of phrase introduced in v. 17, instead of "among them," which is what the Greek contains? How does one account for the introduction of enemies "of God" in v. 28 late in the twentieth century?

- Are translators still primarily concerned about conforming their decisions to theological and ideological propositions already long held? For example, how open is a Protestant committee to making changes that would undermine traditional Protestant theological propositions, especially if the move might be construed to confirm more traditional Catholic positions—or even traditional Jewish ones?
Arguably things did not turn out as Paul presented them: is there a need to reduce dissonance, to save Paul, to rationalize away from the idea that he was mistaken?

Is there resistance to the harshness of Paul's message that those who "believe" in Christ (i.e., Christians) can nevertheless "think" and "behave" in ways that "sever" their relationship to God, not least, by the way that they treat those Jews in view in Paul's argument, i.e., those Jews who do not share their convictions about Christ? Why is Paul's warning in v. 20 to the non-Jews about their attitude toward Jews who do not believe in Jesus translated in the NRSV as "stand in awe," when what is written is instead, "be afraid"!

3. Should translators and interpreters not take up the challenge of Historical Critical Suspicion, that is, willingness to find fault with and express distance from the views attributed to Paul?

In addition to questioning the alternatives available to Paul's interpreters, is not also the need to investigate Paul's own views with some distance, that is, apart from the assumption that whatever it was that he did mean to communicate is necessarily the way that things were, or are, or should continue to be conceptualized by those who do care about what Paul thought?

Should not interpreters recognize that historical "reality" may have been different "in fact" and "interpreted" differently by other figures of Paul's time than his rhetorical approach to those people and events may suggest? Moreover, might not the motives of those figures he criticizes have been different than his aims and polemic claim and infer? Could they not have been perceived by themselves to be quite noble, and similarly have found Paul's actions and motives wanting? But alas, we do not have their point of view available to us: Do we thus not owe it to them, and to his readers, to construct reasonable options for consideration?\(^5\)

If my reading of Romans 11 is correct, things did not turn out as he sought in this letter to communicate that they would turn out. Paul opened up that hermeneutical space at the end of chapter 11 by his appeal to God's sovereign designs being beyond complete comprehension by any human, and also beyond human imagination, if not also seemingly arbitrary and perhaps also self-congratulatory (Nanos 2000, 217-29). Is it then not time to seize this opportunity to rethink these translations and interpretations "with" Paul, to get our

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\(^5\) I have argued for this reconsideration with respect to how to evaluate the identity of the "influencers" (often "opponents," etc.) of those Paul opposes in Galatians in Nanos 2002; similarly, see Mitternacht 1999.
history right as far as possible, but at the same time also to reconsider the conclusions most righty drawn for today, even when those might require some hermeneutical distance "from" him?

Thank you.

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