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Paul’s Missionary Duty Towards Gentiles in Rome: A Note on the Punctuation and Syntax of Rom 1.13–15

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Although scholars have long been aware of syntactical difficulties in Rom 1.13–15, few have approached the problem by challenging the established punctuation. Readings of the text by some earlier interpreters, e.g. Origen of Alexandria, indicate that there may be good reasons to do so. In this article it is argued that current readings of Rom 1.13–15 are based on inaccurate punctuation and syntax. A different punctuation of the passage is suggested, upon which a more plausible reading is based. This reading may, in turn, have some significance for the interpretation of Romans as a whole.

It is sometimes asserted that Rom 1.13–15 includes statements about Paul’s ‘universal’ obligation towards ‘all humanity’. So Friedrich Hauck states: ‘Paul, once a persecutor of the Gospel, is after his visitation and calling by Christ committed to be a messenger to all mankind, R[om]. 1:14: Ἐλλησιν τε καὶ βαρβάροις ... ὀφειλέτης εἰμί.’ Hauck’s words are to some extent descriptive of...
the conventional aim of focus when dealing with this passage in Paul’s letter to the Romans. Questions such as who these people were to whom Paul was obligated, and what potential indications the passage may include of Paul’s person and apostleship, have been and continue to be of main interest among interpreters of the text.

Another closely related assertion is that there is a discrepancy between Paul’s words in Rom 1.15 and 15.20, i.e. between his stated ‘eagerness’ to proclaim the good news in Rome and his canon of not proclaiming the gospel ‘where Christ has been named’. Since most scholars assume that it is Paul’s belief that ‘Christ has [already] been named’ in Rome, attempts to adjust the text in 1.15 to Paul’s canon in 15.20 are not infrequent. Peter Stuhlmacher, for instance, argues that ‘[v]erse 15 . . . explains Paul’s original plan, not what he means to do at the time of writing . . . [T]his verse in no way indicates that Paul is still intending to come as a missionary to preach his gospel in Rome.’ In order to support such a reading, Ernst Käsemann adds the verb ἐγεννέτο to v. 15.

Of a slightly different kind is the tendency among scholars to treat Rom 1.13–15 as a structural unity. Indeed, almost universally, v. 15 is considered to be structurally separated from v. 16. This kind of reading, I presume, is based on modern text editions of Romans, which surprisingly make such a distinction in spite of clear connective marks in the text.

In the following study I will show that the above claims about the content and structure of Rom 1.13–15 are among those that may have to be reconsidered if justice is to be done to the text’s grammar. The purpose of this paper is, on the one

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2 See, e.g., Starnitzke, ‘ “Griechen und Barbaren” ’ as well as most standard commentaries on Romans.

3 Especially noteworthy in this regard are S. Pedersen’s ‘Theologische Überlegungen zur Isagogik des Römerbriefes’, ZNW 76 (1985) 47–67, in which he argues that 1.14 is the ‘Schlüssel zum Römerbrief’ in that it contains ‘das fundamentale Wort über das Apostolat des Paulus’ (47), and P. S. Minear’s ‘Gratitude and Mission in the Epistle to the Romans’, Baseliea: Walter Freytag zum 60. Geburtstag (ed. J. Hermelink and H. J. Margull; Stuttgart: Evang. Missionsverlag GMBH, 1959) 42–8. Minear reads 1.14 (within the context of 1.8–17) as an example of passages ‘in which the apostle indicates a strong connection between his sense of obligation and gratitude, on the one hand, and his motivation as an apostle on the other’ (42), strangely concluding that ‘if men are converted from life on one side of the line to the other, the change will be most authentically indicated by the emergence of a radically new indebtedness/thankfulness. For we, too, are debtors “both to Greeks and barbarians, both to the wise and the foolish” ’ (48).

4 See, e.g., the discussion in K. P. Donfried, ed., The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991). See also Fitzmyer’s (unsuccessful) attempt to minimize the discrepancy between 1.15 and 15.20, after claiming that ‘it is clear that [Paul] did not found the Roman church and that some other Christians must have done so’ (Romans, 715).


6 E. Käsemann, An die Römer (HNT 8a; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1973) 14, 18.
hand, to argue that prevailing readings of Rom 1.13–15 are based on inaccurate punctuation and syntax, and, on the other, to suggest a more plausible reading of the passage.

Current punctuation and syntax of Rom 1.13–15

13 οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι πολλάκις προεθέμεν ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, καὶ ἐκκόλυθην ἄχρι τοῦ δεύρο, ἵνα τινά καρπὸν σχῶ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν καθὼς καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἐθνεῖσιν. 14 Ἑλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνόητοις ὀφειλέτης εἰμι, 15 οὕτως τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς ἐν Ῥώμῃ εὐαγγελίσασθαι.7

According to current readings and critical text editions the proper punctuation8 of Rom 1.13–15 may be detected by following the verse division of the text.9 Thus, a period mark is put after τοῖς λοιποῖς ἐθνεῖσιν (‘the rest of the gentiles’) at the end of v. 13. Accordingly, v. 14 begins a new sentence with the dative phrase Ἑλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνόητοις understood as an object to the predicate ὀφειλέτης εἰμι (‘I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish’ [NRSV]).10 In v. 15, then, another sentence begins, the reading of which, however, has been marked with some uncertainty:11 (a) In line with a number of scholars, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, for example, holds that the entire phrase τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον functions as the subject and εὐαγγελίσασθαι as the predicate. Thus his translation goes: ‘Hence my eagerness to preach the

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7 Rom 1.13–15 according to Nestle-Aland, 27th edn.
8 Punctuation of ancient manuscripts is, of course, a later invention, the purpose of which is to provide helps for readers who are not used to read texts in scriptio continua. Hence, unless originally found in the text, the proper punctuation of an ancient writing always involves interpretation of some kind. As B. M. Metzger observes: ‘Marks of punctuation occur only sporadically or not at all in the most ancient manuscripts. . . . Although the exegete can learn something concerning the history of the interpretation of a passage by considering the punctuation of a passage in the manuscripts, neither the editor nor the translator need, of course, feel bound to adopt the punctuation preferred by scribes’ (Manuscripts of the Greek Bible: An Introduction to Greek Palaeography [New York: Oxford University, 1981] 31–2). So also F. C. Burkitt, ‘The Punctuation of New Testament Manuscripts’, JTS 29 (1927–8) 397: ‘In a certain sense the punctuation of an ancient Greek work is no part of the original tradition; a properly written Greek paragraph goes in theory from the beginning to the end without punctuation, the beginnings and the due subordination of the several sentences being sufficiently indicated by the appropriate particles.’
10 Unless otherwise noted, translations from the Greek and Latin are mine.
11 See esp. C. E. B. Cranfield, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (2 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975–9) 1.85. See also BDF § 224 (1).
gospel . . .'; 12 (b) Whereas C. F. D. Moule also considers εὐαγγελίσασθαι to be the predicate, he believes that 'more probably τὸ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ is a self-contained adverbal phrase, as far as I am concerned'. He argues further that πρόθυμον is a 'slip, or a case of attraction, for [the adjective] πρόθυμος' (approximately 'Hence, as far as I am concerned, I am eager to preach the gospel . . .'); 13 (c) William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, on the other hand, argue that, instead of εὐαγγελίσασθαι, πρόθυμον should be read as the predicate and τὸ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ as the subject. In spite of this difference, however, their translation stands surprisingly close to the foregoing: 'Hence, so far as the decision rests with me, I am bent on delivering the message of salvation . . ..' 14

These different readings of v. 15 may be seen as potential marks of syntactical incompleteness or ambiguity. That the differences are minor ones does not reflect the problem at hand. Rather, what they exhibit are examples of unsuccessful attempts to reconcile an ambiguous syntax. Essentially, this ambiguity seems to be generated by reading v. 14 as an independent sentence, i.e. putting a period mark after ἔθνεσιν. As a consequence, the dative phrase Ἔλλησιν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἄνωθεν can only be taken as an object to οἴησεν εἰμί. 15 That, in turn, leaves the following text in v. 15 'pleasantly ambiguous', i.e. in an uncertain syntactical position, regarding the identification of both the subject and the main verb. 16 To be sure, it is quite possible to read v. 14 as an independent sentence, but when the reading is continued it becomes evident that something has been overlooked or left out. That is what the different suggestions of reading v. 15 indicate.

12 Fitzmyer, Romans, 251–2. J. D. G. Dunn offers identical translation in his Romans (2 vols; WBC 38; Dallas: Word, 1988) 1.27. See also the translations of the NRSV, NEB, and Moffatt.
13 C. F. D. Moule, An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1959) 38. Moule himself does not offer a complete translation of v. 15 (only of the phrase τὸ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ). Cf. the close translations of the RSV, NAB, and TEV, where the phrase τὸ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ seems to be taken as a neuter periphrasis for the personal pronoun ἐμι. 15 That, in turn, leaves the following text in v. 15 'pleasantly ambiguous', i.e. in an uncertain syntactical position, regarding the identification of both the subject and the main verb. 16 To be sure, it is quite possible to read v. 14 as an independent sentence, but when the reading is continued it becomes evident that something has been overlooked or left out. That is what the different suggestions of reading v. 15 indicate.

14 W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902) 19, 21–2. Unfortunately, the authors explain neither the function of the infinitive εὐαγγελίσασθαι in this reading nor which part of Paul’s text they are translating as 'bent on'. Cf. also the similar translations of the KJV and ASV.
Alternative punctuation and syntax of Rom 1.13–15

Despite apparent awareness of syntactical difficulties involved in prevailing readings, few scholars have challenged the established punctuation in order to search for alternative solutions to the problem. Indeed, I have only been able to find one single publication in which this has been seriously attempted.

In the 1967–8 issue of the *Expository Times*, Harry Parkin published a short note in which he suggested an alternative reading of Rom 1.13–15 based on different punctuation of the passage. Unfortunately, Parkin’s note has been largely unnoticed. Therefore, it is appropriate to offer a summary of his argument and suggestion of reading. First, according to Parkin, the phrase Ἐλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἄνοιχτοις is to be taken in apposition to the preceding τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν, ‘providing a natural division of the non-Jewish peoples’. This kind of expression is normal for Paul, as shown in 1.16 where Ὑποδόχως τε ... καὶ Ἐλλησί stands in apposition to παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι. Second, ὀφειλέτης εἰμὶ is employed with the infinitive εὐαγγελίσασθαι. This accords with Paul’s use elsewhere of the word ὀφειλέτης (4× in Paul): in Rom 8.12 and Gal 5.3 he uses ὀφειλέται ἐσμέν/ἐστίν with the infinitives ζήν/ποιήσοι respectively. In Rom 15.27 – which stands closest to the prevailing reading of 1.14 in that it has no infinitive – Paul does not use ὀφειλέτης with the dative case (which is classical) but with the genitive. Further, a survey of the cognate verb ὀφείλω shows that in 12 out of 13 instances in the letters of Paul it is used with the infinitive. Third, as for οὔτως τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον Parkin notes: ‘No new light is brought to bear upon this awkward construction except to relieve it of the full burden of the sentence. It becomes a parenthesis.’ Parkin summarizes his conclusions by providing the following translation of the passage:

I want you to know, brethren, that I have often intended to visit you, but have been hindered more than once, in order to have some fruit among you also, even as I have among the remainder of the Gentiles, both cultured and primitive, both wise and simple. I am under an obligation, that is why I am eager, to preach the Gospel also to you in Rome.

19 Parkin, ‘Romans i. 13–15’.
20 Somewhat surprisingly it gets no mention in Fitzmyer’s *Romans*, in spite of its extensive bibliography. It is not mentioned either in, e.g., Käsemann, *An die Römer*; Cranfield, *Romans*; H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (HTKNT 6; Freiburg: Herder, 1977); Dunn, *Romans*; P. Stuhlmacher, *Der Brief an die Römer übersetzt und erklärt* (NTD 6; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989).
21 Elsewhere in the NT only in Matt 6.12; 18.24; Luke 13.4.
22 According to Parkin, the fact that Paul uses an articular inf. in Rom 8.12 does not undermine the parallel use.
23 Rom 13.8; 15.1, 27; 1 Cor 5.10; 7.36; 9.10; 11.7, 10; 2 Cor 12.11, 14; 2 Thess 1.3; 2.13. Phlm 18 is the only exception (with acc.). Cf. Eph 5.28 (with inf.).
Important as it is, Parkin’s note is unfortunately too short to provide any adequate presentation of the problem under discussion. A glance at the history of interpretation, however, reveals that Parkin, in fact, is not the only reader of Romans who has noticed the close syntactical relationship between τοῖς λοιποῖς ἐθνεσιν and Ἑλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἄνοιχτοις, on the one hand, and οὕτως εἰμὶ καὶ εὐαγγελίσασθαι, on the other. Such alternative readings of Rom 1.13–15 did exist among earlier interpreters, of which no traces are left in modern text editions.

In his Annotationes (1535) Erasmus of Rotterdam tells us that sunt qui malint infinitum εὐαγγελίσασθαι referre ad nomen verbale ὄφειλέτης (‘some would rather take the infinitive εὐαγγελίσασθαι as referring to the noun ὄφειλέτης’), paraphrasing the passage in 1.13–15 thus: Sicut alijs gentibus iam praedicaui, quum omnibus debeam... debeo & uobis qui Romae agitis, tametsi sapientes, potentes, & doctisitis, praedicare euangelium Christi (‘As I have already preached to other nations, in that I am indebted to all... I am indebted to preach the gospel of Christ also to you who live in Rome, even if you are wise, powerful, and learned’). Erasmus’s reference shows two things: first, there were those who would understand ὄφειλέτης as forming a construction with the infinitive εὐαγγελίσασθαι, i.e. ὄφειλέτης εἰμὶ εὐαγγελίσασθαι (‘I am obligated to tell good news’). At the same time, it also exhibits that some would understand ὄφειλέτης εἰμὶ as having

24 Cf. also Zahn, An die Römer, 66–7, albeit on other grounds. Zahn claims: ‘Alle diese Schwierigkeiten [in 1,13–14] schwinden, wenn man den mit καθὼς beginnenden Satz in V. 14 sich fortsetzen läßt und übersetzt: “gemäß dem, daß ich auch unter den übrigen ἐθνην sowohl Hellenen als Barbaren, Gebildeten wie Ungebildeten ein Schuldner bin” ’ (66). That is, he reads καθὼς... όφειλέτης εἰμὶ as a distinct (subordinate) clause. However, since Zahn fails to provide any examples of the use of όφειλέτης (εἰμὶ) with the preposition ἐν, his reading must be considered doubtful at best.

25 Kettunen, Abfassungszweck, 123–6, has also noticed some relationship between the latter. However, he appears to have missed the point of Paul’s grammar. Kettunen argues that vv. 14–15 should be read thus: ‘Ἑλλήνως τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἄνοιχτοις ὄφειλέτης εἰμὶ, οὕτως τὸ κατ’ ἑμὲ πρόθυμον καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς ἐν Ρώμῃ, εὐαγγελίσασθαι, i.e. with a comma before εὐαγγελίσασθαι (see further n. 44 below). Then he states: ‘Paulus ist also verpflichtet, allen Heiden das Evangelium zu predigen. Grammatisch ist deswegen der οὕτως-Satz bis einschließlich ἐν Ρώμῃ parenthetisch, inhaltlich jedoch von zentraler Bedeutung’ (123–4; cf. also on p. 125: ‘Paulus betont ὑμῖν τοῖς ἐν Ρώμῃ’). This is a rather peculiar statement: how is it possible for the clause to be both ‘grammatically parenthetical’ and ‘of a central meaning’ as regards ‘content’? If Paul wanted to highlight the significance of a specific textual content he surely would have grammaticalized it accordingly!


27 See Reeve and Screech, Erasmus’ Annotations, 344–5. The words left out, indicated by ellipsis points, are sic quantum ad animi mei promptitudinem attinet (presumably for οὕτως τὸ κατ’ ἑμὲ πρόθυμον).
a double function, referring to the preceding dative phrase as well as the infinitive εὐαγγελίσσομαι. This is made clear by the repetition of the verb debeo in the paraphrase (omnibus debeam . . . debeo . . . praedicare).

This ambiguity of the syntactical function of ὁφειλέτης εἰμί was not unknown still earlier in the history of interpretation. While many, or most, church fathers seem to have read the passage as is commonly done today,28 John Chrysostom’s (347–407) commentary on Romans gives clear evidence of the ambiguity. In his discussion of the passage ad loc. he reads 1.14–15 with the familiar period mark between ὁφειλέτης εἰμί and οὕτως. However, in his preface to the commentary he notes: Διὸ καὶ ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐλεγεν [Παύλος]: ὁφειλέτης εἰμί, τὸ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον, καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς ἐν Ῥωμαίοις εὐαγγελίσσομαι (‘Therefore [Paul] says in the beginning [of the letter]: I am obligated . . . to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome’),29 taking the infinitive as a complement to ὁφειλέτης εἰμί.

Most enlightening is the treatment of the text by the prominent exegete Origen of Alexandria (185–c. 254). His studies of the passage – virtually the earliest we have30 – are mainly preserved in the Latin translation of his commentary on Romans by Rufinus of Aquileia (c. 345–410),31 and in several Greek fragments of the commentary.32 These texts reveal that Origen was fully aware of the syntactical problem at

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28 This is actually difficult to estimate, since those church fathers who mention the passage often do so in passing only. Nevertheless, Theodoret of Cyrrhus (393–466) (see PG 82.56) may serve as an example of the reading which appears to be the most common. He reads Rom 1.14–15 as follows: Ἐλλησί τι καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνόητοις ὁφειλέτης εἰμί. Οὕτω τὸ κατ᾽ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς ἐν Ῥωμαίοις εὐαγγελίσσομαι. On the former sentence he comments (in Paul’s voice): Τῶν ἐθνῶν ἀπάντων ἐχειριστηθήναι [i.e. Παύλος] διδάσκαλος. Οὕ δὴ χαρίν πάσιν ὁφείλω τῆς διδασκαλίας τῷ χρεός, καὶ οὐχ Ἐλλησί μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ βαρβάροις (‘I [i.e. Paul] was appointed teacher of all the nations. Therefore, I owe my obligation of teaching to all, not only to Greeks but also to barbarians’).

29 See PG 60.394, 407.


31 Dated c. 406. The text used here is the Latin–German edition of T. Heither, Origenes: Commentarii in epistulam ad Romanos (Fontes Christiani; Freiburg: Herder, 1990), which follows the Latin text of PG 14. Rufinus’s ‘translation’ is in fact more of a paraphrase (consequentia) of the commentary, as pointed out by Rufinus himself in his preface to the work. However, that does not seem to affect the following study of Origen’s text, since, despite concerns for syntactical details, I am dealing with Origen’s general understanding of the passage in Rom 1.13–15. The major differences between Rufinus’s text and the extant Greek fragments of the passage (see next note) may be explained by Rufinus’s main concern, viz. to offer a sketch of Origen’s commentary (originally in 15 vols). While the fragments include more detailed discussion of specific issues, such as Paul’s syntax and rhetoric, nothing in them runs counter to the observations made below.

hand. In his preface to the commentary Origen complains that Paul’s letter to the Romans is the most difficult to understand of all his letters. Origen himself sees two main reasons for this, of which the one is that *elocutionibus interdum confusis et minus explicitis utitur* (‘[Paul] sometimes uses expressions that are obscure and not completely without difficulties’). The text under discussion seems to be one of those Origen has in mind.33 He is much concerned about the proper syntax of Paul’s text and wonders therefore why Paul would place καὶ ἐκκλήθην ἀρχὴ τοῦ δεύτερον in v. 13 in so syntactically awkward a position.34 Origen’s answer to the question is that Paul is using the rhetorical technique of ὑπερβατόν, i.e. a transposition of words or clauses.35 His conclusion is that the text (vv. 13–14a) should be read as follows:

_Nolo autem vos ignorare fratres, quia saepe proposui venire ad vos, ut aliquem fructum habeam et in vobis sicut et in ceteris gentibus Graecis ac barbaris sapientibus et insipientibus, et prohibitus sum usque adhuc_ (‘But I do not want you to be ignorant of, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you, in order that I may have some fruit among you as I have among the rest of the gentiles, Greeks as well as barbarians, wise as well as ignorant, but have been hindered until now’).36

But, Origen proceeds, it is also evident that the utterance is ‘defective’; there is something lacking in the text:

*_Defectio vero elocutionis hoc modo adimplebitur. In eo ubi dicit: ‘et in ceteris gentibus Graecis ac barbaris sapientibus et insipientibus,’ videtur deesse:_

33 So Heither, _Origenes_, 62 n. 4.
35 Whereas the Greek fragments include somewhat detailed (but short) discussion of the reason *why* Origen would make use of this technique, Rufinus is more interested in providing the result of it, i.e. *how* Origen reads the text. On ὑπερβατόν see R. D. Anderson, Jr, _Glossary of Greek Rhetorical Terms: Connected to Methods of Argumentation, Figures and Tropes from Anaximenes to Quintilian_ (CBET 24; Leuven: Peeters, 2000) 121–2. Anderson notes that among ancient rhetorical theorists ὑπερβατόν was ‘normally considered poor use of language, leading only to ambiguity’ (122).
36 Cf. Origen’s reading in frg. 4 in Ramsbotham, 'Commentary', 214: _πολλάκις προεθέμην ἐλθεῖν πρὸς υἱὸς Ἰησοῦ καὶ εἰς τὴν καρπὸν σχῆ καὶ ἐν ᾳμιν καθώς καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς έθέειν, ἑλήσα πείρα καὶ βαρβαροῖς, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνόητοῖς, καὶ ἑκκληθήν ἄρτη τοῦ δεύτερου_. Ramsbotham’s edition is based on the text of cod. Vat. Gr. 762 from the 10th century. Staab (frg. 10 in ‘Neue Fragmente’, 79), on the other hand, prefers to follow cod. Vindob. Gr. 166 from the 14th century and adds ὁφειλέτης εἰμὶ between ἀνόητοις and καὶ ἑκκληθήν ἄρτη τοῦ δεύτερου. Apparently, this choice goes against standard criteria in textual criticism: not only is cod. Vindob. about 400 years later than cod. Vat. (external evidence), but also potentially influenced by the text of Romans (internal evidence, e.g. cod. Vat. has the _lectio brevior_ as well as the _lectio difficiild_).
‘quibus,’ ut ea, quae subsequuntur, sic legantur: ‘quibus debitor sum’ (‘The utterance’s defect must be complemented as follows: Where Paul says “among the rest of the gentiles, Greeks as well as barbarians, wise as well as ignorant” [the relative] “to which” is clearly missing, so that one may continue and read: “to which I am indebted”.

This gives the following paraphrase (consequentia) of vv. 13–15:

_Sicut fructum habeo in ceteris gentibus Graecis ac barbaris sapientibus et insipientibus, quibus debitor sum, ita quod in me est, promptus sum etiam vobis, qui Romae estis, evangelizare_ (‘Just as I have [gathered some] fruit among the rest of the gentiles, Greeks as well as barbarians, wise as well as ignorant, to which I am indebted, so, as far as I am concerned, I am ready to proclaim the good news to you also who are in Rome’).

Thus, Origen sought to solve the text’s syntactical problem by reading ὑφειλήτης εἰμὶ relatively. To be able to do this he had to form a relative clause by adding the pronoun _quibus_ to Paul’s text. This strongly suggests that it never occurred to Origen to read the dative phrase ᾿Ελλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνώνυτοις apart from the preceding τοίς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν. Instead, he read the former as an apposition to the latter, with ᾿Ελλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνώνυτοις clearly understood as a natural description for τοίς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν in the letter. In other words, rather than making a clear syntactical distinction between ἔθνεσιν and the following dative phrase, he made great effort to fit ὑφειλήτης εἰμὶ into the syntax, eventually settling upon an emendation of the text. On the reason why he did not think of εὐαγγελίσομαι as a complement to ὑφειλήτης εἰμὶ one can only speculate: perhaps it was a matter of reluctance on his behalf to give up the notion of the text speaking of Paul as an obligator to all people—a popular notion indeed among interpreters of the passage, as previously noted. But, again, this remains pure speculation.

Most importantly, by reading the dative phrase in v. 14 as an apposition, Origen presented the initial step towards the proper punctuation and syntax of the passage.

_Suggested punctuation and syntax of Rom 1.13–15_

I would concur with Origen et al. that the phrase ᾿Ελλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάρους, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνώνυτοις stands in an appositional relationship with the preceding dative phrase τοίς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν. A comma should therefore be put after the word ἔθνεσιν and a period mark after ἀνώνυτοις (οὐ τοῦτο τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον see further below). In addition, I would also agree with Origen in

37 The equivalent pronoun in Greek would be οἶς.
38 See his subsequent discussion of the passage (Heither, _Origenes_, 128–31).
reading καὶ ἐκαλύθην ἄχρι τοῦ δεύρο as an ύπερβατόν (marked by hyphenation). Hence, Rom 1.13–15 should be read as follows:

Οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι πολλάκις προεθέμην ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. – καὶ ἐκαλύθην ἄχρι τοῦ δεύρο, – ἵνα τινά καρπὸν σχῶ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν καθός καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν, Ἐλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοίς τε καὶ ἀνόητοις.

Ὁφειλέτης εἰμὶ οὕτως τὸ κατ ἐμὲ πρόθυμων καὶ ὑμῖν τοῖς ἔν Ῥώμῃ εὐαγγελίσασθαι.

This reading will be supported and explained by the following four points:

First, there is no need to extend further the arguments presented above of the dative phrase in v. 14 being an apposition. With respect to the text’s syntax, this reading seems to be the most natural one. Nevertheless, the following additional examples with parallel usage of the conjunctive τε καί are in order: Rom 2.9 (πᾶσαν ψυχήν ἀνθρώπου τοῦ καταργαζομένου τὸ κακὸν, Ἰουδαίοι τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἐλληνος); 2.10 (παντὶ τῷ ἐργαζομένῳ τῷ ἐγκαθόν, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἐλληνι); 1 Cor 1.24 (αὕτοις δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἐλλησίν).

Second, Harry Parkin has argued convincingly for the probability of Paul using ὢφειλέτης εἰμὶ with the infinitive. To be sure, this cannot be stated beyond doubt because of the relatively few occurrences of the word ὢφειλέτης in Paul’s letters (one of which includes some syntactical uncertainty). However, there is

39 Or, strictly speaking, what the ancient rhetorical theorists would label ύπερβατόν. This could be perhaps be marked by placing the clause at the end of the former sentence, thus: Οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι πολλάκις προεθέμην ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἵνα τινά καρπὸν σχῶ καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν καθός καὶ ἐν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἔθνεσιν, Ἐλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοίς τε καὶ ἀνόητοις, καὶ ἐκαλύθην ἄχρι τοῦ δεύρο. That, however, would involve some alteration of Paul’s text.

40 It provides, for example, a reasonable solution to the mystery of the ‘odd asyndeton’ in v. 14 (Zahn, An die Römer, 65 [‘ein befremdliches Asyndeton’]). Note also that nowhere does Paul seem to initiate a sentence with words or phrases joined by the conjunctive τε καί (see Rom 1.12, 16, 20 [app. nom.]; 2.9; 3.9; 10.12; 1 Cor 1.24, 30 [probably app. nom.]; 2 Cor 12.12; Phil 1.7), except in Rom 1.27 where the joined elements stand in the nominative case as subjects (but notice the widely supported variant δὲ instead of τε).

41 It may be mentioned that there are virtually no examples of an independent use of the inf. εὐαγγελίσασθαι in Paul’s letters. In fact, instances of independent infinitives are very rare in the Pauline letters, mostly confined to imperatival usage (e.g. Rom 12.15; Phil 3.16). See S. E. Porter, Idioms of the Greek New Testament (Sheffield: JSOT, 1994) 201–2.

42 As for comparative material, it should be noted that the word ὢφειλέτης does not occur, e.g., in the LXX or the writings of Philo. Cf., however, Sophocles Aj. 589–90: οὐ κάτοικος ἐγὼ θεοίς ὡς υἱῶν ἀφείν εἰμίʼ ὦφειλέτης ἔτι (‘Do you not know that I owe the gods no service any more?’ [trans. H. Lloyd-Jones, LCL]) – an excellent example from classical Greek literature of ὢφειλέτης εἰμὶ with the infinitive.

43 Viz. regarding the function of the articular inf. in Rom 8.12. On the difference between articular and anarthrous inf. Porter observes: ‘Most scholars are agreed that the difference between the two structures does not warrant a major distinction in meaning’ (Idioms, 194).
hardly any doubt about Paul’s usage of the cognate verb ὧφείλω:44 he nearly always uses it with the infinitive45 (see above) and virtually never with a dative object.46 These facts become even more important when it is noticed that the semantic difference between the form ὧφειλέτης εἰμί and ὧφείλω is mostly a matter of emphasis.47 Hence, there is ample evidence for concluding that it is not only possible, but also more probable, that the infinitive εὐαγγελίσασθαι is a complement to the predicate ὧφειλέτης εἰμί.48

Third, as for the more problematic οὐτάς τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον, I would make the following comments and suggestions. It seems no longer to be a reasonable option to follow Moule et al. in reading πρόθυμον as the adjective πρόθυμος (‘eager’, ‘willing’, ‘ready’), with τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ understood as an adverbial phrase (‘as

Porter reads the inf. in Rom 8.12 as epexegetic or appositional: ‘we are debtors not to the flesh, i.e. to living according to the flesh’ (198). Differently, e.g., N. Turner, A Grammar of New Testament Greek 3. Syntax (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963) 141, who takes it as consecutive or final (‘so that . . .’). Observe that the dative τῇ σάρκϊ need not be an object to ὧφειλέται εἰς-

44 Again (see n. 25 above), Kettunen fails to do justice to Paul’s grammar. He states (Abfassungszweck, 123): ‘Bei Paulus bleibt dieser Ausdruck [i.e. ὧφειλέτης εἰμί] nie ohne Objekt. Wenn es sich um ein Genetivobjekt handelt, ist die Bedeutung “schuldig sein”, [Röm] 15,27 . . . geht es aber wie hier um ein Dativobjekt – und das gilt auch für das Verb ὧφειλεῖν – kommt dazu noch ein Verb, um zu zeigen, worin die Verpflichtung besteht, 8,12; 2 Kor 12,14; vgl. [Röm] 15,1; 1 Kor 5,10; Gal 5,3. Der Sinn ist dann “verpflichtet sein, etwas zu tun”’. Although Kettunen is right in his judgement of ὧφειλέτης/ὑφείλο with the inf. in a close relationship with the inf., he seems to have misunderstood the grammar of the passages to which he refers: in 2 Cor 12,14 the dat. is a direct object to the inf., but not to the verb ὧφείλο; in Rom 15,1 and Gal 5,3 there is no dat. object, only acc. object to the inf.; in 1 Cor 5,10 there is no direct object at all, only prepositional phrase with the inf. (on Rom 8.12 see the previous note). In fact, Kettunen fails to provide any example of the verb ὧφείλο with a dative object. 45 When he does not, namely in Phlm 18, he uses it with the acc. and not the dat. case: εἰ δὲ τί ήδηκρύσεν σε ἥ ὧφείλειν, τοῦτο εἰμὶ ἐλλογά.

46 The only possible exception may be Rom 13,8 (μηδὲν μηδὲν ὧφείλετε εἰ μόνο τὸ ἀλλῆλους ἀγαπῆν), but it is probably more accurate to read μηδενι as a dative of respect, i.e. lit. ‘with respect to nothing (= anything)’ (contra, e.g., RSV and NRSV: ‘Owe no one anything’, in which μηδένι = ‘no one’).

47 See LSJ, s.v. ὧφειλέτης and s.v. ὧφείλο II. So H. Lietzmann, Einführung in die Textgeschichte der Paulusbriefe an die Römer (HNT 8; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1971 [first publ. 1906]) 29, comments: ὧφειλέτης εἰμί heißt bei [Paulus] einfach “ich bin schuldig, ich muß” . . . (also nicht “ich bin Schuldner”).’ Note that in the LXX ὧφείλο with the inf. occurs exclusively in later (Hellenistic) Jewish writings, i.e. near contemporary with Paul’s, viz. Wis 12,15; 4 Macc 11,15; 16,19. Hauck, ὧφείλο, 560, observes: ‘In view of the copious number of examples in general Gk. literature it is surprising how rare ὧφείλειν is in the LXX. In the OT proper it occurs only 5 times [Deut 15,2; Job 6,20; Prov 14,9; Isa 24,2; Èzek 18,7], with a further 10 instances in the Apocrypha [1 Macc 10,43; 13,15, 39; 3 Macc 7,10; 4 Macc 11,3, 15; 16,19; Tob 6,13; Wis 12,15, 20].’

48 On the complement use of the inf., see Porter, Idioms, 196–8.
far as I am concerned’). Perhaps it would be so if τὸ κατ’ ἔμε were to be read as a neuter periphrasis for ἔγω and the whole phrase as a subordinate (explanatory) clause (cf. Parkin’s translation above). But, although this latter reading is possible, it still presupposes that the adjective πρόθυμος is to be preferred as the intended word in the text. However, I would argue that this reading probably grew out of a necessity to fill the assumed empty slot of a main verb within the sentence, thus supplied by the adjective πρόθυμος with an absent εἰμί (or an absent ἐγένετο).

Since the verb is present in the preceding ὑπεντέτυχα εἰμί, it is unnecessary to adapt the text in this way. Instead, a search for a reading of the text as it stands is required. Therefore, I suggest that the phrase τὸ κατ’ ἔμε πρόθυμον may be taken adverbially as an accusative of respect (comprising what is variously labelled adverbial accusative and accusative of manner). The prepositional

49 Moule, *Idiom Book*, 58 (see also above). Cf. BDF § 224 (i), who appear to support this reading (cf. § 283 [3]), as well as, e.g., the Latin versions of Origen (Rufinus), Ambrosiaster (c. 366–84), d (5th or 6th cent.), and several Vg MSS *quod in me est* [τὸ κατ’ ἔμε (ἐστίν)] (promptus sum [πρόθυμος (εἰμί)]). For arguments against the possibility of this reading, see Lietzmann, *Einführung*, 29. The problem with reading τὸ κατ’ ἔμε as a phrase can be exemplified by reference to J. B. Lightfoot’s *Notes on Epistles of St Paul: From Unpublished Commentaries* (London: Macmillan, 1904 [first publ. 1895]) 249. Lightfoot understands τὸ κατ’ ἔμε to be a phrase similar to the plural τὰ κατ’ ἔμε in Phil 1.12. As a result, he claims: Πρόθυμον cannot be taken as a substantive, and rendered, “there is readiness on my part.” The absence of the article and of the substantive verb is fatal to this interpretation.’ Cf. Sanday and Headlam, *Romans*, 21 (‘τὸ κατ’ ἔμε will = “I, so far as it rests with me,” i.e. “under God,”’ equivalent to the Vg tradition *quod in me promptum est*). Note that the adjective πρόθυμος does not occur (elsewhere) in Paul’s letters.

50 Compared to its presence, the absence of the first person singular εἰμί is actually quite rare in Paul’s letters (cf. Rom 7.24; 2 Cor 10.1; 11.6, 22, 23 [without εἰμί] and Rom 1.14; 7.14; 11.13; 1 Cor 1.12; 3.4; 9.1, 2; 12.15, 16; 13.2; 15.9, 10; 2 Cor 12.10; Phil 4.11 [with εἰμί]). See Turner, *Syntax*, 302, who notes that ‘[a]lmost universally in NT, εἰμί is inserted’ (297).


52 Of course, one does not have to assume that an absent verb is thought of as a necessary element in the clause; as some readings imply (cf. Fitzmyer’s reading above), v. 15 may simply be a nominal clause with τὸ πρόθυμον as the subject and ἐντέλεσθαι as the predicate. However, since I have not been able to find any example in Paul’s letters of a nominal clause that has an identical syntactical structure, I consider this possibility to be unlikely. On nominal clauses in the NT, see Porter, *Idioms*, 85.

53 After all, why did Paul not write προθυμός εἰμί or προθυμοῦμαι with the inf. if this was what he meant to say?

phrase κατ’ ἐμὲ may then be read as a circumlocution for the possessive genitive (= τὸ πρόθυμον μου).55 Further, as widely attested in ancient Greek literature,26 the word πρόθυμον should probably be regarded as equivalent to the feminine προθυμία (‘willingness’ or ‘goodwill’).57 Thus understood, the phrase could be rendered ‘with respect to my goodwill’, or, more precisely, ‘with (my) goodwill’.58

The adverb οὖς is a bit more difficult to deal with, not least because of its functional flexibility.59 With regard to Paul’s non-correlative use of it elsewhere, οὖς in Rom 1.15 could probably either be taken in an absolute inferential sense (‘thus’, ‘so’, ‘then’),60 or as a denotation of degree (‘so [very] . . .’),61 modifying the accusative phrase τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον with respect to what has previously been stated. The latter occurs in Gal 1.6 with an adverb (οὖς ταχέως [‘so quickly’]). Read as ‘so’ or ‘in this manner’, οὖς could therefore be taken as wholly embedded in the adverbial τὸ πρόθυμον62 (which, as we recall, denotes Paul’s manner of proclaiming his good news). On the other hand, the former use of οὖς is far more common in Paul’s letters and, therefore, perhaps, preferable. Its function

55 This use of the preposition κατά is frequently found in Hellenistic Greek, mostly confined to pronouns in NT literature (e.g. Acts 17.28; 18.15; Eph 1.15; cf. Acts 26.3). See L. Radermacher, Neutestamentliche Grammatik: Das Griechisch der Neuen Testament im Zusammenhang mit der Volkssprache (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1925) 139; BDF § 224 (1); Turner, Syntax, 268; BAGD, s.v. κατά II.7.b and s.v. πρόθυμος; Lietzmann, Einführung, 29; Robertson, Grammar, 608.
56 E.g. Euripides Med. 178 (τὸ γ’ ἐμὸν πρόθυμον [= ἡ ἐμὴ προθυμία]); Iph. taur. 1023; Thucydides 3.82.8; Plato Leg. 9.859b; Josephus A.J. 4.42, 213; 3 Macc 5.26.
57 So LSJ, s.v. προθυμία I.4. Suggestions of translations of προθυμία include: (1) ‘readiness’, ‘willingness’, ‘eagerness’, and (2) ‘goodwill’, ‘ready kindness’. So also BAGD, s.v. προθυμία, who suggest ‘willingness’, ‘readiness’, ‘goodwill’. Cf. προθυμία in 2 Cor 8.11, 12, 19; 9.2 – the only occurrences of this word in the letters of Paul (besides the neuter πρόθυμον in Rom 1.15).
58 So also C. Spicq, ‘προθυμία κτλ.’, Notes de lexicographie néo-testamentaire (3 vols; OBO 22; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978–82) 2.748 n. 3: ‘Lorsque saint Paul déclare aux Romains qu’il ira leur porter l’évangile τὸ πρόθυμον (Rom. I, 15), on peut traduire “de bon cœur” au sens de bonne volonté, bien disposé.’
59 See LSJ, s.v. οὖς; BAGD, s.v. οὖς.
60 This usage occurs in several forms: (a) comp. use with an adv. κατά (Rom 6.11; 1 Cor 2.11; 9.14; 14.9, 12; 15.42; 45; Gal 4.3; 1 Thess 4.14); (b) with connecting particles (Rom 11.5, 26; 15.20; 1 Cor 7.7, 17, 36; 8.12; 11.28; 14.25; 15.11c; Gal 6.2; 1 Thess 4.17); (c) without connecting particles (1 Cor 9.24; 15.11b; Phil 4.1; and so in dep. clauses: 1 Cor 7.26, 40; 9.15); (d) within participial phrases (1 Cor 5.3; Phil 3.17). In addition, it is found in scriptural citations (Rom 4.18; 9.20 [οὖς added by Paul]; 1 Cor 14.21 [add.]).
61 This usage occurs before adjectives and adverbs. See esp. Gal 1.6 (with adv.); 3.3 (with adj.). Cf. also the potential example in 1 Cor 6.5 (with ὀφθαλμοῖς).
62 Note that John Chrysostom’s reference to Rom 1.14b–15 in his preface (see further above) does not include the adv. οὖς. Since this absence of οὖς does not seem to bother him, it is possible that he considered οὖς to be embedded in τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον.
would then be to contribute to the text’s natural flow by reducing the need for a connecting particle in the sentence.63

Fourth, the asyndeton in ὀφειλέτης εἰμί etc. introduces a new phase in the discourse. This accords well with Paul’s language elsewhere: in addition to the frequent use of asyndeton within smaller units (e.g. Rom 12.9–13.1, 8, 10), Paul occasionally uses it to indicate macro-structural developments in his letters (as evident in Rom 9.1).65 In light of this, Rom 1.13–15 could be translated as follows:

But I do not want you to be ignorant of, brothers, that I have frequently intended to come to you – but was hindered until now – in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the gentiles, Greeks as well as barbarians,66 wise as well as ignorant.67

I am bound, then, to announce the gospel68 with goodwill to you also who are in Rome.

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64 So also Turner, Syntax, 341. On p. 340 he comments: ‘Except occasionally for effect, this [i.e. the use of asyndeton] is contrary to the genius of Greek, but Paul and Hebrews are full of it.’ See also idem, A Grammar of New Testament Greek 4. Style (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1976) 85. Denniston observes: ‘In deciding whether asyndeton is tolerable in a particular place, the usage of the author and the character of the passage must be taken into account’ (Greek Particles, xlvi).

65 Cf., e.g., 1 Cor 5.1; 6.12; 2 Cor 6.11; Gal 4.12, 21; 6.11; Phil 3.17. Note also that, with Romans as the only exception, the transition from opening to body in Paul’s letters always has asyndeton (1 Cor 1.4; 2 Cor 1.3; Gal 1.6; Phil 1.3; 1 Thess 1.2; Phlm 4. Cf. 2 Thess 1.3; Col 1.3; Eph 1.3).

66 Paul probably uses the phrase Ἕλληνιν τε καὶ βαρβάροις simply to denote all non-Jews ( tà ἔθνη, cf. 1.5), as was common among contemporary Jews, such as Philo and Josephus. See esp. H. Windisch, ‘βαρβάρος’, TDNT 1.549–53; idem, ‘Ἐλλην κτλ.’, in TDNT 2.512–16. So also already in Lightfoot, Notes, 249 (‘A comprehensive description of the Gentile World’). The phrase, however, cannot but also include some cultural and/or linguistic distinctions (cf. 1 Cor 14.11 for the latter). Obviously, the Roman audience would consider themselves as belonging to the former category, and Paul’s subsequent discussion shows that he does too (see 1.16; 2.9, 10; 3.9; 10.12).

67 If by Ἕλληνιν τε καὶ βαρβάροις Paul means all non-Jews (see the previous note) it may be assumed that he uses the phrase σοφοί τε καὶ ἄνωθεν to denote a different grouping of the gentile people (so also Cranfield, Romans, 83–4), most likely according to educational level. On the other hand, if the cultural/linguistic distinction is primarily in his mind σοφοί may be identical with Ἕλληνιν and ἄνωθεν with βαρβάροις. In that case, Paul probably intends to flatter his audience as Ἕλληνες.

68 On this meaning of εὐαγγέλισθαι, i.e. primarily referring to the content of Paul’s εὐαγγέλιον, see Rom 10.14–18; 15.18–21; 1 Cor 1.17–18; 15.1–8; Gal 1.6–9, 11–23 (esp. v. 16). Cf. also the interesting occurrence in 1 Thess 3.6.
Conclusions: the reading of Rom 1.13–15

While I do not claim to have provided the solution to the difficult phrase (οὕτως τὸ κατ’ ἐμὲ πρόθυμον), I do consider my suggestions of punctuation and syntax of Rom 1.13–15 to be less problematic in whole than the current one(s). Hence, there is good reason to conclude that the reading suggested above is a plausible one. But how does this affect the interpretation of the text? In what way does my reading differ from previous readings, which, again, have been based on different punctuation?

To begin with, my reading suggests that in Rom 1.13–15 Paul does not declare that he is under an obligation towards all humanity. It also suggests that Paul does not state that he is under an obligation towards ‘Greeks as well as barbarians, wise as well as ignorant’. In fact, according to my reading, Paul does not say anything about his willingness to proclaim the gospel in Rome being a result of an obligation towards certain people. Furthermore, my reading suggests that Paul does not state that it is no longer, or never was, his intention to proclaim the good news in Rome. Thus, there is no sign of discrepancy between Rom 1.15 and 15.20. Finally, the above reading strongly suggests that Rom 1.13–15 should not be read as a structural unity.

What, then, does the text imply according to my suggestion? In general, the reading implies that Rom 1.13–15 comprises the end of one phase in the discourse and the beginning of another.69 Όφειλετης εἰμὶ … εὐαγγελίσασθαι constitutes therefore a transition70 from the first part of the letter’s ‘body’71 to the second.

After the opening (vv. 1–7) Paul begins the main part of his letter by praising the audiences’ faithfulness (v. 8) and expressing his concern for them as well as his yearning to make a visit (vv. 9–12). This is introduced by πρῶτον μέν, followed by

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69 Observe the subordinate (explanatory) function of the clauses immediately following (vv. 16 [γάρ X2], 17 [γάρ], and 18 [γάρ]). So R. D. Anderson, Jr, Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul (CBET 18; Kampen: Pharos, 1996) 185, remarks (his emphasis): ‘Formally the proposition for the letter as a whole might be considered to be v.15. It is this statement (that it is Paul’s desire to preach the Gospel to the Roman Christians) that forms the basis for Paul’s following remarks (indicated by the ensuing series of causal conjunctions [γάρ]), and also seems to be reflected upon again at the end of the “sermon” (15.5ff).’ On the widespread tendency to cut off vv. 16–17 from the surrounding discourse, on the assumption that it constitutes ‘the theme’ of Romans, N. Elliott comments somewhat ironically: ‘Numerous commentators follow text editions (e.g., Nestle-Aland65) in isolating 1.16–17 as the letter’s “theme”, almost as if the superscription περὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ορ περὶ τῆς δικαιοσύνης θεοῦ stood in the text at this point’ (The Rhetoric of Romans: Argumentative Constraint and Strategy and Paul’s Dialogue with Judaism [JSNTSup 45; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990] 84 n. 2).

70 The transitional force may be softened a bit by the inferential οὕτως.

71 I.e. the main part of the letter, viz. everything between the epistolary opening (1.1–7) and closing (16.1–23 [or 27]).
two explanatory sentences with γάρ (vv. 9 and 11),72 which indicates that the main sentence is found in v. 8. Πρώτον μὲν is then answered by δὲ in v. 13:73 After his attempt to convince the audience of his willingness to visit them,74 Paul apologizes for not having been able to do so. The reason Paul gives for his serious delay is that he has been occupied with ‘reaping the harvest’ among other gentiles (cf. 15.19–22). By giving a further description of these people as ‘Greeks as well as barbarians, wise as well as ignorant’, he intensifies his previous missionary work, thus providing additional support for his delay. This first part of the letter’s body may therefore be seen as Paul’s captatio benevolentiae, i.e. his effort to capture the audience’s goodwill before turning to the main subject.75

At the beginning of the next phase in the discourse (in 1.14b–15) Paul presents his main concern with the letter. He refers to his ‘goodwill’ towards the audience, so distinctly marked out in his previous words, and states that it is his duty to announce the good news also to them, as well as to other gentiles. Since Paul has completed his work in the eastern part of his missionary province (cf. 15.19b, 23),77

72 Note that v. 12 contains a subordinate purpose clause with additional explanation (indicated by τούτῳ δὲ ἐστίν) of the preceding purpose clause (εἶτο τὸ στηριχθῆναι ὑμᾶς).
73 Πρώτον μὲν is frequently answered only by δὲ, see LSJ, s.v. πρῶτος B.3.3.a. Cf. the observations made by Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428), in Staab, Pauluskommentare, 115: ζητεῖται δὲ πῶς ἀνταπεδωκὲν Πρώτον μὲν εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ μου διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ περὶ πάντων ὑμῶν, οὗ γὰρ εἶπεν δὲυτερον δὲ, ἡγοῦμαι τοίνυν ὦτ ένταυθά ἡ ἀνταπόδοσις γέγονεν εἰς τὸ δὲ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς ἄγνοεῖν, ἄδελφοι, καὶ τὰ εξῆς (‘The question is in what way [Paul] gives an answer to “First, I give thanks to my God through Jesus Christ for all of you,” for he does not say “Second, …”. Well, I hold that here the answer has become “But I do not want you to be ignorant of, brothers” and so on’).
74 Cf. the frequent mention of visiting in 15.22 (τοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς), 23 (ἐπιποθῶν δὲ ἔχων τοῦ ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς [cf. ἐπιποθῶ γὰρ ἰδεῖν ὑμᾶς in 1.11]), 24 (διαπορεύομενος θεόσσοθα ὑμᾶς), 28 (ἀπελέυσομαι δὲ ὑμῶν), 29 (ἐρχόμενος πρὸς ὑμᾶς … ἐλεύσομαι), 32 (ἐλθὼν πρὸς ὑμᾶς). By this recurrent theme Paul probably wants to assure the audience of his intention to visit them, in spite of the fact that not even now, when he has finished his work ‘from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum’ (15.19 [NRSV]), will he turn to the city of Rome.
75 See 15.23 (ἀπὸ πολλῶν ἑτῶν).
76 So Origen comments (see frg. 9 in Staab, ‘Neue Fragmente’, 79): ἀπολογεῖται υπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ καὶ ἐφελκεται τὴν τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἐκκλησίας ἀγάπην πρὸς ἑαυτόν (lit. ‘[Paul] speaks in defence of himself and draws [thereby] the love of the Roman church towards himself’). Theodore of Mopsuestia notes Paul’s convention of praising his audience in the introductory part (τὸ προοίμιον) of his letters, and speaks of the passage in Rom 1.8 and following as a ‘praise of the Romans’ (Ῥωμαίων ἐπιανον), intended to secure the audience’s goodwill (ὅπερ τοῖς ἐνσήμασι προθυμοτέρους αὐτούς πρὸς τὴν τῶν γραμμάτων παρασκευάζειν ἀνάγνωσιν); see Staab, Pauluskommentare, 113–14. Cf. the comments of Gennadius of Constantinople (d. 471) (ἐπαινέσας αὐτούς); see ibid., 353. So also Ambrosiaster and Pelagius (c. 354–420); see Schelkle, Paulus, 31.
77 On Paul’s missionary province, see esp. Gal 2.7–9. Cf. 1.16; 2.2; Rom 1.5–6; 15.15–16, 18.
it is now the Romans’ turn to hear of his good news. In other words, it is Paul’s missionary duty to present his message to gentiles in Rome. Presumably, then, that is what he subsequently carries out in this extensive letter.

78 In 15.14–33 it becomes clear that Paul is not on his way to Rome in the nearest future; he is on his way to Jerusalem (see esp. v. 25). Accordingly, he cannot deliver his message in person. In light of what he states in 1.14b–15, then, it follows that his letter, or some portion(s) of it, constitutes the announcement of his good news.