Jochen Flebbe’s *Solus Deus* is an outstanding contribution to an already distinguished series. The 509-page volume, which began as a University of Bonn doctoral dissertation under Prof. Michael Wolter, is clearly structured, and an initial overview may be gained by reading pages 1, 17–19, 444–57, and the conclusions to each chapter. In addition, pages 255–56 develop key insights with particular clarity. The high quality of the work is evident at every level: in the perceptive relation of individual texts to the larger argument of Romans;¹ in the detailed exegesis of each text (see esp. ch. 4); in the learned discussions of interpretative cruxes (e.g., *dikaiosynê theou* [42–44, 71–75]; *charis* [91–92]), including textual (e.g., 386–88) and grammatical (e.g., 318–20 and 383 nn. 107–8 with 385 n. 11) problems; in the nuanced treatment of Paul’s relation to “scripture and tradition”;² and especially in the rigorous advancement of the book’s central theses concerning the decisive role of God in Romans (see esp. 444–57). Rhetorically, Flebbe effectively combines pendulum swinging force, such as Rom 4 is *not* an “Abraham chapter” *but* a “God chapter” (260), with clarifying nuance: Abraham is, in fact, the “Thema” or matrix, whereas God is the “Rhema” or new information (see 163 n. 3, 166, 168, 172, 174, 176, 189, 192, 194–205, 207 n. 148, 298–300, 308–16, 354, 398, 433–35, and 446–47).

¹ See, e.g., the observation (57) that Rom 3:4, 6 prepare the way for 3:9, 19.
207, 260); and “insofar as it is a history of God with a human being … in a secondary line something naturally becomes clear in this history about the human being before God” (176). Or in dialogue with Bultmann: “the one who wishes to speak of humanity must speak of God” (133).

Chapter 1 introduces the topic under the headings “God,” “Romans,” “Paul,” “Speech,” “History of Research,” and “Investigation.” It highlights the neglect of God in Pauline Studies (1, 9–10); sketches the role of God in Galatians, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Thessalonians (2–3); discusses the reasons for Romans and defends the decision to focus on this letter (3–6); underscores Paul’s significance for the dialogue with Judaism (7–8); clarifies that the work will investigate not God but speech about God, specifically texts in Romans that contain the word “God” (8–9); situates the work in relation to the field (9–17); and outlines Flebbe’s approach (17–19).

Flebbe attributes the disproportionate focus on anthropology to Bultmann’s influence (10–11). The neglect of God, in turn, has resulted from either (1) maintaining that Paul has merely taken over the traditional Jewish image of God so that his God-talk contains nothing additional (e.g., Kümmel) or (2) thinking that God is newly determined by the Christ-event so that one learns all that is necessary about God there (e.g., G. Delling). Positively, H. Moxnes’s Theology in Conflict (1980) is praised for the breakthrough recognition that Paul’s God-talk has a decisive function in his argumentation and is concretely related to his life situation (13; cf. 164–66), whereas P. G. Klumbies’s Die Rede von Gott bei Paulus (1992) is found wanting in this respect and in its treatment of God in Judaism (13–14). Flebbe himself investigates Paul’s God-talk with a view to the history of research, the relation between Christology and theology, and Paul’s interaction with “scripture and tradition.”


Chapter 2 maintains that 3:1–8 is not a digression but a key component in the argument (57–58; cf. 21–27). The heart of 3:1–8 is verse 4, which establishes the categorical difference between God and humanity. It is this decisive axiom that provides a standpoint from which to address the question of God’s impartial judgment and Israel’s divine special status (58; cf. 26, 36–41). Without denying the determination of God as the God of Israel, it allows Paul to set forth an overarching determination of God as the God of all humanity, which is united under sin (59). This, however, represents not a replacement of the Jewish image of God but rather a discussion within Judaism that by establishing a hierarchy between different Jewish axioms advances to a pointed statement (59; cf. 39–40, 47).

3. Flebbe clarifies his use of this shorthand phrase on page 18. See also n. 2 above.
Chapter 3 takes up many contested issues in advancing its main thesis that God plays the central role in the argument of 3:21–31 (161): 3:21–31 is a unified section (63–67); nyni de in 3:21 is logical-rhetorical rather than temporal (65–68); dikaiosynê theou is a subjective genitive, whereas pistis Christou is objective (71–77); in 3:25 hilastérion has the general sense of “means of salvation” (98–104); paresis here means “forgiveness” (114); nomos in verse 27 means “Torah in the broadest sense” (127–31). Far from developing a new doctrine of God, Paul argues from two central axioms of Judaism—God is a God of dikaiosynê (Exod 34:6) and God is one (Deut 6:4)—to show that God’s action in Christ confirms God’s identity (161). Romans 3:30 is no exception: it, too, is a “traditional” statement (145–48).

Chapter 4 argues—with reference to ou pros theon in 4:2, the theocentric logizesthai, and the God statements in 4:5, 17—that Rom 4 is a “God chapter” rather than an “Abraham chapter”; it is a demonstration from scripture and tradition of 3:27–31, and especially Paul’s central God thesis in 3:29, 30 (260). In 4:2 erga and kauchêma signify the “Jewish way of life according to the Torah” and “the insistence upon a special position of Israel before God” (175; cf. 180). The entire argument aims at the inclusion of the Gentiles, while also including the Jews (231; cf. 263). Romans 4:1–22 (including 4:5, 17) represent a “Jewish-traditional” perspective in which Paul sets forth God and his reality by means of pointed interaction with Jewish scripture and tradition, whereas 4:23–25 reflect a “Christian-actual” perspective in which Paul presents God’s action in Christ as a concretion of what he said about God from scripture and tradition (255256; cf. 261–62).

Chapter 5 contends that Rom 9:1–33 is concerned not with a division within Israel, at least not primarily, but rather with the constitution of the one salvation group through God (350). In contrast to the image of God as judge, which problematically correlates God’s action with human reality (351; cf. 45–49), the image of God as potter establishes God’s complete freedom (352). One can rightly speak of double predestination, however, only in relation to the potter image, since with God himself the negative action is not its own goal but rather a presupposition for God’s final act of salvation (352).

Chapter 6 zeroes in on Rom 11:25–36 and the argumentative relation of its parts. Verses 25–27 present a concrete solution to the historical problem, making known the

4. Cf. also his criticism of Anselm on pages 110, 111, 119, 122.
5. For further insights related to the New Perspective, see, e.g., 126 n. 251, 137, 211, 207 n. 148, 215, 218, 221, 225, 227, 229, 231, 237, 239 n. 233, 292, 442.
6. For this nuance, see 269, 282, 332, 333, and esp. 334. Note my introductory comment on Flebbe’s rhetoric.
Chapter 7 identifies 15:7–13 as the “summa” of Romans and explains that the important function of Paul's God-talk in this section confirms the thesis that Paul's God-talk provides the decisive framework in the argument of Romans (440). At the same time, the phrase “God of hope” expresses an element of openness that serves to ground and legitimate differences or newly accented characteristics in God's eschatological action (439; cf. 442).

Chapter 8 brings together the book’s main theses (444–57) and concisely relates its findings to Pauline proclamation in the present (457). In abbreviated form, its theses are as follows: (1) Paul’s God talk is the decisive factor in the argument of Romans (444). (2) God is likewise the ground and goal of the letter’s “doctrine of justification” (444). (3) God is not newly determined by Christ; on the contrary, Paul affirms the identity and sameness of God with respect to scripture and tradition (445). Ancient Judaism should not be viewed as a monolith that stands in contrast to Paul; instead, we should see it as a plural and varied entity with convictions that oppose and convictions that approach Paul’s statements, so that “Paul can be integrated in this polyphonic concert as a pointed voice” (446–47; see also n. 2 above). (4) The conflict in Romans is not so much about who God is (cf. John) but rather about which consequences follow from a shared image of God if it is pursued radically to its end; it is thus a conflict in which God can be introduced as a clarifying standard (447–448). (5) With reference to the history of research, Paul should be understood as “a radical Jew” (D. Boyarin): he has neither newly defined God by the Christ-event (Delling) nor merely taken over the “traditional” God image without consequence (Kümmel); instead, he has radically and consequently taken up the “traditional” image of God and drawn from it previously undeveloped consequences (448–49). (6) Paul’s pointing of the “traditional” image of God entails (a) his sharpened emphasis on “Gottes Gottheit,” that is, on God’s categorical difference and total freedom (450); (b) his reasoning that God’s oneness and uniqueness can only mean that God is the one God for the one humanity in relation to whom God acts in one and the same way for salvation (451); (c) his determination of God as a God of overflowing salvation (452), (d) as shown by the consistency of the potter image (Rom 9) in contrast to that of judge (3:1–8); (e) his linking of “Gottes Gottheit” and God’s universality in conjunction with Isaiah (453); (f) his focus on the doxa tou theou (453–54); (g) his leveling of the barriers between...
Jews and Gentiles, while preserving the difference of God’s relation to Israel (454–55); and (h) his attention to elements of the new in God’s action and to the openness of God over against all human determinations (455). (7) God secures his identity and sameness by way of his action in Jesus Christ. Anthropological statements are consequences of the primary reality of God (456). (8) For Paul, the offense of his God-talk lies not in a supposed break with scripture and tradition but rather in God himself, who as such is a stone of stumbling—unto the salvation of all (456).

Rather than tackling a specific exegetical issue (e.g., *hilastérion* in 3:25 or *erga* in 4:5), my comments here will focus on Paul’s and Flebbe’s relation to “tradition.” It is a curious feature that Paul’s most ardent supporters are often most intent to drive a wedge between him and “Judaism,” whereas Paul himself is clearly concerned to affirm his continuity with his heritage. In this respect, Flebbe has done us a great service. In particular, he has rightly highlighted the extent to which Paul argues from scripture and tradition rather than from the Christ-event. While I am more than happy to accept this point, I do not think Flebbe sufficiently acknowledges that Paul’s experience/perception of God in (the) Christ(-event) has doubtless informed the way he accents the tradition. In short, it seems to me that like (all) other early Christian writers Paul both draws upon scripture and tradition to interpret God’s action in Christ and interprets scripture and tradition from the perspective of God’s action in Christ. In rightly swinging the pendulum so as to emphasize Paul’s own self-understanding and argumentative presentation, Flebbe has arguably left this second movement underdeveloped. My second point concerns Flebbe’s relation to the history of research. While rightly tipping his hat to N. A. Dahl and H. Moxnes, Flebbe otherwise shows a tendency to minimize his continuity with his predecessors. For example, after rightly associating Bultmann with the disproportionate focus on anthropology, it strikes me as a significant omission to make no mention of another influential tradition that *has* given more attention to God, that represented by, among others, A. Schlatter, E. Käsemann, and P. Stuhlmacher.

Neither of these qualifications, of course, is meant to take away from my great appreciation for Flebbe’s work, which advances our understanding of both God in Romans and Paul’s relation to scripture and tradition. It will be of particular importance for those interested in Romans; the relation between theology, Christology, and anthropology; and the relationship between earliest Christianity and Judaism. I hope that it will be made more readily accessible to the Anglophone tradition via translation or an abbreviated English article.