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Did Something Go Wrong in the Beginning?

I. KRISTER STENDAHL

In 1967, after the Six-Days War, Krister Stendahl published a “A Plea for a New Relationship” between Judaism and Christianity.¹ This article struck my generation as a new and pathbreaking model of interpretation, and not only because it supported the search for a Christianity that aimed to overcome the calamitous teaching of contempt. Stendahl assumed that Christian self-definition by way of enmity towards Jews and Judaism had gained momentum only in the course of a contingent historic development of alienation from Judaism. Anti-Judaism in Christianity was not equi-primordial or co-original with Jesus’s and Paul’s teachings and therefore is not essential for Christians. The view that it is, however, provided the hermeneutic key for New Testament interpretation, especially in German scholarship. Ulrich Wilckens, for example, considered anti-Judaism as essential for Christianity’s self-definition, since in his view it was essential in the New Testament.²

For Stendahl, Jesus, Paul’s, and other witnesses’ “prophetic language fell, so to speak, into the hands of the gentiles”.³ This is to say that prophetic criticism from within the Hebraic community turned to accusations from without. And this change indeed set things on a new

¹ K. Stendahl, “Judaism and Christianity II: A Plea for a New Relationship”, in *ibidem*, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1984, 217-232.

² U. Wilckens, “Das Neue Testament und die Juden. Antwort an David Flusser”, *Evangelische Theologie* 34 (1974), 602-6; D. Flusser, “Ulrich Wilckens und die Juden”, *Evangelische Theologie* 34 (1974), 236-243; R. Rendtorff, “Die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Juden. Zur Diskussion zwischen David Flusser und Ulrich Wilckens”, *Evangelische Theologie* 36 (1976), 191-200.

³ Stendahl, “Judaism...”, 222.

track very early and tragically alienated Christianity from Judaism. Therefore, Stendahl states: “Something went wrong in the beginning”.⁴

But although the clock cannot be turned back, Stendahl proposed to look for “alternatives that were lost at the ancient time, alternatives which are the theological expressions of our repentance and of our understanding as they force themselves upon us today”.⁵ As one such alternative for today, he recommended that Christians ask Jews “whether they are willing to let us become again part of their family, a peculiar part to be true, but even so, relatives who believe themselves to be a peculiar kind of Jew”.⁶

In Stendahl’s view, Paul must be interpreted not in the category of a convert to a new religion but in the perspective of his being called by Christ for his Jewish mission to the Gentiles.⁷ Paul intended to include Gentiles in the messianic salvation of the Jews, in God’s messianic plan, giving them the right to participate in the promises of Israel and their fulfilment. So Paul had a “salvation-historical” framework. Gentiles in Christ as a peculiar kind of convert hence should live in coexistence with Judaism.

II. ALBERT SCHWEITZER VERSUS FERDINAND CHRISTIAN BAUR⁸

Unlike Wilckens, Käsemann, and others, Stendahl has broken away from the mainstream European model of interpretation developed in the nineteenth century. According to this model, Jesus founded Christianity as a universal religion, whose emergence therefore could occur only through a separation from its embeddedness in “particularistic” and “ethnocentric” Judaism. For the purposes of this ideological dissociation, anti-Judaism played a decisive instrumental role. The champion of this model was Ferdinand Christian Baur. For him it was Paul who “broke through the barriers of Judaism and rose out of the particularism of Judaism into the universal idea of Christianity”.⁹ When Paul speaks of a new creation or of “the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age, according to the will of our

⁴ *Ibidem*, 224.

⁵ *Ivi*.

⁶ *Ivi* (original emphasis).

⁷ K. Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles and Other Essays*, Augsburg, Fortress Press, 1976.

⁸ I am indebted for the history of Pauline research to the brilliant monograph of I. Bendik, *Paulus in neuer Sicht? – Eine kritische Einführung in die “New Perspective on Paul”*, Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 2010.

⁹ F.C. Baur, *The Church History of the First Three Centuries*, 2 vols., 3rd edition, London, Williams and Norgate, 1878-1879, vol. 1, 47.

God and Father” (Gal 1:4), it was “only” about a new consciousness of God, an abstract truth or an ideal assumption. Judaism and Christianity belong to distinct epochs of world-history, but Paul was not engaging in different worlds.¹⁰

Thus for Baur the apocalyptic notion of the “present evil aeon” (ὄπωσ ἐξέλῃται ἡμᾶς ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ, Gal 1:4) disappeared, and so for him Judaism replaced this aeon, from which Christianity must be rescued. That is an anti-semitic perspective, or rather the anti-semitic idea par excellence: Judaism and Jews represent (or even are responsible for) the flawed aspects of the *conditio humana*. According to Baur, anti-judaic doctrine therefore was, and had to be, an inherent force in Christian self-understanding, since Judaism, although it should have disappeared in actual fact, continued to exist and to co-exist with Christianity, in spite of Christian efforts to make it vanish. Thus Christianity in his view was always in danger of once again merging with false ideas of Judaism. Baur’s so-called “Frühkatholizismus” – his construction of a Christianity once more tainted with Judaism – represented the earliest example of such a regression.

The most outstanding opponent of such an interpretation was the most brilliant and at the same time most unheeded Pauline scholar: Albert Schweitzer in his *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*.¹¹ In his book on the history of Pauline research,¹² Schweitzer had already dismissed the idea that Paul wanted to found a new religion. Since “for Paul there was only one religion: the Jewish one... ‘Christianity’ is for Paul not a new religion, but it is the Jewish” religion, adapted to the “new given aeon” (“die neue, gegebene Weltzeit”).¹³ Although already dawning after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, this new aeon or world still co-exists with the former age, which is, however, doomed to pass away. So the present time is a time of an *interim* (“Zwischenzeit”),¹⁴ in which finitude and eternity, and the natural and the supernatural worlds,

¹⁰ See Bendik, *Paulus in neuer Sicht*, 18-28. See also my article, “Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette und Ferdinand Christian Baur über Zweck und Veranlassung des Römerbriefes”, in M. Keßler - M. Wallraff (eds.), *Biblische Theologie und historisches Denken: Wissenschaftsgeschichtliche Studien: Aus Anlass der 50. Wiederkehr der Basler Promotion von Rudolf Smend*, Basel, Schwabe, 2008, 226-55; see further my “Coexistence and Transformation: Reading the Politics of Identity in Romans in an Imperial Context”, in K. Ehrensperger - B. Tucker (eds.), *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation. Essays in Honour of William S. Campbell*, London-New York, T&T Clark, 2010, 3-23.

¹¹ A. Schweitzer, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1930.

¹² A. Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Paulinischen Forschung von der Reformation bis auf die Gegenwart*, Tübingen, Mohr, 1911.

¹³ Schweitzer, *Geschichte der Paulinischen Forschung...*, 177.

¹⁴ Schweitzer, *Die Mystik...*, 99.

intertwine. Paul has an apocalyptic or messianic Jewish eschatological conception. But since Paul reckons with the fact that the new aeon has already become intertwined with the old one, Schweitzer called this concept *mysticism*: “Mysticism... is everywhere where a human being considers the division between the earthly and the celestial, the temporal and the eternal, as transcended”.¹⁵

The natural and the supernatural or the temporal and the eternal realms are experienced as merging. But unlike the traditional kind of mysticism, which produces the merging of eternity and finiteness only by an act of thinking, for Schweitzer Paul’s mysticism appropriates an already given reality by active imaginative grasp.¹⁶ Paul and the followers of Christ experience themselves as being on their way from earth to heaven, from time to eternity. According to Schweitzer, Paul considered his contemporaries to be “the last generation of humanity”.¹⁷ Hence the elected followers of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, already take part in a transformation to the messianic kingdom of God on earth and in time, whilst others will have their chance to share in it at the last judgement, soon approaching at the end of time. “Behind the remaining exterior appearance of the natural world, a *transformation* to the supernatural [world] is under way like the stage set which is changing behind the drop-screen”.¹⁸

These reading differs considerably from Baur’s. According to Baur, Paul construed a *horizontal* post-eschatological dichotomy between a universalistic or trans-ethnic religion versus a particularistic ethnic-centred (Jewish) religion. For Schweitzer, however, Paul radicalized the Jewish religion and construed a *vertical* apocalyptic dichotomy between two worlds or aeons, his point being that just and already now they are dramatically mixed. In other words, Schweitzer’s Paul dramatized his present time as the end of time and history, with all the undertones, whether implied or explicit, of catastrophe and salvation. And again in other words, Paul was a messianic thinker rather than some disciple of the philosophy of “universalism”. Schweitzer had an understanding of Paul that was informed by an ethical outrage over the status of humanity, with Paul seeking a “new world” and a transformed humanity, that is, a humanity constituted as the children of God.

Stendahl is obviously close to Schweitzer, although he does not speak of mysticism and does not adopt Schweitzer’s idea of an inter-

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 38.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, 272.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, 100.

im-time. Nor does his concept of a “salvation-historical frame” have the dramatic apocalyptic dynamics which Schweitzer ascribes to Paul. For Stendahl it is Judaism and Christianity, or Israel and the Church, who co-exist. The Baur model, however, has never ceased to influence Pauline scholarship and interpretation. And although Schweitzer won more appreciation among advocates of the New Perspective on Paul, even some of its representatives, such as Dunn and Wright, in part struck up an alliance with Baur’s dichotomy.¹⁹ The same is true for Theissen, who considers the emergence of Christianity as the result of dismissal by either Jews or Judaizers of the Jesus movement’s attempt to establish a more open version of Judaism.²⁰ Closer to Schweitzer is E.P. Sanders’s interpretation of Paul, in which he especially favors Schweitzer’s concept of eschatological participation and transformation in Christ, while none the less constructing a *Paulinism*, or a Pauline religious pattern, in which Paul denies the very foundations of Judaism.²¹ Perhaps only Christiaan Beker²² and Calvin Roetzel²³ among recent scholars have come closest to Schweitzer’s position, by reading Paul as a thoroughly apocalyptic thinker.

III. IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF STENDAHL: CAROLINE JOHNSON HODGE

In the spirit of Stendahl, and following up on his reading of Paul, Caroline Johnson Hodge²⁴ has recently published a brilliant book on Paul: *If Sons, then Heirs*. Her “study of kinship and ethnicity in Paul’s letters” intends to prove that the traditional dichotomy between universal/particularistic or universal/ethnic categories, and accordingly between Christian/Jewish communities, does not fit Paul’s discourse on the inclusion of Gentiles. Johnson Hodge follows also in the footsteps of L. Gaston and J. Gager, and in part also those of S. Stowers, and so in the footsteps of the so-called radical New Perspective²⁵ and its thesis, that Paul’s gospel speaks only to Gentiles, and that Christ is only *their*

¹⁹ See Bendik, *Paulus...*, 128-148, 150, 167; see also C. Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, 6-9.

²⁰ G. Theissen, *Die Religion der ersten Christen. Eine Theorie des Urchristentums*, Gütersloh, Mohn, 2000.

²¹ Bendik, *Paulus*, 103-127.

²² J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1980.

²³ C.J. Roetzel, *Paul: A Jew on the Margins*, Louisville (KY), Westminster-John Knox Press, 2003, 19-37.

²⁴ See fn. 19.

²⁵ Johnson Hodge, *If Sons...*, 7-9.

messiah.²⁶ Johnson Hodge's main thesis is that Being-in-Christ does not imagine "a hybrid identity for both, Jews and gentiles",²⁷ but only for *gentiles*. Jews already are what Gentiles try to become through being in Christ, namely Abraham's seed or children, and the sons of God. "Paul constructs kinship ties to give gentiles a new heritage",²⁸ namely that of Abraham and Israel. Paul's "new language of kinship creates a myth of collective identity for the gentiles, an identity that relates to, but does not become one with, a Jewish identity".²⁹ Christ's followers among the Gentiles therefore are justified by Paul in considering themselves a peculiar kind of Jew to speak in Stendahl's language.

Johnson Hodge presupposes "that Paul writes to gentiles",³⁰ and *only* to them, and not to Ἰουδαῖοι, but only *about* them. Even when Paul, himself a Jew, uses the first person plural, he only rhetorically identifies with his Gentile addressees, rather than merging with them. So Jews and Gentiles-in-Christ "are separate but related lineages of Abraham".³¹

Whether Johnson Hodge's radical new reading argues convincingly, by surmounting seemingly obvious inconsistencies or even contradictions to that reading in the Pauline letters, cannot be discussed here. I have some reservations and doubts, not least concerning her interpretation of the first person plural in Paul, and her way of identifying all addressees as Gentiles. Epistolary configuration implies that the natural meaning of a first person plural is an expression of the author's wish to align himself with his addressees.³² Since letters always construe a "basic bipolarity"³³ between the author and the addressees, between an "I" and a "you", an epistolographic "we" usually advises the reader that the author rhetorically joins himself to his audience. And where the eth-

²⁶ See M. Zetterholm, *Approaches to Paul: A Student's Guide to Recent Scholarship*, Augsburg, Fortress, 2009, 127-163.

²⁷ Hodge, *If Sons...*, 150.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 151.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 152.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, 9.

³¹ *Ibidem*, 5.

³² See W.-H. Ollrog, *Paulus und seine Mitarbeiter: Untersuchungen zu Theorie und Praxis der paulinischen Mission*, WMANT 50, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener Verlag, 1979, 183; see further S. Byrskog, "Co-Senders, Co-Authors and Paul's Use of the First Person Plural", ZNW 87 (1996), 230-50; M. Müller, "Der sogenannte "schriftstellerische Plural" – neu betrachtet: Zur Frage der Mitarbeiter als Mitverfasser der Paulusbriefe", BZ.NF 42 (1998), 181-201; A. Reichert, *Der Römerbrief als Gratwanderung: Eine Untersuchung zur Abfassungsproblematik*, FRLANT 194, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001, 116-17; C. Gerber, *Paulus und seine "Kinder": Studien zur Beziehungsmetaphorik der paulinischen Briefe*, BZ.NW 136, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2005, 78-80.

³³ P. Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgiving*, BZ.NW 20, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1939, 37.

nicity of the empirical addressees of Paul's letter is concerned, I wonder whether Johnson Hodge's presupposition – and she is only following an increasing number of scholars who advance the same thesis – makes sense, especially in respect to Romans and the greetings in chapter 16. Is it really possible to exclude without doubt the greeted *Jewish* couple Prisca and Aquila (16:3) from the range of the encoded readers? Do they not count as part of the intended audience of the letter? And what about Andronicus and Junia, who are called compatriots (Rom 16:7)? Is it really possible to take “compatriots” as a metaphor?³⁴ Maybe they were even more than compatriots, namely Paul's relatives *sensu stricto* (συγγενεῖς μου). That would not exclude them, however, as part of the audience to which Paul is addressing his letter.

Nonetheless, Johnson Hodge not only plausibly avoids ascribing to Paul an inherent, intrinsic principle, or an essentialistic idea of a universal and inclusive Christian religion, but she also places him in the historical formation of a discourse on kinship and ethnicity. Paul did not champion a new Christian collective identity over against Jews and Gentiles, according to Johnson Hodge, but rather a new collective identity among certain, possibly even many, Gentiles in relation to the lineage of Abraham and his seed, all the while embedded in a clear family-tree of hierarchy: Jews first, and only after them Gentiles-in-Christ. Therefore, she dismisses the traditional mainstream-reading, which places Christ's followers above Jews and Gentiles. If processes of collective identity-construction necessarily imply processes of inclusion and exclusion, then Paul, according to Johnson Hodge, interrupted the systematic othering of Jews by Gentiles significantly or at least weakened it (and reciprocally the othering of Gentiles by Jews as well). This means that Paul's gospel, however, would draw Gentiles toward Jewish identity and not Jews toward Gentile identity. Here, I would mostly agree with Johnson Hodge. However, I will propose still another reading – while following in the footsteps of Schweitzer.

IV. FOUR DISCURSIVE SELF-DEFINITIONS IN PAUL

Johnson Hodge's book joins recent studies on identity and ethnicity in antiquity, and especially in Judaism and early Christianity, which hesitate to describe ancient communities as mere religious groups. Religion – if this term may be adequately applied at all to antiquity – is only part of the cultural self-definition or the imagination of a collec-

³⁴ The most fiery representative of this interpretation is A. Andrew Das, *Solving the Romans Debate*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007.

tive identity of a group, an *ethnos*, or a nation. In this respect, Johnson Hodge's interpretation is certainly plausible in view of the fact that Paul ascribed a virtual identity to Gentiles-in-Christ, an identity which is tied to kinship with Abraham. But further differentiation is needed. I would like to propose that one distinguish between four discursive self-definitions in Paul's letters.³⁵

The *first* one is indeed an ethnic discourse: the dichotomy between Jews and Gentiles, Jews and Greeks, or circumcision and uncircumcision. Here, however, Paul does not have an undynamic or static dichotomy in mind, when it comes to cultural identity, since an uncircumcised Gentile could prove, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, that his deeds and behavior show that he is "the Jew in concealment" and has a "circumcision of the heart by means of the spirit, not of the letter" (ὁ ἐν τῷ κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαῖος Rom 2:29). And *vice versa*, circumcision could become uncircumcision, if someone is a παραβάτης νόμου (Rom 2:27), a transgressor of the Tora. But *nota bene*: Paul stops short of calling him a Greek, for a Jewish transgressor does not change his ethnic status as a Ἰουδαῖος. To this ethnic discourse likewise belongs the usage of the term "Israelite(s)" Ἰσραηλίτης, and Paul's identifying with them (Rom 11) and calling them his συγγενεῖς: relatives, compatriots, or kinsmen. In Rom 9:3, Paul speaks of "my brothers, that means [epexegetical or explanatory genitive] my relatives κατὰ σὰρκα". Although this is often interpreted as a diminution ("brothers in respect of their kinship relations *only* according to the flesh"),³⁶ as if he used the rhetorical device of a *minutio*, it seems, on the contrary, more likely to be an *amplificatio*, an augmentation or intensification, since κατὰ σὰρκα belongs only to συγγενεῖς. It intensifies Paul's identification with them.³⁷

The *second* discourse is indeed about Abrahamic ancestry, and one can summarize it briefly. As Johnson Hodge has pointed out, Paul relies on a patrilineal logic:³⁸ descendants are understood to be somehow "contained 'in' their ancestors".³⁹ And this is surely true for corporal or fleshly descendants. But remarkably enough, Paul claims in respect of the σπέρμα or seed of Abraham in Rom 9:7 that not all in their capacity as children are σπέρμα/seed of Abraham, but rather "in Isaac shall your seed be called". And he explains in v. 8: "that is: not the children

³⁵ See E. Stegemann, "Zur apokalyptischen Konstruktion einer kollektiven Identität bei Paulus", in M. Oeming - W. Boes (eds.), *Attestamentliche Wissenschaft und kirchliche Praxis: FS Jürgen Kegler*, Berlin, LIT-Verlag, 2009, 29-54.

³⁶ J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans*, Vol. 2, Dallas, Word, 1988, 525.

³⁷ Stegemann, *Zur apokalyptischen Konstruktion...*, 50-53.

³⁸ Johnson Hodge, *If Sons...*, 100.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 94.

of flesh these [are] children of God, but the children of the promise are *reckoned* as σπέρμα/seed”. The children of the promise are created by God’s word of promise and even *contra naturam* (that is, not according to the flesh) like Isaac (cf. Rom 4), or by God’s word of calling or election, κατ’ ἐκλογὴν, like Jacob. So Abraham’s seed, as contained in him, is prototypically represented in Isaac and Jacob, but it is created or elected by God’s word: *counted* to the *seed* of Abraham. The point, then, is that God creates and elects, even counts or reckons, the kinship shared by blood. So those ἐκ πίστεως Ἀβραάμ, those on the basis of Abraham’s faith[-fullness], who belong to Abraham as forefather, are his *seed*, because of the word of God, the promise or the gospel, as well as their faith and trust in it and their obedience to God. Of course Gentiles are included in the promised eschatological descendants of Abraham, as “children of the promise”, but only on the basis of the Gospel – God’s eschatological word – and its salvific and elective power, as well as the faith[-fullness] in and obedience to it.

The *third* discourse is about sibling status. The language of brothers and sisters, and of “father” related to Paul as missionary and founder of communities, obviously reflects in Paul’s letters a comparable usage about groups or assemblies and synagogues, as Ryder Aasgard⁴⁰ and Philipp Harland⁴¹ have demonstrated with ample evidence. This is the language of a “cultural minority” (Harland) on the basis of households (κατ’ οἶκον αὐτῶν ἐκκλησίαν Rom 16:5) and their hierarchic construction. Rüpke calls these formations “Gruppenreligionen”.⁴² And Hubert Cancik draws attention to the fact that Christ’s followers in Rome organized themselves in the second and third centuries on the basis of houses, οἶκος or *familia*, since they were not allowed to assemble as *collegia* and did not claim the status of a “club” or “association”.⁴³ Since “Christians” from the mid-second century defined themselves increasingly as ἔθνος or γένος, then this household usage is not in contradiction to that self-definition, for that label had no copyright. It was not forbidden to claim collective identity as a people, whereas claiming one as a “club” would not do. And there were certain advantages in claiming the self-definition as γένος or ἔθνος.

⁴⁰ R. Aasgard, “*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters*”: *Christian Siblingship in Paul*, Sheffield, T&T Clark, 2004.

⁴¹ P. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities*, New York-London, T&T Clark International-Continuum Press, 2009; Id., *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2003.

⁴² J. Rüpke (ed.), *Gruppenreligionen im römischen Reich: Sozialformen, Grenzziehungen und Leistungen*, Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 43, Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2007.

⁴³ H. Cancik, “Haus, Schule, Gemeinde. Zur Organisation von ‘fremder Religion’ in Rom (1.-3.Jh. n. Chr.)”, in Rüpke (ed.), *Gruppenreligionen...*, 31-48; 45.

The *fourth* discourse is about sons or children of God, as ascribed to the followers of Christ, even among Gentiles. This fourth kind of discourse is a different kettle of fish. It is embedded in Paul's messianic or apocalyptic gospel-language, and thereby in a kind of universal-historical discourse in Romans chapter 5 and its corresponding chapter 8, as well as in 1 Corinthians 15. But let me start with some introductory remarks.

One problem in Johnson Hodge's interpretation, to my way of understanding, is that Paul's gospel is not about kinship for gentiles-in-Christ, but about Jesus as God's anointed one and son, appointed to rule and empowered by God as Lord (Rom 1:3-4). It is about his rise to universal dominion and the consequent turnaround of the aeons or worlds.⁴⁴ This narrative is Jewish to the very bottom-line, and therefore Paul has caught Gentiles in the net of a Jewish narrative. But the story is one of dominion, in which the Jewish messiah stems from David's seed as the son of God; therefore, it concerns the kingdom of God, which lasts forever, unshakeably so, and which, at least since the apocalyptic book of Daniel, had competed with narratives from the Persian, Greek, and later the Roman empires. It is implicitly empire-critical or counter-imperial, and it announces at the same time a new divine empire.⁴⁵ But let us not confuse the categories. It is about dominion and rule and lordship – and who is or will be in charge of it for ever. *It is not about a new belief-system or religion.* It is a messianic or apocalyptic Jewish myth. But as such – as Arnaldo Momigliano has pointed out⁴⁶ – it is by birth a universalistic concept, since it awaits the universal kingdom of God or of his Son or messiah whom he empowers.

Paul shapes his Adam-Christ-typology in view of the universal history of humanity. The particularity of this concept – at least in Paul's version – entails a series of propositions: first, that it included faithful Gentiles who were not expected to convert to Judaism and as proselytes become members of the Jewish people/ἔθνος; second, that is because they already participated, through faithful obedience to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, in the notion that the kingdom of God is at hand, that God has already determined Jesus Christ to be the Kyrios and act with God's power; and third, because of this enlarged membership or expanded kinship, one must mark the beginning of a new aeon, or saeculum,

⁴⁴ Stegemann, "Coexistence and Transformation..." (see fn. 10).

⁴⁵ E. Stegemann, "Apocalittica e storia universale nella tematica dell' *imperium* nell' antichità" in *Protestantesimo* 65 (2011) 3-4, 277-297.

⁴⁶ A. Momigliano, "The Origins of Universal History", in Id., *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 1987, 31-57.

or world, a new creation. The world is in a critical state, for the *kairos* has come and the fulfilling of God's promises for Abraham's seed are put in force, to which the Gentiles-in-Christ are related. But since God's eschatological spirit, the "holy spirit" or the "spirit of holiness" (Rom 1:3-4) – that is, the spirit which is holy and makes holy is poured out into the hearts of the Christ's followers, whether Jew or Gentile – they participate in a process of eschatological transformation. As with all humankind, Jews and Gentiles alike have Adam as their prototype and are shaped by sin and death because of their fleshly (*sarx*) constitution. But being in Christ means to be molded in the appearance or shape of God's son Jesus Christ by God's spirit (Rom 8:28). Jesus Christ as the prototype of a new, transformed humanity, and therefore the last Adam (1 Cor 15:45), is the one through whom his followers receive justice and eternal life. In Rom 8, Paul calls him πρωτότοκος – the firstborn. His followers are already in a process of "being conformed to the image [εικόν] of God's son that he might be the firstborn among many others" (Rom 8:29). If we refrain from taking this as merely a metaphorical assertion – and I would advise against taking it that way – then Paul's apocalyptic or universal-historical concept is that, through the eschatological spirit of holiness, those being-in-Christ or being Christ's body (σῶμα) on earth are already undergoing metamorphosis into sons or children of God like Christ. The difference, for these followers, between belonging to the seed of Abraham and belonging to Abraham as their earthly (fore)father is that God is their father, who molds them according to the pattern of his firstborn son in heaven through the πνεῦμα ἀγιωσύνης.

Being counted to the seed of Abraham means being descended from a father to whom the promise has been made, that a *seed* consisting of nations would be his, and that this seed will inherit the world, or rule it. To have God as father means to cry "Abba, Father" and thereby to change from being a slave to being a son. This vertical relatedness to heaven has an impact on the still existing earthly dependency of Christ's followers, not least on their status and behavior as siblings.

V. CONCLUSION

Paul did not champion a new religion and not even a new *ethnos*, a third *genos*, or a true Israel, *but a new creation or humanity*, which in the end transcends or overcomes all earthly conditions and differences, including ethnic ones. Therefore, Paul makes a universalizing claim about Jews and Gentiles as Christ's followers in opposition, so to speak, to a universalizing claim about Jews and Gentiles as followers of Adam. Jews and Gentiles are aggregated as being "in-Christ," and only thereby as being in Adam. The overarching whole in each case

is humanity's universal history of decline and its subsequent rising by God's salvation through Christ, on the basis of faith[-fullness]. Whether Paul was influenced by the stoic concept of the unity of mankind, the *unitas generis humani* (Seneca), and the golden age ideology starting with the Augustan era, must be left open. But since those "whom [God] has called not only from among the Jews, but also from among Gentiles" (Rom 9:24) differ already from all other Jews and Gentiles who do not yet participate in that salvific transformation, a kind of connecting factor or link to a later interpretation is indeed in play. This dissolves humanity into three aspects: Christians are "the one *genos* of the saved people [*laos*]" (Clement of Alex. Strom. 6,42.2), which is gathered by faith from Jews and Gentiles, with Christians in a position of superiority. That concept, however, owes its logic to ethnic reasoning,⁴⁷ which makes trans-ethnic claims of superiority for the group that defines itself as the initiator of a people or *ethnos* composed of Jews and Gentiles. Transformation now means conversion to the saved people, to Christianity as a superior people or religion.

If my apocalyptic or universal-historical reading of Paul has some plausibility, then the construction of Christianity either as a new universal people or as a new universal religion is anachronistic. Paul's self-definition of the followers of Christ as both the sons and children of God and members of a new universal people or religion turns out to be incompatible. But obviously Christ's followers in the second and third centuries thought the *ethnos*-language to be helpful. Their pretence of being a people, a new and superior one, obviously served to express their collective identity-construction over and against both Jews and Gentiles. Here, I follow Denise Buell in particular. Claiming a collective identity obviously is something highly variable, and depends on both situations and their ideological reception. Therefore, the question is which party claims which collective identity, in which situation, and opposed to what other group or groups.

Did something go wrong in the beginning – and, we must add, since when, and just why? It is obviously an apocalyptic myth or a messianic dream that inspired Paul and Jesus, as it did other witnesses after Paul. Krister Stendahl's honorable search, however, for an alternative to or a disarmament of the shameful anti-Jewish self-definitions of Christianity will in the end – I believe – not really reach its goal if it restricts itself only to a better and more insightful *interpretation* of Paul and the New Testament. Paul's apocalyptic framework is not repeatable. What

⁴⁷ See D.K. Buell, "Race and Universalism in Early Christianity", *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 10 (2002), 432-441.

went wrong, I think, is that the necessary shift from an apocalyptic self-definition – through dramatizing the present as the end of time – to a post-eschatological self-definition, which acknowledges the ongoing process of the old theatre of the world, armed itself with the weapon of superiority-claims and blamed the Jews. Although we must protect Paul from interpretations which legitimate racism and supremacy, we have to admit that we are responsible for our mental and political attitude, and therefore cannot hide or creep away from the teaching of contempt only by appealing to a better understanding of Paul. But, of course, a better understanding helps.

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