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Hybrid Jews/Judeans: Renarrating Ethnicity and Christian Origins in the Context of Empire

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Recent research has emphasized the contextual and contingent nature of biblical scholarship, especially regarding issues of empire, race and ethnicity.[1] Rather than opting for a disinterested and anti-contextual approach, this presentation pushes for an ethically engaged form of scholarship and thus lets a contemporary context interact with a research question about ethnicity and Christian origins. The paper has two main parts. The first part begins in contemporary Sweden and discusses ethnicity as a concept and its relation to empire. In the second part, I discuss various ways of conceptualizing Christian origins in terms of ethnicity, and end by offering a suggestion.

Ethnicity in Contemporary Sweden

In a popular Swedish radio show called "Summer," Özz Nûjen, stand-up comedian and actor, told about how he escaped from Kurdistan and came to Sweden when he was eight years old. Having lived in Sweden for 30 years, he posed the question: "Why do people keep asking me where I come from? … People ask if I feel Swedish. And I don't know. How does that feel?" (my translation). In the program, it became clear that Nûjen regards himself as a Kurd as well as a Swede. When he travels he always longs for Sweden. But evidently, he also longs for Kurdistan.

A double ethnicity is becoming increasingly common in Sweden. A number of recent books by Jewish authors illustrate a similar double iden-

[1] A vast amount of scholarship has highlighted the contextual character of biblical studies in general. See, among others, Pui-lan (1998), Moxnes (2012), and Patte (2011). For the particular issue of race and ethnicity, see Kelley (2002), Heschel (2008), and Buell (2010).

tity among Swedish Jews.[2] In a recent book by Ricki Neuman (2012) about a Swedish Jew who is searching for his identity, the main character has a dream where he becomes accused of not accepting the offer of being Swedish.

> Why didn't you become Swedish? Answer me! You could have. We would have accepted you. We would have so much to give you, had you only said yes.
>
> Then there is silence.
>
> It is my turn.
>
> But I am Swedish, I say and hear how my voice rises to falsetto. Why can't you understand that, I am as Swedish as you, one hundred percent Swedish. (Neuman 2012, 40, my translation)

The character claims to be as Swedish as any Swede. And yet he is also a Jew. One of the points in the book is to highlight the experience, common for Jews in Sweden, of belonging, and yet not belonging. This tells us something about being a Jew and being a Swede as a combined or hybrid identity. Not so long ago, a Swede was white and Lutheran. Jews were seen as a foreign minority. Today, Swedish ethnicity is a much more contested field. There is a nationalist discourse that regards Swedish ethnicity as something inherently stable. But whether one likes it or not, people identify themselves as Kurdish Swedes, Jewish Swedes, and Muslim Swedes. This highlights one of the key points in this paper—that ethnicity is an elusive and porous phenomenon that is constantly being negotiated. Coming to terms with the unstable nature of ethnicity, I will further argue, helps us to conceptualize Paul and Christian origins in a more responsible and nuanced way.

In order to better understand ethnicity, it is necessary to take into account the history of the concept. Tracking its history, one inevitably runs into the longstanding phenomenon of empire.

[2] Some of whom include Elisabeth Åsbrink, Göran Rosenberg, Leif Zern, Stephan Mendel-Enk, and Ricki Neuman.

Ethnicity and Empire

In ordinary speech, ethnicity often carries a meaning of group identity that is thicker than that of other groups. The ethnic is not just a voluntary association—it has to do with origin, kinship, bloodlines, bodies, deep-rooted notions, and customs. This ethnic "stuff" tend to appear self-evident, natural and given.

As soon as we begin to investigate the matter, however, this self-evident meaning begins to disintegrate. What does it mean, for instance to be an ethnic Swede? Or to eat ethnic food? Is everyone ethnic, or is it only minorities who are ethnic? In Swedish, "ethnic" can be used about cultures that are seen as foreign. Ethnic food is thus something non-Swedish. But the designation ethnic Swede is sometimes used for someone who is stereotypically Swedish (that is, white). But then again, the football player Zlatan Ibrahimović is a Swedish national icon that with his Serbian background questions this stereotype.

Its slippery nature, it seems, is connected to how the term ethnicity is inherited and burdened with cultural baggage from ancient empires. The term's origin can be traced back to the Greek *ethnos* that was used early in Greek history as a wide designation. In the writings of Homer (8th century B.C.E.), it could refer to almost any kind of grouping, not only of people but also of animals (swarms, flocks, etc.) and even the dead (LSJ, s.v.). The more specific meaning of nation and people is developed after Homer and can be traced back to Herodotus (5th century B.C.E.), who described various peoples (*ethnē*) and their concomitant tribes (*genē*).[3] Due to his panoramic value-neutral and detailed descriptions of different peoples and their customs and origins, Herodotus is often seen as having invented ethnography.[4] As argued by Geary (2002, 47), the comparably non-judgemental approach of Herodotos was not accepted by the later Greek and Roman authors who regarded him as "philobarbarian."[5]

Hence, in connection to the Greek and Roman imperial expansions, *ethnos* began to be used in a more stereotypical way to designate foreign and barbarous nations. Writing from the center of an empire, Greek authors began to use *ethnē* (typically in the plural) as a generic category that

[3] See Herodotus, *Hist*. 1.101 about the Median *ethnos* and its various tribes (*genea*). See also Herodotus, *Hist*. 9.106 about the peoples of Hellas (*ethneōn tōn Hellēnikōn*).
[4] Geary (2002, 42–43).
[5] See Plutarch, *Mor*. 857a. See also Hall (2002, 182).

lumped together non-Greek peoples in a degrading fashion.[6] Similarly, Roman authors who were writing during the heydays of Rome, used the Latin *gentes* (also typically in the plural) to designate peoples who were not part of the Roman *populus*. For Roman writers such as Pliny, Herodotus approach was far too complex. Rome needed clearly distinguishable peoples, orderly classified according to where they lived. A basic division was thus established between the constantly existing *gentes* or *ethnē* who were based on ancestry and who were part of the natural rather than the civilized world and the *populus* who had a constitutional law rather than a natural law and who had a history (Geary 2002, 49–50).

A similar "us and them" dynamic can be seen in the Hebrew term *goy*, which is translated as *ethnos* in the LXX. Although *goy*, like *ethnos*, can have a wide variety of meanings, it is commonly used in the Hebrew Scriptures as a generic term for non-Israelite peoples with a denigrating connotation. The surrounding *goyim* exhibit their foreign character by their wickedness (Deut 9:4–5), their abominations (Deut 18:9; 2 Chr 33:2), and by the making of their own gods (2 Kgs 17:29). The *goyim* are said to rise up against God and oppress his covenant people, yet God scorns at them (Ps 59:8) and causes them to perish (Ps 10:16).

Although the term *goyim* of Hebrew Scriptures is highly similar to *ethnē* or *gentes* of Greek and Roman writers, the Hebrew term is different in one important respect. Rather than originating from a dominating position, it was developed as a response to being exposed to various expanding empires. The Hebrew "us and them" vocabulary could thus be seen as a nationalistic protection against imperial domination. Even so, however, when Christianity became official religion in the Roman Empire, the Hebrew Scriptures were transferred from a position in the periphery to the centre of an empire. The *ethnē* vocabulary thus became an important part of the Christian expansion, not least during the nineteenth century and the well-known device of converting the heathen.

For the purposes of this paper, I would like to highlight this imperial heritage that regards *ta ethnē* as an undifferentiated mass of peoples who have in common that they are "others." This heritage can explain that the term ethnic has been used in an ethnocentric way in the western world with the meaning foreign or heathen (*OED*, s.v.). Even if "ethnicity" during the mid-twentieth century began to be used in a more neutral way to

[6] LSJ here refers to Aristotle, *Pol.* 1324β. Aristotle writes about non-Greek nations (*tois ethnesi*) such as Scythians, Persians, Thracians, and Celts.

replace the term "race" (Fenton 2003, 51–72), the term's imperial heritage can still be detected as it is often minorities who are seen as ethnic. The dominant group, on the other hand, is often seen as lacking ethnicity.

Ethnicity in Contemporary Scholarship

In contemporary scholarship, ethnicity is typically discussed in the non-judgemental approach of Herodotus. Nevertheless, the term is contested and is defined differently depending on theoretical approach. Steve Fenton (2003) has helpfully synthesized the various suggestions. The simplest way to delineate the term, he argues (3), is to say that ethnicity is about "descent and culture" and that ethnic groups can be thought of as "descent and culture communities." Quickly, he clarifies that descent and culture are not simply there as objective knowledge or facts. Thus, he makes clear that ethnicity refers to "the social construction of descent and culture" (3). Of course, there are alternative suggestions, most notably, perhaps, a more narrow definition offered by Jonathan Hall (2002, 9–19). The major difference to Fenton concerns the issue of territory. But Fenton's wider definition of ethnicity fits better with the perspective applied here.

In the scholarly writings on ethnicity, there is a general tension between what is often called primordialism and social constructivism. Whereas the first understands ethnicity more as a stable category that reminds of a family, the second emphasizes its fluid character. As several scholars have begun to realize, this is not a question of "either–or" (Fenton 2003, 73–90). One way to conceptualize these aspects together has been offered by Homi Bhahba (2004, 199–244). Based on Benedict Anderson's famous work *Imagined Communities*, Bhabha understands a nation as being construed in a double narrative movement.

On the one hand, Bhabha (208–13) argues, the people are the historical *objects* of a nationalist pedagogy, a discourse whose authority is based on an alleged previous historical origin or event. On the other hand, he argues, the people are also *the subjects* of articulations that erase the original presence and establish a renewed aspect of the people by repetitious signifying processes. Bhabha (209) calls these two aspects the pedagogical and the performative. In the production of the nation as narration, he suggests, "there is a split between the continuist, accumulative temporality of the pedagogical, and the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative" (cf. Baumann 1999, 90–95). The performative articulations that constantly redefine an ethnic group are for Bhabha located on the borders

between collective identities. Ethnicity thus becomes internally marked by cultural difference and hybridity.

The notion of hybridity will play an important role in the rest of this paper and is one of Bhabha's main terms. Its main thrust, I would argue, is how it challenges commonly held notions of "cultural diversity" and "multiculturalism" that regard cultures and ethnicities as fixed entities that supposedly live unsullied side by side, at most with cultural exchange between each other. Bhabha (1990a, 208; 2004, 47–56) criticizes this essential notion of cultures for leading, at best, to an appreciation of cultures as something that can be collected in museums and, at worst, to racism, xenophobia and ethnocentrism. As an alternative to notions of cultural diversity, Bhabha thus upholds cultural difference and hybridity. Rather than seeing culture and ethnicity as unifying forces that are kept alive in the national tradition of the people, Bhabha regards them as something that takes place on the borders, in the in-between space of translation and negotiation.

In order to sum up the first part of the article, I would like to make three points about ethnicity. First, ethnicity as a term is connected to the growth of empires. In an empire, the ruling population tends to regard other peoples as ethnic. The dominating group, on the other hand, sees itself as the non-ethnic norm. Second, as a response to imperial domination, a particular people can sometimes mobilize resistance by referring to a stable ethnic self-understanding. This resistance, however, tends to reify imperial notions of stable ethnicities. Third, as shown by social scientists, ethnicity is not an objective fact but rather something continuously negotiated. Even if it is sometimes perceived as stable, it does change over time. Further, coming to terms with the unstable nature of ethnicity, and here I lean primarily on Bhabha (1990a, 213), is necessary in order to establish new forms of solidarity that rests on mutual vulnerability and alienation, rather than allegedly fixed notions of ethnic essence.

With this understanding of ethnicity, I will now approach the question of Paul and Christian origins in Mediterranean antiquity.

Ethnicity and Christian Origins: Four Versions

The question of Christian origins has been keenly debated among biblical scholars since the birth of our discipline. Since the latter part of the previous century the debate has often taken place under the heading "The Part-

ing of the Ways."[7] This debate, in turn, is connected to Pauline scholarship and the so called "new perspective on Paul."[8] Both of these scholarly discussions, it is important to notice, stem from a painful realization after the Second World War, that biblical scholarship had been plagued by an anti-Jewish tendency that was connected to the holocaust.

Even if the Jewishness of Paul has been a prominent topic, these debates have mainly been reacting against the Lutheran theological notions of law and grace, rather than dealing with the issue of ethnicity.[9] But even so, the issue of ethnicity tends to linger in the background, often as something taken for granted. Within contextual hermeneutics (Brett 1996; Segovia 2000), however, the issue of ethnic difference has been addressed. Also Daniel Boyarin (1994), who identifies himself as a "talmudist and postmodern Jewish cultural critic" (1) has made an important contribution. It was not until a *JBL* article by Denise Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge appeared in 2004, that the issue of ethnicity in the study of Paul and Christian origins entered the mainstream of biblical scholarship.

At the center of this investigation stands the Pauline vision expressed in Gal 3:28 of unity in Christ. What does it mean that there is "neither Jewish/Judean nor Greek" in Christ?[10] Based on how scholars in different ways conceptualize Judaism and Paul's position respectively in terms of ethnicity, I have found it helpful to divide the various versions of Christian origins into four categories. To clarify, with the phrase "Paul's position" I do not refer to how Paul understood himself ethnically but rather how his vision of unity in Christ is to be seen in terms of ethnicity. Here are my four categories:

1. Judaism as ethnic; Paul as non-ethnic (dominating)
2. Judaism as ethnic; Paul as multi-ethnic
3. Judaism and Paul as ethnic
4. Judaism and Paul as ethnically hybrid

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[7] Only to mention a few of the works in this wide cluster: Dunn (2006, 1991), Lieu (1994), Porter and Pearson (2000), Zetterholm (2003), Becker and Reed (2003).

[8] Some of the most important works include: Stendahl (1963), Sanders (1977), Räisänen (1983), Dunn (1983b), Wright (1978).

[9] See the critique from Lieu (1994).

[10] As I here begin focusing on the ancient context of Paul, I will translate *Ioudaios* as "Judean" and "Jew" interchangeably in order to signal the complex combination of religious and ethnic dimensions that *Ioudaios* encompasses in the ancient context.

A note of caution is needed. It is always a risky enterprise to categorize scholarship. Bearing in mind that ethnicity is a slippery concept, this categorization is especially difficult. Also, considering the vast amount of scholars who have made contributions to the issue, this overview is markedly limited and sketchy. Nevertheless, I hope it will be helpful in order to get an impression of various possible scholarly alternatives to understand the ethnic aspects of Christian origins. Let me then briefly describe the four categories.

1. Judaism as Ethnic; Paul as Non-Ethnic

The first category is the dominant view. Judaism is here seen as an ethnic religion and Paul is seen as representing a universal religion where ethnicity has no significance. This interpretation represents what Johnson Hodge (2007, 126–27) has called the "fusion theory" according to which Paul advocates a melting of differences into one unified identity in Christ where ethnicity does not matter.

This dominant view was famously presented by Tübingen scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur. For Baur, Paul is a great hero who represents a moral and spiritual Christian universalism over against Jewish Torah-bound nationalistic particularism. Baur (1875, 90) thus regards Paul as a man "who resolutely broke through the limits of the national consciousness." Such break with Jewish nationalism, Baur thought, was connected to Paul's understanding of Jesus as Messiah. Baur writes:

> Everything that was national and Jewish in the Messianic idea … was at once removed from the consciousness of our apostle by the one fact of the death of Jesus. With this death everything that the Messiah might have been as a Jewish Messiah disappeared; through his death, Jesus, as the Messiah, had died to Judaism, had been removed beyond his national connexion with it, and placed in a freer, more universal, and purely spiritual sphere, where the absolute importance which Judaism had claimed till then was at once obliterated. (Baur 1875, 125)

Baur's interpretation rests on a dialectical opposition between Paul and Judaism. For Baur, Paul represents a transition of Christianity from East to West, which corresponds to a transition from Jewish particularism to Christian universalism. Whereas Judaism represents the Eastern, nationalist, particular, and worldly, Paul represents the Western, free, universal, and spiritual. In such a divide one can hear the echo of what Edward Said (1979) has called Orientalism, the nineteenth century tendency of constru-

ing the Orient as "the other" against which an elevated European identity was formed.[11] Baur's understanding of Paul and Christian origins, it thus seems, was connected to a colonial mindset that wanted to see the unification of the whole world in Christ. Jewish particularism then represents what Baur regarded as belonging to the past, the ethnic if you will, something that ought to be rejected in the name of progress and civilization.

Even if Said refrained from analyzing biblical scholarship as it developed in nineteenth century Germany, he did examine the French biblical scholar Ernest Renan, whose writings represent a rather clear case of how scholarly writings was affiliated with European imperialism. The following writings of Renan give further witness to how a non-ethnic universalist understanding of Christian origins could go hand in hand with an imperialist ideology:

> Established first through violence but subsequently preserved through [common] interest, this great agglomeration of cities and provinces, wholly different from each other, dealt the gravest of blows to the idea of race. Christianity, with its universal and absolute character, worked still more effectively in the same direction; it formed an intimate alliance with the Roman Empire and, through the impact of these two incomparable unificatory agents, the ethnographic argument was debarred from the government of human affairs for centuries.[12]

Renan's triumphant exposition of Rome's empire and Christianity represents what I have called a colonial heritage in biblical scholarship (Leander 2013). Renan's imperial universalism does not come without a peculiar sense of blindness and irony. Although Renan here positions himself (as well as the Roman Empire) against "the idea of race," we ought not to forget the orientalism of Renan and its concomitant view of the Semites as a stagnant and childish race. The same tendency is present in Baur's work (cf. Kelley 2002; Zetterholm 2009) and is connected to a European colonial self-understanding. With this interpretation, unity under a Roman emperor is not much different from unity in Christ. In both cases, ethnicity is supposedly irrelevant.

[11] Baur's rhetoric of universal and particular can also be understood in his local context as representing a dream of a unified Germany, cf. Gerdmar (2013, 207).

[12] Ernest Renan, a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne, March 11, 1882, quoted in Bhabha (1990b, 13–14).

If Baur defended a de-ethnicized understanding of Paul, what about current scholars? The dominant view in contemporary scholarship is perhaps most prominently represented by James Dunn, who more explicitly than others have addressed the issue of ethnicity. One of the major weaknesses in many reconstructions of Christian origins, Dunn (1983a, 5) argues, is "the failure to grasp the full racial and nationalistic dimensions of the early disputes within Christianity." In his writings on Paul and Christian origins, Dunn often refers to Paul's criticism of Jewish nationalistic presuppositions and ethnic restrictions. Discussing the Antioch incident as reported in Gal 2, Dunn (2006, 177) says: "Paul thus in effect accused Peter of thinking in too narrowly nationalistic terms." Even if Dunn is careful to point out that the parting of the ways was a gradual process, he still upholds Paul as playing a crucial role in the development of Christianity as a universal religion over against ethnic Judaism, stating that "for the Judaism which focused its identity most fully in the Torah, and which found itself unable to separate ethnic identity from religious identity, Paul and the Gentile mission involved an irreparable breach" (Dunn 2006, 301).

It is interesting to notice that Dunn, in his *The Partings of the Ways* (2006, 1–3), begins by discussing Baur's work on Paul in a critical manner. Despite his critique of Baur, however, Dunn's position seems to be curiously similar. Even if Dunn would probably disagree (cf. 2006, xxvii n. 65), it is possible to hear echoes from Baur in the way Dunn construes a dichotomy between Jewish particularism and Christian universalism. As noted by the Jewish rabbi Jacob Neusner (1995, 3–4), Dunn "appeals to the particularity and ethnicity of Judaism, as against the meta-ethnic, universalizing power of Christianity." For Neusner, Dunn's version of Christian universalism is highly problematic. Without the doctrine of an ethnic Israel, he states, Dunn's Christianity could not accomplish its purpose.

This is not to neglect that there are important differences between Baur and Dunn. But the point here is that Baur and Dunn share a similar understanding of Paul and Christian origins in terms of ethnicity. Both regard Judaism as a particular ethnic identity and Paul as breaking the barriers of that identity in favor of an identity in Christ where ethnicity makes no difference (cf. Zetterholm 2009, 117–18). Hence the designation of this category: "Judaism as ethnic; Paul as non-ethnic."

One interesting rephrased or reversed version of this dominant understanding of Christian origins has been offered by Daniel Boyarin (1994). Boyarin agrees with mainstream interpreters that Paul represents a non-

ethnic religion, but for Boyarin this is a negative. Paul's vision, Boyarin (17) argues, is Platonic and allegorical and upholds "the Universal Subject as a Christian male." Paul's vision of unity in Christ therefore values spirit over matter and sameness over difference; and it especially suppresses Jewishness and femaleness. Boyarin thereby turns the traditional interpretation on its head. Rather than letting a particularist Judaism represent the problem, he has universalism as the problem. Although Boyarin's suggestion is highly stimulating and helps to rethink the issue of Paul and Christian origins, it also problematically upholds a basic distinction between Jewish particularism and Pauline universalism. Even so, his provocative suggestion incites us to address the problems with the dominant non-ethnic understanding of Paul.

Even if the dominant understanding carries a certain emancipative potential in contexts of blatant racism (Buell and Johnson Hodge 2004, 236–37), it nevertheless promotes a universalism that neglects issues of ethnic difference and implies a blindness for the contingent nature of Christian faith. The upholding of a de-ethnicized ideal risks marginalizing voices who speak from minority positions. As the French philosopher Alain Badiou (2003, 98) states in his book on Paul, "although it is true … that there is 'neither Greek nor Jew,' *the fact is* that there are Greeks and Jews." A reinterpretation of the Pauline formula is thus called for.

In what follows I will present three alternative ways in which scholars understand Christian origins. These three suggestions could all be seen as responses to the problems inherent in the dominant non-ethnic understanding of Christian origins.

2. Judaism as Ethnic; Paul as Multi-Ethnic

The second group in this overview is represented by Paula Fredriksen, who has written extensively on the issue of Christian origins. In her article "Judaizing the Nations," Fredriksen (2010) presents a position that differs from the majority view. Whereas she agrees with the standard understanding of Judaism as ethnically distinct, her position implies disagreement with the non-ethnic understanding of the unity in Christ. Her position also implies disagreement with Boyarin's suggestion that Paul suppresses ethnic difference.

Fredriksen's (250) main point is to question the common view that Paul was preaching a law-free Gospel. When making this point, however, Fredriksen also makes some interesting arguments about ethnicity. In Paul's apocalyptic position, she thinks, non-Jews ought to act *as if* they

were Jews in refusing public sacrifices, but they were not supposed to convert. Even if the nations should turn to the God of Israel, she argues, ethnically they were to remain non-Jews. Jews and non-Jews in Christ share the same Father, she argues, but remains distinct according to the flesh (*kata sarka*, 244).

In this argument, Fredriksen presumes Jewishness to be a distinct ethnicity (249). If a non-Jew would become a Jew, she seems to argue, it would be tantamount to changing one's ethnicity (239). Paul, she also argues, upholds an apocalyptic vision of a multi-ethnic unity in Christ. Hence, she represents a category that I have described as "Judaism as ethnic; Paul as multi-ethnic."

Fredriksen has helped to reconceptualize Christian origins by pointing out how ethnic difference plays a significant role for Paul's vision of the unity in Christ. But her position problematically presumes Judaism to be a fixed ethnicity that cannot coexist with other ethnicities in the same subject.

3. Judaism as Ethnic; Paul as Ethnically Fluid

A third way of conceptualizing Christian origins in terms of ethnicity has been presented by the already mentioned article by Buell and Johnson Hodge (2004), but also by other works that Buell and Johnson Hodge have authored separately (Buell 2001, 2005; Johnson Hodge 2007).

With reference to Boyarin's thesis, Buell and Johnson Hodge (2004) argue that the Pauline vision of unity in Christ, famously expressed in Gal 3:28, does not erase ethnic difference. Rather, they (247) argue, it "is itself a form of ethnic reasoning." The term "ethnic reasoning" has been coined by Buell (2001, 451) to refer to the set of rhetorical strategies that construe collective identities in terms of peoplehood. Being in Christ is not ethnically neutral, Buell and Johnson Hodge (2004, 246–47) argue, but it is rather to be seen as a complex and malleable ethnicity, both Judean and non-Judean.

Compared to Fredriksen, Buell and Johnson Hodge address the issue of ethnicity more directly and put more emphasis on the complex nature of the "in Christ" identity. On the one hand, they argue (similarly to Fredriksen) that Paul does not ask non-Judeans to become Judeans or to cease to be Greeks. But on the other hand, and unlike Fredriksen, they see this as a kind of Judean identity. Via baptism, non-Jewish peoples are included in God's promises to Israel, get Abraham as forefather and join a community

of culture and descent. The "in Christ" identity, they argue, is located under a Judean umbrella that has ethnic significance.

I take this as indicating that for Buell and Johnson Hodge, the Pauline vision of unity in Christ is a fluid kind of Jewish ethnicity that in itself can be combined with other ethnic identities. Although baptism involves a change in terms of ethnicity, it does not involve a rejection of a previous ethnic identity.

The strength of the proposal by Buell and Johnson Hodge is that ethnicity becomes a key factor when understanding Christian origins. With their words, "there is no ethnically neutral 'Christianity' implied in Gal 3:28" (2004, 250). Ethnicity cannot be swept under the carpet with reference to a universal non-ethnic vision of unity. But the proposal also involves a problem in that it refrains from addressing the issue of Jewishness outside the in-Christ identity. It thereby risks reifying the understanding of Jewishness as a fixed ethnic identity. Hence, I categorize their proposal as "Judaism as ethnic; Paul as ethnically fluid."

In what follows, I will therefore try to conceptualize Judaism *and* Paul's vision as representing inclusive ethnic categories, i.e., as categories that can be combined with other ethnic categories, establishing in effect various hybrid or fluid self-understandings.

4. Judaism and Paul as Ethnically Hybrid

A fourth way to conceptualize Christian origins regards Judaism as well as Paul's vision of unity in Christ (Gal 3:28) as ethnically hybrid subjectivities. I will begin by clarifying how my understanding of Paul's position in terms of ethnicity is close to, but not identical with, the understanding of Buell and Johnson Hodge.

My understanding of Paul's position is indebted to two essays by Szekar Wan (2000a, 2000b) where he discusses Paul's ethnic reconstruction. With reference to the weight Paul (2 Cor 11:22; Phil 3:5–6; Rom 9:1–5; 11:1) places on his own ethnic identity, Wan (2000b, 122–29) challenges Boyarin's spiritualized reading of Paul and claims *contra* Boyarin that the Pauline vision "does not wish to erase ethnic differences" (126).

Wan thus reads Gal 3:28 as representing a universalism that is based on ethnic difference and that is open for hybridizations. One indication of the accuracy of his suggestion can be found in Paul's way of addressing his recipients as he writes to the churches in Galatia. "You foolish Galatians," Paul exclaims (3:1) and indicates thereby that the Galatian ethnicity does not prevent one from at the same time being a follower of Christ with its

concomitant ethnic implications of receiving Abraham as forefather and joining a community of culture and descent.[13]

The "in Christ" formula, Wan further argues, strives to erase power differential. The differences that the unity in Christ encompasses, Wan (126–27) thinks, form a hybrid universalism that challenges notions of cultural supremacy and is based on cultural and ethnic particularities. This suggestion has been criticized by Buell and Johnson Hodge. With reference to the metaphor of the olive tree (Rom 11:17–24), they argue that Paul gives privilege to the Judeans over against the Greeks. They do not consider, however, that Paul's use of this metaphor is a way to address a problem of non-Judeans boasting over Judeans (Rom 11:18) and hence as aiming to establish more of an equal relation.

But although I tend to agree with Wan's interpretation of Paul's position, there are also elements in his argument that I find problematic. One problem concerns Wan's (126) understanding of hybridity as established by the blending of "two distinct varieties," of Jewish and Hellenistic traits. Whereas Wan presumes Jew and Greek to be stable ethnic categories, I would rather argue that they are in themselves unstable categories that are caught up in processes of hybridization. It is hardly possible, for instance, to imagine Jewishness during the first century without the Greek (Hengel 1981, 311–12; Engberg-Pedersen 2001).

Further, Wan also seems to operate with a standard view of Judaism as a fixed ethnicity. There were traditional Jewish ethnic boundaries, Wan (2000a, 203, cf. 2000b, 123) says, and then there were Paul's expanded boundaries based on a faith-centered reading of the Abraham covenant that represents a new hybrid *ethnos*. Somewhat similarly to Buell and Johnson Hodge, Wan thus establishes a division between Judaism and Paul that needs to be challenged. As an alternative, I would suggest that the Jewish Diaspora subjectivity as well as the Pauline vision were both based on a combination of faith and ethnic reasoning, and they were both involved in hybridization. At this point, therefore, I will turn to the Jewish Diaspora in itself and argue that the designation *Ioudaios* functions as an ingredient in various hybrid self-understandings. Since this last point questions a standard view of Jewishness, it needs to be elaborated more carefully.

[13] I here adhere to the view that the recipients were churches in the northern part of the Roman province, among the ethnic Galatians, see Bruce (2004).

Ioudaios and Ethnic Hybridity

A significant contribution to conceptualize *Ioudaios* in Mediterranean antiquity as a more open ethnic category has been offered by Cynthia Baker (2009). As Baker correctly notices, despite the fact that ancient sources attest to various amalgamated Jewish ethnicities, the notion of ethnic multiplicity among Jews remains foreign and virtually unexplored among scholars. Considering the composite ethnic identities among contemporary Jews (Russian, North African, and Swedish), this might come as a surprise.

In her essay, Baker examines how ancient sources depict Jews as a multi-ethnic or multiracial people. By analysing texts by Philo of Alexandria as well as Luke's Pentecost account (Acts 2:1–11), Baker (81) argues that Jews in antiquity "are imagined to embody multiple (often dual) lineages of birth, land, history, and culture." Baker (98–99) thus questions the common assertion that Jews were a fixed and exclusive ethnicity and asks instead what our historiography about Christian origins might look like if Jewishness were to be seen as a multiethnic phenomenon.

A more ambiguous companion for making this argument is Shaye Cohen's study *The Beginning of Jewishness* (1999). Unlike the approach applied here, Cohen (136, cf. 109) has a more closed understanding of ethnicity and regards it as "closed, immutable, an ascribed characteristic based on birth." With this understanding of ethnicity, Cohen (129–30) finds a sharp divide in the use of *Ioudaios* during the first century B.C.E., at the time of the Hasmonean period. From this time, Cohen (135) argues, it was possible to be "a Macedonian and a Jew, a Syrian and a Jew, a Cappadocian and a Jew. If one worshiped the God of the Judeans and/or followed the ancestral laws of the Judeans, one became a Jew." If ethnicity is understood as a more fluid category, this is not so much a divide as an expression of how Jewishness has been construed differently in various situations.[14] Despite a dissimilar understanding of ethnicity, then, I find Cohen's argument helpful for the task.

With reference to Second Maccabees, Cohen (134) regards the use of *Ioudaios* as an open category as a response to the Greek expansion and the concurrent widening of the term Greek (*Hellēn*). Just as non-Greeks could become Greeks by adopting Greek customs, Cohen argues, non-Jews *could* become Jews by adopting the Jewish way of life. From the perspec-

[14] For a similar critique of Cohen, see Horrell (2012) and Buell (2000, 168).

tive applied in this paper, however, this is not a shift away from an ethnic identity. It rather shows how Jewishness becomes transformed via the use of ethnic, religious and cultural negotiations. *Ioudaios* continues to be an ethnic as well as a religious and cultural designation.

In what follows, I will discuss a few ancient sources that further extend the argument about *Ioudaios* as an open ethnic category. This, in turn, will help us re-narrate the ethnic aspect of Christian origin and Paul.

I would like to begin by mentioning a passage from Dio Cassius' *Roman History* (37.16.5–17.1) that gives witness to how the term *Ioudaios* could be understood from the outside as a hybrid or fluid category. The citizens of Judea, Dio states, "have been named Jews (*Ioudaioi*). I do not know how this title came to be given them but it applies also to others, although of a different race (*alloethneis*), who zealously adhere to their customs." According to Dio, *Ioudaioi* does not only designate Jewish people who live in Judea, it also refers to people with other ethnic identities who follow the Jewish way of life. Anyone who is devoted to Jewish practices, Dio says, is called a Jew. *Ioudaioi* thus designates an ethnically fluid category.

But how was this seen from the inside of the Jewish group? This is a large debate (Goodman 1992) and I will here limit myself to two passages in Exodus that are important for Judean or Jewish self-understanding. My point by bringing up these passages is not dependent on their historical accuracy. Rather, I read these texts as reflections of how Jews/Judeans imagined themselves as a group. These two passages indicate that the Jewish/Judean people at its very formation were ethnically mixed.

First, the beginning of the Book of Exodus tells about a new Egyptian king who talked to the midwives Shiphrah and Puah and instructed them to kill all newborn boys (Exod 1:15–16). As argued by Richard Clifford (1993, 46), the expression "midwives of the Hebrews" probably means they worked for the Hebrews. From the context, Clifford argues, the midwives are to be taken as Egyptian rather than Hebrew women. The Exodus narrative thus presents these women, who were ethnically Egyptian, as models of what it means to be a true Israelite.

The second passage is from Exodus 12 about the celebration of the first Passover. When the unleavened bread had been eaten and the congregation of Israel finally succeeded in leaving Egypt, the narrator describes the group of people that was breaking up. In addition to the "six hundred thousand" the Exodus narrative also refers to a "mixed multitude" that went with them (Exod 12:38).

The story of Exodus thus describes the ethnically mixed origin of the Jewish people. At the release from Egypt, there were people of various ethnicities who chose to live as Israelites and to take part of the journey into the desert. From its very inception, Exodus indicates, *Ioudaios* is an ethnically unstable and diverse category.

This understanding of Jewishness also seems to be presupposed in Acts, especially in the Pentecost account and in the episode about the Ethiopian eunuch. As for the latter, commentaries tend to regard the identity of the Ethiopian as a problem. Is he, or is he not, a Jew?[15] Why, one might then ask, is this conceived of as a problem? It is generally agreed that the mission to non-Jews in the narrative of Acts begins in chapter 10 with the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman soldier who is definitely presented as a non-Jew. It is important for the story of Acts that Peter gets to play the role as the legitimate founder of the mission to the nations. The story-line in Acts therefore clearly makes him a Jew. Also, Luke describes him as having been worshipping in Jerusalem (8:27). Further yet, he is depicted as owning a scroll with the book of Isaiah, from which he is reading as he travels. To own such a scroll would be highly unusual for a non-Jew.[16]

If Jewishness is seen as being devoted to Jewish practices, this Ethiopian is certainly a Jew. Such a reading fits well with the plot in Luke-Acts, especially in relation to the beginning of Acts, where the risen Jesus says "you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth." This saying is then illustrated (apart from the Pentecost account) by the episode about an Ethiopian Jew who becomes a witness to the most remote part of the known world. The Ethiopian Jew thus illustrates the existence of hybrid Jewish identities. It is precisely this notion of Jewishness that I here wish to conceptualize.

Let us now turn to the Pentecost account, where Luke describes Jews as belonging to an impressive variety of nations. In this episode, the Christ-followers are portrayed as being filled with the Holy Spirit at great turmoil and as beginning to speak in other languages (2:1–4). Luke then describes a group of people who were witnessing this extraordinary event. They were "pious Jews from every nation (*ethnos*) under heaven" (2:5). These Jews, Luke continues, became utterly perplexed as they were hear-

[15] Haenchen (1971, 314), Longenecker (2007, 843–45).
[16] Longenecker (2007, 845).

ing the speech in the respective language to which they were born (the verb *gennaō*, 2:6–8). The Jews that were gathered in Jerusalem, Luke thus makes clear, belonged to various nations (*ethnē*), where they were evidently brought up with various mother tongues.

Luke's account makes evident the context of empire and its relevance for the task at hand. The list of nations is similar and yet different from the lists used by imperial Rome in order to manifest universal superiority and control. Luke thus depicts a universalism of a different kind than Rome's. There are at least two important ways in which Luke account diverges from the Roman accounts. First, Luke's list of nations is centered around Jerusalem rather than Rome and begins in the east and moves gradually towards the west: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya about Cyrene, visitors from Rome, Cretans and Arabs (2:9–11). Second, Roman authors such as Pliny classified people in a stereotypical way based on where they were living.[17] Pliny thus depicts whole non-Roman populations as being subdued and submissive to Rome. Luke, on the other hand, depicts minority groups with hybrid ethnic identities that were living in various parts of the empire. Although they were Parthians, Medes, etc., they were also Jews and thus had more of an equal relation to the Jews living in Jerusalem. It is here important to notice that Luke mentions Judea as part of his list. During the heydays of Rome's hegemony, Luke describes how a small portion of those defeated by Rome have traveled to Jerusalem to worship. With a different center, a different God, and hybrid minority ethnicities, Luke's list of nation represents a universalism from below.

Commentaries on Acts are not in agreement over how to interpret this manifold of ethnicities. As Charles Kingsley Barrett (1994, 121) states in his ICC commentary, "The list of nations, including both countries and races, presents several problems and has never been satisfactorily explained." Similarly, Bruce Metzger (1994, 251) finds "most amazing … that these Jews were persons from every nation under heaven … [S]ince Jews were already an *ethnos*, to say that these were from another *ethnos* is tantamount to a contradiction of terms."

Both Barrett and Metzger seem troubled by Luke's presentation of the ethnically diverse Jews. Usually, Barrett states (118), *Ioudaios* "has a

[17] Pliny, *Nat. Hist.* IV.

racial meaning" and refers to 2:11 that has the phrase "Jews and proselytes." But is it necessary to take *Ioudaios* as a racial designation? After all, the mention of proselytes indicates that anyone, regardless of race or ethnicity, could become a Jew by choice, by following Jewish customs and by worshipping the God of Israel. Josephus writes that "kinship is created not only through birth (*genos*) but also through the choice of the manner of life" (*Ag. Ap.* 2.210). The proselyte was thus a particular *sort* of Jew (Goodman 1992, 71). The phrase "Jews and proselytes" can thus be taken as representing the group *Ioudaios* as a whole. In the eyes of Dio Cassius, there was no difference between a Jew and a proselyte. They were both Jews. It is far from clear, then, that *Ioudaios* has a racial meaning, as Barrett assumes.

How come, Barrett further asks, could Jews from birth use so many languages? Here he refers to Wilfred Knox (1948) who seems even more bewildered than Barrett. It is probably Luke, Knox (83) says, who *inserted* the term Jews in 2:5. Knox, it seems, cannot quite accept the text as it stands. Why all these native languages, he asks. Latin, Greek and Aramaic would have made the job, he argues. But for Luke, the ethnic variety among these Jews seems to be of crucial significance.

Conclusion

I have explored an understanding of *Ioudaios* as a permeable ethnic category that can function in various hybrid self-understandings. As indicated by ancient sources, *Ioudaios* was not necessarily a fixed ethnoracial designation but could be combined with other ethnicities, thus bearing a hybrid character.

When this understanding of Jewishness is placed side by side with Paul's vision of unity in Christ, a new way of conceptualizing Christian origins is offered that I here have labeled "Judaism and Paul as hybrid." The hybrid nature of the Pauline vision of *Ioudaois* and *Hellēn* as one in Christ was not foreign to the Jewish context in which it emerged. Jewish Diasporic Torah-based faith as well as Paul's Christ-centered faith use ethnic reasoning in their forming of group identities, thereby in different ways transcending ethnic borders. This proposal continues on the trajectory that questions the liberal tradition of construing Pauline universalism over against Jewish particularism.

The suggestion offered here is associated with scholarship that has begun to appreciate the ethnic difference in Paul's vision, as well as the Jewish character of the Pauline communities. Considering that Jews until

quite recently have been a significant other for Western cultures, this development is significant since it offers resources to counter ethnic prejudice and racism. It remains to be seen if this emerging appreciation of ethnic difference also can be extended to include other others as well.

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