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**Covenant, Creation and Transformation in Paul**

Having responded earlier in some measure to the questions put to us, I have decided to focus on the covenant issues especially those noted in relation to 2 Corinthians 3. This was not primarily a matter of convenience or even of time, though these are very relevant, but basically because I came to see that almost all of the matters we were requested to discuss were touched on in the discussion of covenant in this passage.

The problem in discussing Paul's view of covenants is that there are so few explicit mentions of these in his letters, and all of these are not general or absolute statements, but entirely contextual, so that what they say or mean is determined not by the words Paul uses in them but by the context in which these are situated by Paul. These contextual statements are also sometimes made more difficult to interpret by Paul's citation of scripture. Because whenever and wherever Paul does cite scripture or use illustrations, this is where commentators often take the opportunity to fill in a meaning that they think ought to have been there already. Into the space for illustration or citation, they fill in the theology they would like to have been there but often is not. This is often done by putting together obscure and oblique references from differing letters in order to make a cumulative argument. But even 40 instances of hearsay evidence are not as good as one clear witness. Thus putting together very brief references involving OT citations in Corinthians with an allegorical reference from Galatians does not produce a convincing and coherent theology of covenant in Paul, although it is on these passages in particular that the latter is primarily based.

First of all, a brief glance at Galatians by way of clarifying what may or may not be an appropriate reading of covenant in the light of some recent discussion. I am

particularly indebted to Michael Bachmann's work on this<sup>1</sup>, as well as the excellent article by Robert Brawley in which he interacts with Michael Bachmann i.e. "Contextuality, Intertextuality, and the Hendiadic Relationship of Promise and Law in Galatians."<sup>2</sup>

I support Brawley's critique of J Louis Martyn's claim that there is a sharp antithesis between the two covenants in Paul<sup>3</sup>, and also Brawley's proposal that Paul denies the antithesis and attributes the division of the two covenants to his interlocutors in Galatia. I likewise follow Michael Bachmann's denial that the allegory of the two women in Galatians is determined by ethnicity. The problem of law is not ethnocentricity. I further agree with Brawley on diatribe style in Gal.3:19-21 in which the false premise of an imaginary interlocutor is rejected. The false thesis proposed is that the law is against the promises, but the solution of Paul is to synthesize law and promise into one holistic hendiadic act of God.<sup>4</sup> Thus law and promise are not antithetic but ultimately complement one another in the ongoing story of how the monotheistic God blesses all the nations. It is interesting that H J Schoeps thought that Paul had misunderstood the law because he tore law and covenant apart, but EP Sanders rightly cautions that to separate law from covenant is to misunderstand it. As Bachmann has argued, the relationship between promise and law can be described from several different perspectives, and the function of the law changes from its role as παιδαγωγός or disciplinarian in that it eventuates in Christ, having served its role in the divine purpose.

Only with the greatest difficulty and extreme ingenuity can the παιδαγωγός be viewed as a negative image, as HD Betz does. Paul's image of the law as παιδαγωγός is certainly not pejorative, otherwise the use of this image in a manner different from its normal use is inexplicable and self-defeating in terms of clear communication.<sup>5</sup>

Brawley is also convincing in his demonstration that in the citation of Isaiah 54:1 by Paul, the promise makes two Jerusalems into one, rather than setting up two parallel

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<sup>1</sup> *Antijudaismus im Galaterbrief? Exegetische Studien zu einem polemischen Schreiben und der Theologie der Apostels Paulus*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck/Ruprecht 1999, 127-158. ET *Antijudaism in Galatians?* Robert Brawley, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 93.Bd pp.99-119.

<sup>3</sup> JL Martyn, *Galatians: A new Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 33A, New York 1997, 337-70., Brawley, "Contextuality", pp. 99-104.

<sup>4</sup> Brawley, "Contextuality", p.108.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Brawley, "Contextuality", pp.106-07.

but differing and enduring entities. Jerusalem assumes two identities in Isaiah, a Jerusalem in captivity and a Jerusalem of hope in a promise, but the children of Jerusalem in captivity are also the ones who become the children of a free Jerusalem. Paul does not align his interlocutors with Hagar and his Christian readers with Sarah, But rather his Christian readers may occupy either position. I fully agree that the antithesis in Galatians in the Jerusalem imagery is not between gentile Christians and Jews but between slavery and freedom, options that pertain to the Galatian gentiles. Thus rectification is ἐκ πίστεως and not by law, but it is also not against law inasmuch as Paul synthesises the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants.<sup>6</sup> But in Christ the function of law changes so that the law is fulfilled as the fruit of being led by the Spirit.

### **Commonality or Contrast ? The Comparison between the Glory in the Ministry of Death and Paul's Ministry of the Spirit**

One of the most difficult texts in relation to covenant is 2 Corinthians 3. As E.P. Sanders has noted<sup>7</sup>, Paul's argument is not simply expressed in black and white contrasts between Old and New Testaments but also formulated as 'degrees of whiteness'.( Paul B Duff develops a similar insight in his article on 2 Cor. 3:6-18).<sup>8</sup> He notes that the *qal wahomer* type of analogy is basic to Paul's discussion-an argument from the lesser to the greater, or the light to the heavy- is built on the premise-if X is true, then Y is also true but to a greater extent. This type of argument assumes X and Y's commonality. So important is this commonality between X and Y that an opposition (implied or otherwise) between the protasis and the apodosis would actually subvert the argument. Thus for the argument to succeed, both the protasis and the apodosis must share some commonality, and the protasis itself must be true as the starting point for the whole argument. Thus if Paul compares the glory of the ministry of 'death' with the glory of his own ministry of the Spirit, then he is in fact admitting commonality in divine action, not merely contrasting or condemning this ministry in light of his own. Thus Duff paraphrases 2 Cor. 3:9 as follows: 'If Moses' ministry was glorious since it brought the Torah (i.e. 'the oracles of God', Rom.3:2) to

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<sup>6</sup> Following Brawley,"Contextuality", pp.112-18.

<sup>7</sup> *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, Philadelphia, Fortress 1983, pp.137-41.

<sup>8</sup> "Glory in the Ministry of Death. Gentile Condemnation and Letters of Recommendation", *Novum Testamentum* Vol. 46, 2004, pp.313-37.

humanity in general but more specifically to the Jews (although it also brought condemnation to the gentiles because they did not embrace it), how much more glorious is (Paul's) ministry which now brings reconciliation to the gentiles (without their having to follow the Torah)! As Duff concludes, read in this way, 'the argument of 2 Cor.3:7-11 truly functions as an argument from the lesser to the greater rather than an argument contrasting opposites.'<sup>9</sup>

In a lecture delivered at Villanova University Philadelphia and now a forthcoming article in a subsequent Festschrift,<sup>10</sup> I have sought to demonstrate that comparison is a basic element in Paul's theologizing but it is often frequently misunderstood as a criticism of Judaism. In particular, Paul's listing of his Jewish credentials in Philippians chapter 3 is understood as a clear statement that these cherished Jewish credentials are to be regarded as loss or even as refuse, something to be quickly discarded. But this interpretation misses the element of comparison present in the text. Paul is not making an absolute statement on the value or lack of value of Judaism *per se*. Rather he is evaluating in comparison to knowing Christ (Phil. 3:8). He would count everything as loss from this perspective. It is not just Jewish flesh or boasting that he includes but boasting in anything, gentile or Jewish i.e. all things. The problem is that because Paul uses his cherished Jewish attributes as examples, Philippians 3 is read as a denigration of Judaism. But Paul is saying to his gentile converts-whatever values you hold dear, these are as nothing compared with knowing Christ. So Paul by means of his own example, encourages his gentile converts to adopt a critical stance towards their gentile cultural values and the relation of these to life in Christ. This interpretation also holds for two similar passages i.e. 1 Cor 7:19 and Gal. 6:15 respectively. In both of these Paul claims that circumcision is nothing and this would seem to support the traditional critique of Judaism anticipated from Paul. But what is missed is that Paul does not assert only that circumcision is nothing, but goes on to state exactly the same about uncircumcision. Thus if we take Paul's meaning as indicating that being in an uncircumcised state is of the same negative value as being

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<sup>9</sup> 'Glory in the Ministry of Death', p.326. Duff recognizes the problem in viewing the ministry (diakonia) of Moses as simultaneously accompanied by glory-i.e. the divine presence and as also a ministry of condemnation and death. His solution is that this condemnation and death must refer to the effect of the Mosaic law upon gentiles as a result of their not having kept the Law (as some Jews at Paul's time may have thought, even if not all shared this view), (pp.320-26).

<sup>10</sup> "I Rate All Things as Loss: -Paul's Puzzling Accounting System: Judaism as Loss or The Re-Evaluation of All things in Christ", included in a Festschrift published by the Catholic Biblical Association, winter 09.

in a state of circumcision, we might conclude that Paul is counter-cultural, equally critical of both Jewish and gentile society. But Paul does not mean these statements to be taken as absolutes-as ontological reality. Rather the element of comparison is also present here, and what Paul is actually saying is that ‘compared with being in Christ, these significant and valued entities such as circumcision/uncircumcision are as nothing’. Thus he does not think that to be circumcised or uncircumcised is a matter of indifference. Far from being indifferent to these things, they are all radically reevaluated in comparison with being in Christ. Hence these are not statements of ultimate value, but only comparative evaluations. Thus I might assert that health, wealth, home and family are of no significance compared with being in Christ, but that would not mean that I do not attribute great and lasting value to these in and by themselves.

When we parallel this argument with the similar form of argument Paul uses in Romans 5: 8-10, 15-17 and Rom.11:11-16, we can see how Paul relates the differing periods of salvation history. This is achieved in both instances by a *qal wachomer* form of argument, ‘But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life’. Similarly in Rom 5:15-17 ‘For if many died through one man’s trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ... If, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ’. So also in Rom. 11: 12, ‘For if their trespass means riches for the gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!’ Utilizing the same form of argument in vv.13-15, Paul continues, ‘Now I am speaking to you gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?’ Here again in Romans we find that Paul explains the effects and outcome of the Christ-event in terms of commonality, but with the emphasis from the lesser to the greater. We understand this to refer not to a presumed superiority of

Christianity over Judaism, an anachronism in Paul's day, or even to the nullification of Israel's covenant.<sup>11</sup> The reference is rather to the extension of the promises to the gentiles, as Paul notes in passing in Rom.9:24. In 2 Corinthians 3, whilst the argument is much more intricate, progress can be made if we stress the following: Paul is addressing a gentile community, and therefore any reflections on Jews or Judaism are at the most, purely incidental. Paul only employs the idea of the Corinthians' transformation to argue for the legitimacy of his own ministry<sup>12</sup>. He does not need written letters of commendation because he has the evidence of the Spirit in the formation of the Corinthians' community as evidence of the validity and effectiveness of his ministry (δικονία). (but such a conflation of aspects of the theme in Galatians and Romans is by no means unproblematic, reflecting some of the worst aspects of decontextualizing Paul's letters).

Whilst being generally in agreement with Duff's careful exegesis of this passage, we would not wish to see the comparison so much in terms of the ministries of Moses and of Paul. The comparison is more focused on the glory of the divine presence in the narrative of Exodus chapters 33-34 and that same divine activity and glory in the proclamation of the gospel to gentiles. The glory of God had to be veiled lest the Israelites would be destroyed by that glory, but that same glory is now freely manifested to gentiles through Paul's ministry. The 'how much more' (πολλῶ μᾶλλον) of Paul's comparison should therefore not be read as an absolute statement or generalised as a comparison between the Testaments. The glory of God present in Moses' activity meant death for gentiles, but the same glory of God now present in the extension of the promises to gentiles is so much greater, because it is through the

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<sup>11</sup> As Duff maintains, 'I suggest that what is veiled is not the nullification of Israel's covenant but rather that Moses has prevented Israel (past and present) from recognizing the deity's plan for the justification of all humanity, including the gentiles. In other words, it is the Torah's condemnation of those who do not keep the law that is transitory, not Israel's covenant.' 'Transformed "from Glory to Glory": Paul's Appeal to the Experience of His Readers in 2 Corinthians 3:18', JBL 127, no 4 (2008) pp. 759 -780 (p.776), following his previous article "Glory", pp. 327-28. According to Duff, the Corinthians 'see in themselves (i.e. as in a mirror) "the glory of the Lord" as they are transformed into "the same image", that is, into the image of the risen Christ' 'Transformed', pp.773-74. This emphasis on transformation makes the meaning of 'telos' here (2 Cor 3: 13) as goal rather than termination all the more likely, (As I have argued for in the case of Rom.10:4 ('Christ the End of the Law: Rom.10:4', *Paul's Gospel in an Intercultural Context: Jew and Gentile in the Letter to the Romans*, Bern, Frankfurt, New York:

Peter Lang, 1992, pp.60-67).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Duff, 'Glory', pp. 765-68.

Spirit a way to life (rather than death) for them.<sup>13</sup> We conclude therefore, that in Paul the different forms of divine activity and presence are not contrasted but compared, the glory of the new aeon in Christ being the greater (in extent) to which the lesser, but common, glory of God in the ministry of Moses is related. In the working out of the divine purpose in both, the glory of God i.e. the presence of God, is operative and effective, but in differing ways.

### **The Church Does not Have a Separate Covenant for Gentiles but Shares in the Promises with Israel.**

It has become commonplace to note that the covenant is not a frequently used concept in the Pauline letters. Of course it has to be recognized that the covenant theme as such may occur at points where the term *διαθήκη* is absent.<sup>14</sup> Whether we can make much of this infrequency is a difficult issue. Did Paul really believe in a new covenant replacing or succeeding the old? Did he, as some scholars such as Lloyd Gaston<sup>15</sup> and John Gager maintain, actually believe in two covenants, one for Jews alongside another for gentiles?<sup>16</sup> My view is that it would be better to speak of a renewed rather than of a new covenant. The covenant with Israel is renewed through the action of God in Christ. Thus the covenant with Israel is renewed and the promises to the patriarchs are actualized so that gentiles can now share in the blessings brought through the Christ. The significance of the coming of Christ is formulated by Paul in Rom.15:8 as having primarily the purpose of being a servant to the circumcised in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and then only secondarily that ‘the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy’. The actualization of the promises in Christ means, according to Paul in this passage, that gentiles now have access to the promises. But he does not state that they are within the covenant. Rather they participate in Christ, that is, all of their life is lived ‘in Christ’ and by virtue of this relationship, they share in the blessings he brings. If we combine the statements of

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<sup>13</sup> As Duff states, ‘the Corinthians, like virtually all gentiles, were under the sentence of death according to the Torah (brought by Moses). Paul points out that through his ministry (ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης) they have received the possibility of reconciliation with God and the commutation of that death sentence’ (p. 779).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. ‘The Concept of Covenant in Paul’, *The Concept of the Covenant in the Second Temple Period*, ed, Stanley E Porter and Jacqueline C. R. de Roo, Atlanta, SBL, 2003, pp.269-85.

<sup>15</sup> *Paul and the Torah*, Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1987, esp. pp.15-34.

<sup>16</sup> *Reinventing Paul*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000.

Paul in Galatians and Romans respectively perhaps we can come to an overview of this process of adoption in Paul. It is only by virtue of being in Christ that gentiles are related to Abraham. They are not ‘in Christ’ in the same sense as they are ‘in Abraham’ but Christ is the firstborn of many brothers (Rom.8:29). Gentiles in Christ become his siblings as sons of God (Gal.3:26) and thus ‘joint heirs with Christ’ (Rom.8:17). As Paul claims, ‘And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise’ (Gal.3:29).<sup>17</sup>

The clearest point in Paul’s argument in Romans in this respect is where he states in 11:16, ‘if you, a wild olive shoot were grafted in to share the richness of the olive tree...’. The gentiles only *share* in the blessings of God with Israel. They are not designated as having a covenant of their own, in which case if they could go direct to God apart from the Jews, there would be no need to share with Israel. But gentiles do not have covenant participation without Israel – ‘for Paul there can be no church of gentile Christians alone.’<sup>18</sup> If anything is emphasized throughout Romans 11, it is that Jews and gentiles are intertwined in their destinies, the one without the other cannot find their full salvation-hence the incompleteness of salvation so long as the ‘rest’ of the Jews remains (Rom.11:23). A pointer to Paul’s view of gentile status in relation to the promises is that he never designates Christ-following gentiles as Israel. In the past I have argued that gentile Christ-followers share in the covenant with Jews, but despite this they are not designated as Israel-they remain as a community of gentiles in Christ, a satellite congregation alongside of Israel. I still maintain the latter view, but recognize now that if one claims the gentiles share in Israel’s covenant, the result is that it must also be recognized that as equal members of the covenant, the title ‘Israel’ cannot then be withheld from them, as does Paul. The arguments that gentiles do not become Israel are exegetically very strong despite much concentrated effort to dismiss these. James DG Dunn is consistent in his argument that if the covenant is opened up in Christ for gentiles, then they too become part of Israel, but I do not find

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<sup>17</sup> Cf Caroline Hohnson Hodge, *If Sons Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, pp.103-06. I did not find in this study a sufficient differentiation of the views of Paul on this issue in Galatians and Romans, e.g. in Galatians Christ is the one seed (sperma) whereas in Rom.4:16 all of Abraham’s seed is mentioned, both Jews and gentiles. Also in Rom. 9, as noted above, Paul distinguishes between physical descendants and children (tekva).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, London: SCM, 1980, p.309.

a basis for such an inclusion in Paul.<sup>19</sup> The ending of Galatians chapter 6 clearly speaks of two entities as indicated by the connecting *καί*, not one, ‘Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, and upon the Israel of God’ (v. 16). Thus we have another group indicated in addition to those who follow the pattern of life in Christ affirmed in v.15. It seems that Israel and the church remain two distinct entities. In one sense it is possible to conceive of the *ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ* as one entity distinct from Jews and Greeks as in 1 Cor. 10:32, but this is not typical of Paul’s general pattern. When read in context, Gal.6:15-16 gives no solid basis for designating the church of Jews and gentiles as new Israel, with the resultant potential for the displacement of Israel from the covenant.

Romans 9-11 is also clear on this issue. The key point here is Romans chapter 9 in which Paul draws a distinction between Abraham’s seed and Abraham’s children. Although Israel *kata sarka* is mentioned (in a neutral sense) in 9:3, neither here nor elsewhere in Paul do we find a reference to *Israel kata pneuma*. In my opinion, the dichotomy of two Israels is a later development often anachronistically read back into Paul. The term ‘Israel’ is here limited to those who are descended from Abraham., But the promise is effective only for Abraham’s τέκνα, his children and not simply for all his fleshly σπέρμα, descendants . Continuity with Abraham is not to be maintained or secured at the physical level only. Abraham’s descendants should also share his faith. In light of this, Rom.9:8 could be translated as: ‘For it is not those of fleshly descent alone, but those of fleshly descent and of promise who are Abraham’s seed’<sup>20</sup>. At this stage in his argument *Paul is not offering a general principle that any group of any descent could constitute the covenant people* as the RSV translation might suggest. ‘This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants’. In Paul’s terms, the children of promise is here a subgroup within those of fleshly descent from Abraham, and at this point in chapter 9 he does not yet (prior to 9:24) include any

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<sup>19</sup> Cf Dunn’s comment, ‘A Christianity which does not understand Itself in some proper sense as ‘Israel’ forfeits its claim to the scriptures of Israel’, *The Theology of Paul*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1998, p.508, cf.also pp.509-13. In a similar vein, but arguing unconvincingly in my view on the basis of multiple identities, Johnson Hodge claims, ‘Being in Christ means being a part of Israel’, (p.106) and that ‘being in Christ is an ethnic designation’ (p.132), cf. also pp.117-35.

<sup>20</sup> The distinction between Abraham’s seed and his children seems somewhat unclear by virtue of the fact that Paul is citing scripture but also interpreting this from his own perspective. Thus the meaning of σπέρμα here seems to be understood by Paul as ‘children’.

beyond this group. It is not warranted to simply generalize this sub-group to refer to gentiles who at this stage in Paul's argument are not directly in focus. Paul bases his argument on the fact that the scripture says, ἐν' Ἰσαὰκ κληθήσεταί σοι σπέρμα (9:7), thus recognizing a narrowing in the scope of the promise within the progeny of Abraham to only those whose descent is through Isaac and then Jacob. But this represents a limitation within the scope of the promise, not a transfer to others outside it, and certainly not to gentiles who do not come on to the scene until 9:24. Paul is not here setting out a general principle that faith alone secures entry to the covenant promises, but only arguing the case for selection within the descendants of Abraham.

Of course this is only a section of a longer argument which goes on to speak of the inclusion of gentiles also in 9:24 and, when Paul comes to this, he will argue for an opening up of covenant promises to include the gentiles. The pattern is this: first Paul establishes that not all those of fleshly descent are children of promise and then he argues that the God who had freedom to select from within the historic people of Israel has the freedom to select gentiles also. But nowhere does he claim or assert that God has the freedom not to select any from within Israel – to do so would be to deny his own word of promise to Abraham and through him to the nations. The covenant with Israel is firm because even divine freedom is limited by divine commitment.

Moreover, the solidarity of Israel as a people is not sacrificed despite the wedge Paul appears to drive within his own people at 9:6b. A similar distinction appears at 11:23: 'and even the others, if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in...' But in his concluding verses of chapter 11, the unity of Israel, 'all Israel', reappears. From this terminology, it seems that despite Paul's suggestive usage, Israel cannot be precisely limited only to those descendants of Abraham who share his faith. Such a view might prove enticing and convenient to Christian theologians since it would make feasible a definition of Israel which omits entirely to discuss those descendants who do not share their forefather's faith, and also leaps too easily from believing Israelites to gentile Christ-followers.

It is significant that Ernst Käsemann notes a similar point in relation to Rom. 4.11–12. 'His (Abraham's) example shows that everything depends only on faith. Becoming a proselyte is not a prior condition of this. In fact, then, Judaism is robbed

of both Abraham and circumcision....’ Käsemann, however, in view of this problem he has just noted, goes on to add, ‘This roughness is softened in v. 12. As often, Paul hastens to qualify an exaggerated statement. An on-going relation of the patriarch to Judaism is now acknowledged. In fact the apostle is concerned to be able to call Abraham also the father of the circumcision, since any other course would take the promise away from Israel and contest its salvation history’.<sup>21</sup>

Thus ‘Israel’ in this scenario noted above would not be limited only to those who are Abraham’s descendants but can include Christ-followers of gentile origin with no connection with Abraham except through faith in Christ. This is not the route Paul chose to follow in Romans. He is not content to salvage some remnant from the people of Israel and to sacrifice the rest. In this regard he sticks with the historical particularity of his own people Israel, and cannot be content even though at least some of them have found the new faith in Christ and shared it also with gentiles. A distinction remains in Paul’s thought between Israel, whether or not it is faithful Israel or ‘the rest’, and those gentile Christ-followers who though not being Abraham’s physical descendants become his lineage by virtue of Christ.

Having argued that the church of Jews and gentiles is not, in Paul’s view, Israel, we need to clarify what are the implications of this for our understanding of covenant in Paul. It is very significant that in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-12, Paul states to his gentile community that in their labour and toil for them, he and his co-workers ‘exhorted each one... and encouraged and charged you to lead a life worthy of God, *who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.*’ Here we do not have a reference to gentiles coming into the covenant but only into the kingdom and glory. It would seem that the gentile Christ-communities have access to the kingdom, but not into the covenant. As Paul states in 2 Cor.7:1 in a passage following on from a reference to gentile Christ-followers as a ‘temple of the living God’ (6:14b), ‘Since we have these promises...’. We note he does not say, ‘since we are in the covenant or in Israel.’ The most significant description of gentile association with God is that they are ‘in Christ’ since all the promises of God find their affirmation in Him (2 Cor.1:20). But previously they were ‘alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and the covenants of

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<sup>21</sup> *Commentary on Romans*, London: SCM Press, 1980, p.116.

promise' (Eph.2:12)<sup>22</sup>. It would appear therefore that it is only in and through Christ that gentiles have the opportunity to share in the blessings of God (also enjoyed by Jews in Christ). We can express it this way. Gentiles are blessed when the promises to the patriarchs are confirmed to Israel in the renewed covenant and thus actualized for all. But they do not thereby join the covenant to Israel, else the distinction between Israel and the nations, so basic to Paul's own thinking, would be obliterated.

We prefer to use the terminology 'renewed' covenant rather than 'new' covenant since the latter might suggest a complete replacement of the former covenant or a new covenant specifically for the church.<sup>23</sup> The differing covenants are thus seen as differing expressions of the ongoing faithfulness of God. The covenant remains a specifically Israelite entity, as Paul notes, 'to them belong the covenants' (Rom 9:4). Paul does not take over the categories of covenant theology and apply them to Christians. If we are to speak of Paul's covenantal theology, it must be in terms of Paul affirming Israel's covenant, and of doing so in terms which Israel could recognize.<sup>24</sup> The renewed covenant is thus the 'old' covenant in a new light.<sup>25</sup> What is changed is the expansion of the blessings to gentiles as well as Jews, hence Paul's "how much more" emphases. This is possibly one reason why Paul uses covenant terminology so sparsely in his letters to gentiles. 'In Christ' language is rightly predominant. Gentiles in Christ are related to the covenant only through Christ. They do not become part of the covenant because its identity forming dimension is specifically directed to Israelites, whereas for gentiles their identity is shaped by their location in Christ as gentiles and the pattern of life that appropriately flows from this through the work of the Spirit, (cf. Gal.3:14, 'that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the gentiles'). The fact that Paul is a minister of the renewed covenant (2 Cor 3:6) does not mean that he is anti-covenantal nor that there is a new covenant with the church. Rather the covenant is renewed with Israel through Christ and though gentiles are not within the covenant, they are included in the

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<sup>22</sup> 'Learning to Be a Gentile', *Christology and Scripture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Ed. Andrew T Lincoln and Angus Paddison, London/New York, T&T Clark, 2007, pp. 22-40 (pp.26-8).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Stanley Porter, *Covenant*, p.306. Contra Ernst Käsemann, 'The Righteousness of God in Paul', *New Testament Questions of Today*, London: SCM Press 1969, pp. 168-82 (180).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Porter's comment, 'And in his single most important letter (Romans) the only covenant in view is the covenant(s) with Israel', *Covenant* (p.306).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. WD Davies, 'Paul and the People of Israel', *Jewish and Pauline Studies*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984, pp.123-52 (129).

promises now confirmed and as such share in a Jewish symbolic universe. Hence Paul must relate gentiles in Christ to the God of Israel and he does this through the Scriptures of Israel.<sup>26</sup>

### **Retention of Previous Identities in Christ in a Process of Transformation**

Although the renewed covenant is the old covenant in a new perspective, it has nevertheless implications for the relationship of Jews and gentiles in Christ and thus, as noted above, for their ongoing identities. The covenant is not transformed but confirmed in Christ and it is this that is the basis for the transformation of ‘all things’. A crucial test of our understanding of Paul is whether we view him as seeking to obliterate or simply transform the previous ‘worlds’ of his communities. Does he radically demand the obliteration of all identity distinctions such as gender and ethnic affiliation? If Gal.3:28 is taken to mean that the Jew/gentile, male/female and slave/free distinctions are obliterated, it is hard to understand why married couples should remain married, especially to an unbelieving partner. As I have argued in my book on *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*,<sup>27</sup> Paul does not seek to remove entirely all previous cultural affiliations and status, but decisively to transform Jews as Jews and gentiles as gentiles. Unlike some who stress new creation in a radical way, Paul recognizes that he starts from the given (‘as you were when called’), recognizes it as a starting point in a process of change, and seeks to transform this given.<sup>28</sup> There is a parallel between new covenant and new creation terminology in Paul.<sup>29</sup> Just as the covenant is not annulled or obliterated so too the good creation that God has made is neither destroyed nor rejected. Like the covenant, creation is renewed in Christ. Käsemann rightly notes the link between covenant and creation but posits an opposition between them much in the same way as he does with Abraham and Moses

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. my *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*.pp.57-61 and Kathy Ehrensperger, ‘Paul and the Authority of Scripture: A Feminist Perspective’ in Christopher D. Stanley, Stanley N.Porter eds. *As It is Written: Studying Paul’s Use of Scripture*. Atlanta: SBL 2008, pp. 281-308 (304-08).

<sup>27</sup> London/ New York, T&T Clark, 2006 (hbk) 2008, (pbk).

<sup>28</sup> As Alan Segal claims, “No convert forgets everything previously known. Rather, the convert changes a few key concepts, revaluing everything else accordingly. Old doctrines often remain intact but are completely changed in significance through the imposition of a new structure” (1990.p.75).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. E.Käsemann’s comment, “For the apostle knows no God who can be isolated from his creation”, (Romans, p.270.Cf. also pp..93, 308-11,and 317: also “‘The Righteousness of God’ in Paul”, *New Testament Questions of Today*, London: SCM Press, 1969, 168-82 (178). Cf K Kertelge’s criticism that Käsemann and some of his followers put Israel at the margins of God’s activity by overstressing divine creative action, which, though always present in Paul, is never at the centre of his thought, *Rechtfertigung bei Paulus*, Münster: Aschendorff 1967, p.308; similarly my *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, pp.136-39.

in terms of prototype and antitype.<sup>30</sup> It seems more appropriate in Pauline terms to view the renewal of the covenant as inalienably linked to the renewal of creation. The covenant is thereby not dissolved in the new creation but retains its nature and function within the purpose of God. The blessings of the covenant expand and extend now not only to gentiles in Christ but to the whole of creation (Rom 8:18-25).<sup>31</sup> The problems of the world are neither covenant nor creation but the power of sin which affects everything.<sup>32</sup> The goal of transformation is the overcoming of sin and as such does not imply a denial either of particular identity or socio-cultural reality. It is a world affirming transformation not world denying as such. Again as Wayne Meeks notes, Paul is not counter-cultural despite his radical critiques of the Greco-Roman world in which he lived and worked.<sup>33</sup> One evidence of Paul's inclusive ethic is that the differing expressions of the living out of the life in Christ by Jews and gentiles are recognized as equally valid despite continuing to be different (e.g. Rom 14:1-15.13). This Pauline emphasis is notably retained in Ephesians where the enmity between Jew and gentile is broken down whilst the differing identities of these peoples are retained.<sup>34</sup>

We must not impose on Paul the sectarian mentality of sections of modern Christianity. He does not fear to discuss hopefully the future of those Jews who fail to recognize the Christ he proclaims, nor to debate with them in a shared use of common scriptural traditions the validity of his gospel. His hope is a hope that embraces even those who now reject his proclamation, but he refuses to accept *what is* as the ultimate reality which for him is Christ crucified, the hope of the world. Thus Paul does not

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. 'Paul and Israel', *New Testament Questions of Today*. London: SCM 1969, p.185. Kaesemann claims Paul did not speak of a *renewed* covenant as did the Jewish Christians before him, but of a *new* Covenant . Moses is for him the antitype, not, like Abraham, the prototype of Christ the fulfiller of the promise"(p.185).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Käsemann's comment on 9:24-29, "In place of the earlier restriction, we now have extension", *Romans*, p.273.

<sup>32</sup> The argument in Romans 1-3 is not to prove that Jews and gentiles both sinners but rather that they all, whether Jew or gentile, live in a world dominated by the power of sin. Cf. Kathy Ehrensperger, 'Reading Romans in the Face of the 'Other':Levinas, the Jewish Philosopher, Meets Paul, the Jewish Apostle', David Odell-Scott, ed., *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians*, London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2007, pp.115-154 (133-36).

<sup>33</sup> *Christ Is the Question*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2006 pp.83-100.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. my article on Ephesians, 'Unity and Diversity in the Church: Transformed Identities and the Peace of Christ in Ephesians', *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, vol.25.1, 2008, pp.15-31. Similarly see Stephen Fowl, 'As Ephesians makes clear, however, although becoming a Christian does not require the erasure of one's ethnic or cultural past, it also requires the remembering of that past as a gentile past. It demands an understanding of one's past and present in relation to Israel and the God of Israel', 'Learning To Be a Gentile' p. 39.

hold to a dualistic understanding of the world, but sees Christ as the supreme victor whose death will eventually transform the whole created order. In this present time, he views his communities as proleptically participating through Christ in the coming kingdom in which all things will be completely transformed. Yet these same communities in the present time are only in the process of being transformed (cf. μεταμορφούμεθα, 2 Cor.3:18) , by the word of the cross and through the example of Paul as he in turn imitates Christ as the pattern of life. They are called to be saints and Paul seeks to transform their identity by all possible means so that Christ is formed in them through their living together as a community in Christ.<sup>35</sup>

As Paula Fredriksen argues, ‘...through Christ in the Spirit these gentiles are no longer common.....but holy....., and thus suitable to be brought close to holiness.’<sup>36</sup>

The key issue for gentiles in Christ is their change in status from profane to holy. This is clearly demonstrated by Paul’s use of holiness language in places such as Rom 12.1 ff ‘present your bodies as a living sacrifice which is your appropriate worship’ and 2 Corinthians 7:1 “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God”.

. Without becoming part of the covenant or adhering to Jewish ritual laws but having ‘turned away from idols to the true and living God’ (1 Thess 1.9) these gentiles in Christ are now under God’s sovereignty and thus in the sphere of holiness. To be in this sphere requires the holiness of the entire community and is thus the identity forming agenda of that community.<sup>37</sup>

Holiness for Jews as distinct from gentiles in Christ has a different starting point.

They still have the Law as an identity determining factor and they retain their Jewish identity. But one aspect is different: they are now required to recognize gentiles in Christ as equally holy despite their holiness not being determined by the Law.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. chapter 10, “Paul’s Theology of Transformation “in *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, (pp.158-73).

<sup>36</sup> P.Fredriksen, ‘Paul, Purity and *Ekklesia* the Gentiles’, J.Pastor, M.Mor eds., *The Beginnings of Christianity: A Collection of Articles*.Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi Press 2005, 205-217, 213

<sup>37</sup> Cf. K.Ehrensperger, ‘...nothing is profane’ and ‘everything is indeed pure’: Hospitality and Paul’s Discussion of *koinos* and *katharos* in Romans 14.14 and 14.20’, short paper presented at the SNTS General Meeting, Vienna 2009

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