

“NO LONGER JEW OR GREEK”
PAUL’S CORPORATE CHRISTOLOGY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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In his careful study of the Apostolic Decree (Acts 15:20, 29), David Catchpole began by setting out briefly the “theological presuppositions of the Decree”.¹ According to Catchpole, “the theology underlying the Decree is one which sees the Christian gospel as doing nothing about the Jew/Gentile distinction. That is, Jews remain Jews, and Gentiles remain Gentiles.” This theology “would have been repugnant to Paul... For Paul, the Christian gospel does a very great deal to the Jew/Gentile distinction. Such a categorization... belongs to the first and obsolete era of human existence. In the second era now present, Christians are controlled by corporate participation ‘in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. iii. 28)...”² Richard Bauckham has recently suggested that “Catchpole’s claim” that the theology expressed in the Decree does nothing about the Jew/Gentile division “is mistaken”: “The theology underlying the decree holds (as Paul does) that uncircumcised Gentiles belong fully to the eschatological people of God. The requirements of the decree are not understood as those which Jews in general held to apply to Gentiles, but as those which the Law of Moses prescribed for Gentile members of the eschatological people of God.”³

However, leaving aside the questions concerning the theology of the Apostolic Decree and of Paul’s attitude to it, questions which I shall not take up in this essay, it seems to me that Bauckham has perhaps failed to do justice to the difference between the position Catchpole presents as Paul’s and that which Bauckham sees as shared by Paul and the Apostolic Decree. For Bauckham, it seems, Paul’s view (like that of the Decree) is that both Jews and Gentiles may equally be saved through Christ and may both thus be members of God’s eschatological people, but in terms of their identity and conduct, Jews remain Jews and Gentiles remain Gentiles: Gentiles must obey those precepts “which the Law of Moses

¹ D.R. Catchpole, “Paul, James and the Apostolic Decree”, *NTS* 23 (1977) 428-44; here p. 429.

² Catchpole, “Paul, James and the Apostolic Decree”, 430.

³ R.J. Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church”, in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting* (ed. R.J. Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1995) 415-80; here p. 470 n.164.

prescribed *for Gentile members* of the eschatological people of God”. Catchpole, on the other hand, suggests that for Paul, what God has done in Christ is to create a people among whom the distinction between Jew and Gentile has been rendered obsolete, a distinction belonging to a former era and now transcended by a new identity in Christ. While there is no disagreement about the fact that Paul’s gospel announces a route by which Gentiles (as Gentiles) can be welcomed into the eschatological people of God, there is an important difference in terms of the extent to which incorporation into Christ is seen as redefining the identity and practice of both Jews and Gentiles. On this matter, contemporary scholarship is divided, and it is a point which has a significant impact on the way we understand Paul’s attitude to Christian identity, to the Law, to ethics, and so on, not to mention his attitude to James, Jerusalem, and the Apostolic Decree.

On the one hand, then, there are authors who in recent work maintain — albeit in varied ways — that Paul has established groups comprising both Jews and Gentiles who now share a distinct new identity and for whom obedience to the Jewish Law is not fully and literally required. Philip Esler, for example, argues that “Paul unambiguously asserts that the Christ-followers constituted a third group set over against the Judaic and gentile worlds”. Paul therefore discards the Law and regards it as irrelevant to the Christian congregations: it has “passed its use-by date”, “had its day”, and is now replaced by the Spirit.⁴ Daniel Boyarin emphasises Paul’s desire to create a unified humanity which is one in Christ. Thus he regards Paul as having “given up his specific Jewish identity in order to merge his essence into the essence of the gentile Christians and create the new spiritual People of God”.⁵ John Barclay, while rejecting Boyarin’s notion that Jewish and Gentile identities are wholly erased or annulled by Paul, preferring to speak of a relativising of former identities, sees Paul as an “anomalous” Diaspora Jew, associating intimately with Gentiles and creating distinct

⁴ P.F. Esler, *Galatians* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) 89, 202-3; cf. *idem*, “Group Boundaries and Intergroup Conflict in Galatians: A New Reading of Galatians 5:13–6:10” in *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. M.G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 215-40; see p. 233.

⁵ D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA; London: University of California Press, 1994) 155.

communities of Jews and Gentiles in which observance of the Law was relativised and in some respects abandoned altogether.⁶

On the other hand there are those who argue that, for all his insistence that *salvation* is through Christ alone, Paul clearly continues to view Jewish and Gentile believers as people with distinct identities and distinct obligations. Peter Tomson, for example, argues that Paul's view was that "Jews and gentiles should each stick to their respective ways of life" wherein "gentiles kept their minimum set of 'commandments of God' while Jewish Christians kept 'the whole law'".⁷ Paul himself thus possessed a "double membership: of the group of those 'respecting the law', the Jews, and of the body of Christ".⁸ Markus Bockmuehl presents a similar argument: "Paul himself in 1 Corinthians 7:17ff makes clear that his 'rule for all the churches' is for Jews to keep the Torah (indeed Gal. 5:3, too, may mean they are obliged to do so) and for Gentiles to keep what pertains to them."⁹ Bockmuehl quotes Michael Wyschogrod with approval: "The distinction that needs to be made, therefore, is not between the law before Christ and after Christ, but the law for Jews and for Gentiles."¹⁰ Karin Finsterbusch has likewise recently argued, "daß in Paulus' Augen die Thora universaler Maßstab für gerechtes Handeln ist, daß sie aber für Juden und Heiden nicht in gleichem Umfang gültig ist... Die Rechtfertigung aus Glauben setzt die ethische Funktion der Thora also nicht außer Kraft."¹¹

⁶ J.M.G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora From Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 381-95; *idem*, "'Do We Undermine the Law?' A Study of Romans 14.1–15.6", in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. J.D.G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 287-308.

⁷ P.J. Tomson, "Paul's Jewish Background in View of His Law Teaching in 1 Corinthians 7", in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. Dunn), 251-70; here pp. 267, 269.

⁸ P.J. Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law* (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 281.

⁹ M.N.A. Bockmuehl, "The Noachide Commandments and New Testament Ethics: With Special Reference to Acts 15 and Pauline Halakah", *RB* 102 (1995) 72-101; here p. 98.

¹⁰ Bockmuehl, "The Noachide Commandments", 99.

¹¹ K. Finsterbusch, *Die Thora als Lebensweisung für Heidenchristen* (SUNT 20; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 15, 83, *et passim*.

The debate is not so much about whether Paul sees Christ as the defining centre of the believer's identity — that much is clear — but rather about the significance and the effect of this (re)definition. Is it essentially a soteriological affirmation or does it significantly affect social practice and interaction? In this essay I aim to approach this debate through an examination, informed by the social sciences, of Paul's corporate Christology and of the way in which this Christology constructs a community which is "one in Christ". I shall assess from Paul's own statements what concrete implications this has for the identity and practice of both Jewish and Gentile members of the Christian community.

PAUL'S CORPORATE CHRISTOLOGY AND CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Paul's very frequent use of the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ (and near equivalents, such as $\text{ἐν Χριστῷ} \& \text{ἐν Χριστῷ}$) has long been noted.¹² Albert Schweitzer famously saw this "being-in-Christ" as the key to Paul's theology, understanding it as a form of mysticism — Christ mysticism — in which the elect are united in one corporeity with Christ, having died and risen with him.¹³ Schweitzer's basic emphasis, though differently nuanced and expressed, remains important to more recent attempts to capture the heart of Pauline thought, such as E.P. Sanders' "participationist eschatology" or Morna Hooker's "interchange".¹⁴ Nevertheless, James Dunn considers that the theme of participation "in Christ" has been somewhat neglected in recent studies of Paul, compared with "the amazingly vigorous contemporary debate on justification by faith".¹⁵

It has proved difficult to express exactly what kind of "reality" Paul has in mind with the idea of Christians being "in Christ", together comprising the "body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:27). Adolf Deissmann famously found it nonsensical to speak of being "in" another person, and concluded that "Paul must have thought of Christ as a kind of an impersonal

¹² G.A. Deissmann, *Paul: A Study in Social and Religious History* (2nd edn; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1926) 140.

¹³ A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (2nd edn; London: A. & C. Black, 1953) 10, 19, etc.

¹⁴ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1977) 549; M.D. Hooker, *From Adam to Christ: Essays on Paul* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

¹⁵ J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 395; cf. also A.J.M. Wedderburn, "Some Observations on Paul's Use of the Phrases 'In Christ' and 'With Christ'", *JSNT* 25 (1985) 83-97.

continuum, like the atmosphere”.¹⁶ Subsequent interpreters have rejected Deissmann’s implausible suggestion, but have remained sympathetic to his perplexity concerning the meaning of the idiom.¹⁷ But in terms of Paul’s Christology this much at least is indisputable: Paul describes Jesus not solely in terms of what he as an individual is or has become — Messiah, Lord, Son of God, etc. — but as someone in and through whom believers live, both individually and *corporately*.¹⁸

More fruitful perhaps than a focus on what ontological status Paul implies with his “in Christ” language is an attempt to see what this corporate Christology-language *does* in terms of the construction of Christian identity, and here insights from the social sciences may be of considerable help. The sociology of knowledge approach known most widely through the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explores the ways in which everything that passes for “knowledge” — expressed in language, symbols, ideas, etc. — forms a “symbolic universe”, a body of tradition which shapes and orders human behaviour and relationships.¹⁹ From this perspective, the separation all too evident in Pauline studies, between “doctrinal” subjects such as Paul’s Christology or soteriology on the one hand, and his ethics and exhortations on the other, breaks down. Paul’s statements about God, Christ, Spirit and so on,

¹⁶ Deissmann’s view as summarised by C.F.D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977) 60; cf. Deissmann, *Paul*, 140.

¹⁷ See Moule, *The Origin of Christology*, 47-96. On the various ways in which the phrases \aleph ❖ ■- and ❖ ◆  ■  □ ✕ ◆ ◆  ✿ may be understood grammatically, see Wedderburn, “Some Observations”, who stresses that Paul’s varied uses cannot be fitted into a single category, such as “locative”, “instrumental” etc.

¹⁸ It is not my concern here to investigate the background or origin of Paul’s corporate Christology. Cautions have rightly been raised against too easily invoking a “Hebrew” idea of “corporate personality” (cf. J.W. Rogerson, “The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality: A Re-Examination”, *JTS* 21 [1970] 1-16). Nevertheless, since a spatial or locative sense seems to be implied in at least some instances (Gal 3:27-28) — though this does not exclude an instrumental sense too (so Wedderburn, “Some Observations”, 95-6 n. 37) — and since Paul unambiguously refers to Christians as the *body* of Christ, the description “*corporate* Christology” seems entirely and quite literally appropriate.

¹⁹ P.L. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (London: Penguin, 1967) 113.

afresh the question as to how, if at all, the identity and conduct of Jew and Gentile are redefined as a consequence of their being “in Christ”.

In what must necessarily be a selective consideration, those texts which refer to baptism, the Christian ritual of initiation and entry for both Jews and Gentiles, are an obvious place at which to start. Baptism and Lord’s Supper, the two most significant Christian rituals, serve not only to dramatise and recall the central doctrines of the early Christian groups, but also to construct their sense of identity and to structure their patterns of social interaction.²³ The most important Pauline baptismal tradition in this regard is that which appears in Gal 3:26-29, 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:9-11, where a connection with baptism is explicit in the first two passages and implicit in the third (cf. Col 2:12).²⁴ While the form of the teaching varies considerably in these three epistolary contexts, the multiple appearance of a similar tradition shows its basic importance for Paul and for the Pauline churches. Common to all three passages is an emphasis on oneness or unity in Christ and an affirmation that this includes both Jew and Gentile, slave and free (1 Cor 12:12-13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11). In both Galatians and Colossians the declaration is that now “there is no longer Jew and Greek”

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Commenting on the meaning of the other major Christian ritual, the Lord’s Supper, Paul similarly stresses that this is a celebration of the unity and oneness of the body of believers who share &□✠■◆■✠✎⊗ in the blood and body of Christ: “because there is one bread, we many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). The fact that Paul presents this assertion concisely as an apparently uncontroversial basis for his argument that the Corinthians should avoid &□✠■◆■✠✎⊗ with demons (1 Cor 10:20-21) may indicate, as Paul Gardner suggests, that this understanding of the Lord’s Supper was

²³ See W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) 140-63; M.Y. MacDonald, *The Pauline Churches* (SNTSMS 60; Cambridge: CUP, 1988) 61-71, reprinted in *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (ed. D.G. Horrell; Edinburgh: T. & T.Clark, 1999) 233-47.

²⁴ On the similarities between the three passages see e.g. R. Scroggs, “Paul and the Eschatological Woman”, *JAAR* 40 (1972) 283-303; here p.292. Colossians may well not be by Paul himself, but nevertheless shows the influence of this baptismal teaching within the Pauline tradition.

widely shared, at least between Paul and the Corinthians.²⁵ Paul's conviction that the Lord's Supper should demonstrate the oneness of the body of Christians also explains why he is so disturbed by the divisions that currently appear when the Corinthians gather for this meal (1 Cor 11:17-34), and why he considers that such a divided celebration is no longer really the Lord's Supper at all (1 Cor 11:20).²⁶

This oneness in Christ, which baptism initiates and the Lord's Supper celebrates, is most vividly and profoundly expressed in Paul's notion of the community as the body of Christ. The functioning human body perfectly illustrates the idea that a group of "members" can be diverse and different, with different functions to perform, yet also be essentially one (1 Cor 12:12-27). Paul, of course, goes beyond simply using the human body as an illustration of how a community of diverse people can be united, and actually describes the Christian congregation as "the body of Christ" (1 Cor 12:12, 27; cf. Rom 12:5). In terms of identity then, while a whole series of terms are used by Paul to describe the members of the Christian communities, a very basic description is that they are those who are $\mathfrak{M} \blacklozenge \blacksquare \uparrow \square \text{X} \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \text{X} \text{X}$. Thus Paul can describe a person (himself, in this instance) as simply $\text{X} \text{X} \blacksquare \square \square \blacklozenge \square \square \text{er}$ $\mathfrak{M} \blacklozenge \blacksquare \uparrow \square \text{X} \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \text{X} \text{X}$ (2 Cor 12:2), where it seems to me to make most sense to see $\mathfrak{M} \blacklozenge \blacksquare \uparrow \square \text{X} \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \text{X} \text{X}$ as primarily a formulaic identity designation (though it may also serve to emphasise that it was in Christ's power that the visions and revelations Paul describes took place²⁷).

From a social-scientific perspective, then, we would expect Paul's corporate Christology — the declaration that all converts are one body in Christ — both to function as a fundamental designation of distinctive group-identity and to structure social interaction within the congregations. However, that leaves open the question as to how, and in what ways, this defining identity affects other aspects of the believers' identity (social, cultural, religious, etc.) and social conduct. The answer to that question cannot be deduced from social-scientific theory but must be drawn from the evidence of Paul's letters. In what ways,

²⁵ P.D. Gardner, *The Gifts of God and the Authentication of a Christian: An Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 8–11:1* (Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1994) 161-5.

²⁶ Cf. D.G. Horrell, "The Lord's Supper at Corinth and in the Church Today", *Theology* 98 (1995) 196-202.

²⁷ Cf. R.P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40; Waco, TX: Word Books, 1986) 399.

we may ask, does this corporate Christology, and the fundamental “Christian” identity which it encapsulates, undergird a redefinition and restructuring of existing identities and practices? To what extent does Paul see his own and others’ identities fundamentally redefined by their being in Christ, and is there any evidence that Paul’s corporate Christology was controversial — perhaps precisely because of its implications for the social interaction and identity of the Christian congregations? I turn first to the question of controversy.

HOW CONTROVERSIAL WAS PAUL’S CORPORATE CHRISTOLOGY?

The phrase $\mathfrak{M} \blacklozenge \blacksquare \text{ ☞ } \square \times \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \text{ ☞ } \text{☞}$ is unique to the Pauline letters in the New Testament, apart from three occurrences in 1 Peter (3:16; 5:10; 5:14; and cf. 1 John 5:20), which probably reflect the influence of Pauline language on the author of 1 Peter.²⁸ The notion of the congregation as the body of Christ is also unique to the Pauline tradition in the New Testament.²⁹ In view of the conflicts Paul faced in Antioch, Galatia and elsewhere, it may not be insignificant to note that the letter of James (connected with James, whether authentic or not) shows no trace of this corporate Christology. James and Paul evidently share the early Christian conviction that Jesus is Lord and Messiah/Christ (James 1:1; 2:1) — to this extent Paul’s Christology is uncontroversial — but there is no evidence (though an argument from silence is always precarious) that they share the corporate christological notion of being (one) “in Christ”. So “in Christ” language, and the corporate Christology which it reflects, is certainly *distinctive* to Paul, at least insofar as our literary evidence allows us to conclude; but is there any evidence to suggest that it was controversial?

First we may briefly consider the dispute at Antioch, reported by Paul in Gal 2:11-14, to which we shall have to refer later. Despite much continuing debate about the incident and its causes, certain things are clear: before the arrival of the people from James, both Jewish and Gentile Christians ate together (presumably in the common meals of the community, i.e. the Lord’s Supper). This practice was regarded as unacceptable, at least in its current form, by the people from James, who convinced the Jewish Christians to separate themselves from this inclusive table-fellowship. What might have undergirded and legitimated this eating together which the people from James sought to bring to an end, or at least to suspend until further

²⁸ Though this does not imply that 1 Peter should be judged a “Pauline” letter. See, e.g., P.J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 18-19; O. Knoch *Der erste und zweite Petrusbrief. Der Judasbrief* (RNT; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1990) 17-18.

²⁹ Though cf. also the corporate images found in John 15:1-4 and 17:20-23.

requirements had been met? The most obvious and plausible answer is: exactly the kind of corporate Christology which is expressed in the baptismal declaration Paul cites later in the letter (Gal 3:26-28) and which he sees embodied in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 10:17), "you are all one in Christ, in whom there is no longer Jew and Greek". The baptismal declaration of Gal 3:26-28 is often thought to represent a pre-Pauline tradition, originally from the Antioch community. Certainly there are firm indications that it is at least a pre-Galatians tradition, clearly distinct within its epistolary context, and if not strictly *pre*-Pauline then at least a product of the congregation's shared convictions rather than exclusively of Paul's.³⁰

If the Antiochene/Pauline baptismal tradition did serve to underpin theologically the community's practice in which Jews and Gentiles ate together without distinction — and it is much more plausible to assume that there *was* such a connection between theological declaration and community practice than that the declaration "one in Christ... no longer Jew or Gentile" had no direct meaning for social interaction within the congregations — then it seems reasonable to suggest that this corporate Christology itself, as well as the unification which it expressed and legitimated, was controversial. The "people from James" did not agree that "in Christ there is no longer Jew or Gentile", since they sought to reestablish the separation of the two groups, on the grounds either that the Gentile believers were failing to observe a minimum of Torah-observance regarding their food and drink, or that the Jewish believers could not be sure in such a context that they were not sinning in partaking of food and wine shared in common with Gentiles.³¹ While the most obviously apparent issue of dispute in both Antioch and Galatia is that of the extent of Torah-observance required of

³⁰ See further H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 181-5; Horrell, *Social Ethos*, 84-5.

³¹ Among the important discussions of the reasons for the criticism mounted by the people from James, see J.D.G. Dunn, "The Incident at Antioch (Gal 2.11-18)" in *Jesus, Paul and the Law* (London: SPCK, 1990) 129-82; E.P. Sanders, "Jewish Association with Gentiles and Galatians 2:11-14" in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul and John in Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. R.T. Fortna and B.R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990) 170-88. Holmberg and Esler, however, argue for a greater degree of Jewish separatism in commensality than do Dunn and Sanders: see B. Holmberg, "Jewish *Versus* Christian Identity in the Early Church?", *RB* 105 (1998) 397-425; Esler, *Galatians*, 93-116.

Gentile converts, it seems highly likely that different christological convictions underpinned the conflicting positions taken by Paul and his Jewish Christian opponents.³²

Further hints — though no more than hints — of Paul’s distinctive and controversial Christology may be found in 2 Corinthians. In 2 Cor 11:4, in a strongly defensive and polemical context, Paul speaks of those who preach “another Jesus”, and of the Corinthians receiving another Spirit, or another gospel. As Jerome Murphy-O’Connor has observed: “In 11:4 Paul makes a very clear distinction between his role and that of the Corinthians. He ‘preached’ Jesus, they ‘received or accepted’ the Spirit and the Gospel... The key element in 11:4, therefore, is ‘Jesus’; the other two are dependent on it.”³³ Although we can deduce very little from this reference about the contrasts between Paul’s Christology and that of his opponents, who were connected (if not identical) with the so-called “super-apostles” (2 Cor 11:5) and stressed their Jewish (Jerusalem?) connections (2 Cor 11:22), it is at least a hint that their presentations of “Jesus” were different.

In what I judge to be a later section of 2 Corinthians,³⁴ certainly a less overtly polemical section, Paul refers to his changed perspective on “Christ” (2 Cor 5:16), in the context of a passage which expresses a thoroughly incorporative or participationist Christology (see vv. 14, 17, 21). Paul’s conviction that Christ died and rose for all, and that all have therefore died and are summoned to live for Christ (5:14-15), leads him to two conclusions.³⁵ The first, a negative conclusion, is that no-one is any longer to be regarded

³² See further Holmberg, “Jewish *Versus* Christian Identity”, who sees the Antioch incident as one where Paul demanded from Christian Jews the giving up of the marking of their Jewish identity for the sake of the church’s unity: “Jewish identity must cede to the common Christian identity” (p. 414). I am in substantial agreement with the argument of Holmberg’s essay, though unfortunately Holmberg does not consider Paul’s corporate Christology when he considers the *basis* from which Paul derives this sense of Christian identity (see pp. 416-25).

³³ J. Murphy-O’Connor, “Another Jesus (2 Cor 11:4)”, *RB* 97 (1990) 238-51; here pp. 239-40.

³⁴ See Horrell, *Social Ethos*, 296-312.

³⁵ The two statements each introduced with $\diamond\odot\diamond\mathfrak{M}$ in vv. 16 and 17 are best taken as two conclusions each drawn from vv. 14-15 rather than as one conclusion (v. 16) from which another is then drawn; cf. C.K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC);

from a worldly point of view (ግራምግራም ግራምግራም). Even though Paul once knew Christ from a perspective ግራምግራም ግራምግራም, he does so no longer (v. 16).³⁶ The second conclusion, positively stated, is that “if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; old things are gone, behold they have become new” (v. 17). In stating that he no longer regards Christ ግራምግራም ግራምግራም, Paul may be expressing a veiled polemic against his opponents, though the immediacy and intensity of the conflict is less than in 2 Cor 10–13 (cf. 2 Cor 2:17–3:1; 4:2). Is it possible that here again we glimpse a significant difference in Christology between Paul and his Jewish-Christian opponents?³⁷ They proclaim “another Jesus”, a Jesus who, from Paul’s point of view, is a Christ regarded ግራምግራም ግራምግራም (note Rom 9:5). It is difficult to be sure exactly what Paul means by that — it seems unlikely that he is primarily meaning to disavow any interest in the historical Jesus³⁸ — but it certainly stands in contrast with the perspective on Christ which Paul himself now holds and which is spelt out in the surrounding context. For Paul, as the context of 2 Cor 5:16 makes clear, the event of Christ’s death and resurrection marks the disjunction between the old age and the new, between an old way of knowing and a new epistemology, one which is “thoroughly and without remainder christological”.³⁹ As Graham Stanton concludes: “The main point of 2 Cor. 5:16 is clear: as a consequence of the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christians have a new perspective on all things and all people and no longer ‘know’ ግራምግራም ግራምግራም. Any attempt to evaluate others, even Christ,

London: A. & C. Black, 1973) 173; P. Barnett *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 296 n.41.

³⁶ This verse is notoriously difficult and its interpretation much discussed. The various opinions are reviewed in M.E. Thrall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (vol. 1; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T.Clark, 1994) 412-20.

³⁷ Cf. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 296.

³⁸ Rudolf Bultmann famously argued that the history and preaching of Jesus are unimportant for Paul; see e.g. *Theology of the New Testament vol. 1* (London: SCM, 1952) 188-9; “The Historical Jesus and the Theology of Paul”, in *Faith and Understanding I* (London: SCM, 1969) 220-46. See discussion in G.N. Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching* (SNTSMS 27; Cambridge: CUP, 1974) 87-93.

³⁹ J.L. Martyn, “Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages”, in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T. & T.Clark, 1997) 89-110; here p. 110.

as though the death and resurrection of Jesus had not brought about a totally new situation is to be rejected most firmly.”⁴⁰ Christ is the one in whose death all have participated, the one “in” whom all believers are no longer to be regarded Jew and Gentile; no longer, we may suggest, regarded as Jew and Gentile, but as together one body in Christ.

There is some evidence, then, to support the hypothesis that Paul’s corporate Christology was not only distinctive but also to some degree controversial. It appears to represent one point of contrast between Paul (together with the Antioch community, at least prior to the “incident” there) and the varied forms of Jewish Christianity associated with James and the Jerusalem church. Specifically, Paul’s corporate Christology seems likely to have underpinned his controversial conviction that, because Jews and Gentiles are together one body in Christ, a new creation, they can and must share unbounded fellowship at the Lord’s table.

“NO LONGER JEW OR GREEK”: BUT WHAT DOES THAT MEAN IN PRACTICE?

It is explicit in the baptismal declarations examined above that Paul regards the Christian community as a body of people which is one in Christ, in whom “there is no longer Jew or Greek”. But what exactly does that phrase mean? To what extent does it imply a redefinition of former identities and a restructuring of former practices? That is not immediately apparent and a range of interpretations are possible. It might be taken as essentially a *soteriological* declaration: that Jews and Gentiles are equally and without distinction saved in Christ, but that their identities and accompanying ethical imperatives remain distinct. Or, at the other end of the spectrum, it might be taken to mean that the identity distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians has essentially been dissolved, that a new identity “in Christ” has displaced the former labels (or rather that the identity labels of Israel now apply without distinction to all who are one in Christ — see below) and that whatever ethical obligations there are apply to the whole people of God in Christ. From a perspective informed by the sociology of knowledge, one would expect both the positive declaration (“you are one in Christ”) and its negative counterpart (“there is no longer Jew and Gentile”) to reflect not merely some theoretical standpoint “in the sight of God” (can any statement “merely” do

⁴⁰ Stanton, *Jesus of Nazareth in New Testament Preaching*, 93.

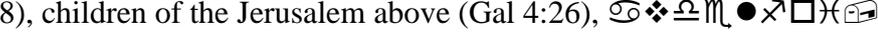
distinct sets of commandments by Jewish and gentile Christians was the basic principle of Paul's missionary work".⁵⁴

However, it may be questioned whether this makes the best sense of what Paul writes here, and in the strikingly similar formulations in Gal 5:6 and 6:15. This section of 1 Corinthians 7 (vv.17-24) is widely agreed to provide illustrations of the wider principle Paul invokes during his answers to the Corinthians' questions about marriage and sexual relationships (7:1-40): on the whole, though with exceptions countenanced throughout, people should remain as they are. In this connection Paul thus states that Jewish Christians should not seek to *remove* (○⚡☞ ℳ❖□✕♦□☞☞♦□♦) the marks of their circumcision (i.e. of their Jewish identity),⁵⁵ nor should Gentile Christians become circumcised. The reason given, however, is that circumcision and uncircumcision are *nothing* (□♦❖☞ℳ☞■). Paul follows this with the assertion that what *does* count is "keeping the commandments of God" (v.19). His Jewish-Christian opponents in Galatia would no doubt have perceived a sharp oxymoron in Paul's juxtaposition of the statements "circumcision is nothing" and "but keeping the commandments of God", since Gen 17:9-14 clearly states that circumcision is a permanent obligation for all who would be descendants of Abraham (as all "in Christ" clearly are, in Paul's view: Gal 3:6-4:6).⁵⁶ However, as the distinction between dying ■□☞○♦☞ and living □ℳ♦☞☞☞ shows (Gal 2:19), keeping the commandments of God does not necessarily mean for Paul upholding literally "the whole Law". (It is also noteworthy that the commands, instructions, and advice Paul gives in 1 Corinthians 7 are based explicitly either on the teaching of Jesus or on his own instruction [vv. 10, 17, 25; cf. 1 Cor 14:37].) Paul does not wish his converts to alter or eradicate the marks of their identity as Jew or Gentile, but insists that these distinctions are now "nothing". A similar insistence appears twice in Galatians, where Paul specifies what matters as "faith working through love" (5:6) and as "a new creation" (6:15). In all three cases, the marks of identity and practice which previously *distinguished* Jew and Gentile (circumcision/uncircumcision) are

⁵⁴ P.J. Tomson, "Paul's Jewish Background", 268, emphasis his.

⁵⁵ On the reasons why this might have been done, see B.W. Winter, *Seek the Welfare of the City: Christians as Benefactors and Citizens* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 147-52.

⁵⁶ Cf. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 96: "keeping the Law while being uncircumcised is simply an oxymoron from the perspective of rabbinic Judaism, because being circumcised is part of the Law!"

argued to be implicit in 1 Corinthians 10, and virtually explicit in Gal 4:29 (cf. also Rom 9:6-8).⁶⁷ Most explicit of all of course is the unique and much disputed phrase in Gal 6:16 —  — which seems most likely to refer to the Christian community.⁶⁸ All who are in Christ are equally and without distinction descendants of Abraham (Gal 3:6–4:6, 21-31; cf. Rom 9:8; 2 Cor 11:22), inheritors of God’s promise (Gal 3:29; 4:28), children of the Jerusalem above (Gal 4:26),  (cf. e.g. Deut 15:2-3, 7, 12 etc.), and  (Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26, etc.). They are the ‘people of God’ (cf. Rom 9:24-25; 2 Cor 6:16); the scriptures were written for their instruction (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11); the patriarchs are their fathers (1 Cor 10:1; cf. Rom 4:1). And despite Paul’s polemic against physical circumcision, he describes Christians as ‘the circumcision’ (Phil 3:3; cf. Rom 2:28-29). In view of all this, it must be said that Gentile converts who are “in Christ” are, for Paul, as much a part of (a redefined) Israel as are Christian Jews, and both belong by virtue of their being in Christ (and by this means alone!), who is the (singular) seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16). They are all equally part of the Israel of God, but an Israel whose identity and practice are redefined, reconfigured around Christ and not Torah.⁶⁹

In tension with all this, however, is Paul’s continuing awareness of ethnic Israel, to whom the promises of God still intrinsically belong and whose “failure” to believe is a cause of considerable anguish and theological wrestling for Paul (Rom 9–11). Unlike most later generations of Christians, Paul held onto this conviction in spite of its tension with his belief that God had recreated Israel as the body of people in Christ.⁷⁰ Of course, Paul believed that in the providential purposes of God this tension would be resolved — and soon! — when Israel’s time of hardening was ended and she finally came to be saved (Rom 11:26).

⁶⁷ Cf. N.A. Dahl, “Der Name Israel: Zur Auslegung von Gal 6,16”, *Judaica* 6 (1950) 161-70; here p. 163.

⁶⁸ For arguments in favour of this interpretation, see e.g. Dahl, “Zur Auslegung von Gal 6,16”; Barclay, *Obeying the Truth*, 98; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 298-9.

⁶⁹ Cf. the argument of T.L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle’s Convictional World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), who proposes that Paul conceived of Gentile admission on the model of Jewish proselytism, but that Paul’s Judaism was reconfigured around Christ and not Torah.

⁷⁰ See further Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*, 239-48, 297-9, 305-7.

CONCLUSIONS: IDENTITY AND COMMUNITY “IN CHRIST”

What then can we conclude about the implications of Paul’s corporate Christology for the construction of Christian community and for the redefinition and restructuring of converts’ identity and practice? The implications of the sociology of knowledge have been influential throughout this investigation, informing the conviction that (theological) symbols and ideas serve to construct identity and to shape social interaction, though the specific ways in which they do this can only be ascertained by exegesis of the relevant texts. This perspective, however, raises questions over the plausibility of a sharp separation between soteriology and ethics, as is required for the thesis that, while Paul’s soteriology was based solely on faith in Christ, his ethical teaching was for Jews and Gentiles to “stick to their respective ways of life”.⁷¹ On the basis both of a sociological appreciation of the close relationship between “symbolic orders” and social practice, and of the exegesis of Pauline texts, this proposal appears mistaken.

Paul’s emphatic and repeated declaration that in Christ there is no longer Jew and Gentile reflects not just a soteriological conviction, but a profound statement about the identity and unity of the new community which God has created, a statement which shapes and structures social interaction in the congregations in real and sometimes controversial ways. Both the positive christological declaration — “you are all one in Christ” — and its negative corollary — “there is no longer Jew or Greek” — do indeed fundamentally (re)define identity and social practice, in ways which, at least in certain circumstances, compromise or even abrogate previous patterns of identity-forming conduct.

The evidence from Paul’s letters indicates that for Paul himself a new and defining identity implies a radical transformation of his Jewish identity and practice (1 Cor 9:20; Gal 2:15-20; 4:12; Phil 3:8 etc.). Similarly, Paul is clear that the identity distinction between Jewish and Gentile Christians, the circumcised and the uncircumcised, is now “nothing” (Gal 2:19), since both are part of God’s new creation in Christ (1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6; 6:15) — on this point the writer to the Ephesians seems to me a good interpreter of Pauline theology (Eph 2:14-18). Jew and Gentile have become one in Christ,

⁷¹ Tomson, “Paul’s Jewish Background”, 267; cf. 266 (“the soteriological equality of Jewish and gentile Christians” *bis*); also Finsterbusch, *Die Thora als Lebensweisung*, 61, 63-4, 82-3; M.N.A. Bockmuehl, “Review of Finsterbusch, *Die Thora als Lebensweisung*”, *JTS* 49 (1998) 787.

equally and without distinction descendants of Abraham and members of the Israel of God. Hence what defines the “ingroup” as opposed to the “outgroup” is quite simply being $\aleph \heartsuit \blacksquare \heartsuit \square \times \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \heartsuit \heartsuit$. *The distinction to be drawn in terms of moral obligation and social interaction is not between Jew and Gentile but between those who are in Christ and those who are not.* It is this latter distinction which determines the boundaries in such crucial spheres of social interaction as commensality (1 Cor 5:11) and marriage (1 Cor 7:39 — $\circ \square \heartsuit \blacksquare \square \blacksquare \aleph \heartsuit \blacksquare \heartsuit \square \times \heartsuit \heartsuit \blacklozenge$).⁷² Indeed, the change in focus is epitomised in Paul’s insistence that he is not $\blacklozenge \square \square \square \heartsuit \blacksquare \square \heartsuit \circ \square \blacksquare$, but $\aleph \blacksquare \blacksquare \square \circ \square \heartsuit \heartsuit \square \times \blacklozenge \square \blacklozenge \heartsuit \heartsuit$; “in-lawed”⁷³ in a way which is commensurate with his new identity $\aleph \heartsuit \blacksquare \heartsuit \square \times \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \heartsuit \heartsuit$ (1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2).⁷⁴ While Paul’s understanding of (Christian!) identity and ethical responsibility remains profoundly Jewish — and this point should not be underemphasised — that understanding is reconfigured and recentred around Christ.⁷⁵

It seems to me, therefore, that David Catchpole was entirely correct to insist that for Paul, “the Christian gospel does a very great deal to the Jew/Gentile distinction”. Paul’s corporate Christology provides the basis for his conviction that all who are in Christ have died to the old era and now live (corporately) as “one”, a new creation, the body of Christ, in the power of the Spirit: former distinctions signify nothing. Paul’s corporate Christology thus underpins a (controversial) model of community in which Jew and Gentile enjoy unbounded table-fellowship, sharing one bread and one cup, demonstrating in concrete social interaction that they are “one body in Christ”.⁷⁶

⁷² Cf. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora*, 385-6.

⁷³ As E.P. Sanders points out, the phrase $\aleph \blacksquare \blacksquare \square \circ \square \heartsuit \heartsuit \square \times \blacklozenge \square \blacklozenge \heartsuit \heartsuit$ is “virtually untranslatable” (*Paul, the Law and the Jewish People*, 100). The phrase in Gal 6:2, $\square \square \blacksquare \square \square \circ \square \heartsuit \blacklozenge \square \blacklozenge \heartsuit \heartsuit \square \times \blacklozenge \square \blacklozenge \heartsuit \heartsuit$, is of course more straightforward — in translation if not in interpretation.

⁷⁴ See further R.B. Hays, “Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ”, *CBQ* 49 (1987) 268-90; Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, 126-35.

⁷⁵ Cf. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles*.

⁷⁶ I am extremely grateful to John Barclay, Bruce Longenecker and Christopher Tuckett for their comments on a draft of this essay. Needless to say, they should not be held in any way responsible for the opinions, or any errors, herein.

