

# Unity and Diversity in the Church: Transformed identities and the peace of Christ in Ephesians

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## Abstract

The question the author explores in this paper is whether Paul's stance on retaining one's ethnic identity which eventually was lost when the church became predominantly gentile was already lost by the time the letter to the Ephesians was written around 90 CE at the latest. The point is that Christ does not merely bring peace of mind, psychological well-being, but *shalom*, the total health and well-being of being right with God and finding peace even with enemies. It is a real political and social peace that Christ enables and demands of those who truly belong to His kingdom. As Eph. 1-2 indicates, through the power of Christ hostility arising from difference can be turned into a cause of celebration of the blessings of God in Christ.

## Introduction

Over the last two decades and in my recent book on *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity* (2006) I have argued that Paul's gospel declares that everything is relativised in the coming of the Christ – circumcision is nothing and so too is uncircumcision. The practical significance of this is that those that are married, because of their dedication to Christ, are to live as though they are not. Yet despite this, wives and husbands still remain married, slaves by and large likewise, and one's ethnic identity at the receipt of the call of Christ is not to be denied or forsaken – everyone should remain in the calling, *en tē klēsei*, in which they were called (whether as circumcised or uncircumcised) (1 Cor. 7:20).

Pauline transformation in Christ does not mean the creation of a new group without ethnic identity but rather the transformation of those who are Greeks into transformed Greeks, and of Judeans<sup>1</sup> into transformed Judeans in Christ. Paul thus cannot be said to be indifferent to ethnic identity in the way this might be postulated of Stoic thinkers,<sup>2</sup> since his stipulation to remain as you are means that for Paul ethnicity is not an indifferent thing. He does state that both circumcision and uncircumcision are nothing, but the crucial point of this passage (1 Cor. 7:17-24) is not a comparison between circumcision and uncircumcision, but a comparison of both with the call of God.<sup>3</sup> In light of this call, the whole of life is relativised, and it is neither better nor worse to be circumcised or uncircumcised. With the call of God, what one is and what one has is taken over by Christ, but then given back to be regarded differently so that all of life can be transformed by

God whether as Jews or gentiles in Christ.

The issue I wish to explore in this article is whether Paul's stance on retaining one's ethnic identity (remaining in the calling in which one was called) which eventually was lost when the church became predominantly gentile was already lost by the time the letter to the Ephesians was written around 90 CE at the latest.<sup>4</sup>

## Unity in Christ

Ephesians advocates a distinctively Christian identity. Christ is central and the hero of deliverance. As Karl Barth brilliantly recognized, Ephesians more than any other letter, stresses that election, in fact the whole of redemption, takes place in Christ. It is in Him that believers are elect and have everything that is gifted to them by God. But how is this deliverance in Christ presented? We will return to this later, but the reading adopted here is derived from the macro image of Ephesians, that of the new temple. Christ has broken down the dividing wall on the Cross. That is, he has removed the balustrade that prevented gentiles having access to the temple courts as did Jews. But now gentiles in Christ are built into a new temple without division in which God's glory dwells. They have a new identity in Him being built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Christ being the corner stone or, as I prefer, coping stone that holds the entire building together.<sup>5</sup> His reconciling work has thus removed the partition of hostility between Israelites and gentiles.

As Dahl notes, 'In comparison with nearly contemporary writings, Ephesians contains no expression of anti-Jewish sentiments'<sup>6</sup> The law is not mentioned at all in Eph.1, there is only one reference to the law in the letter at 2:15, and even that is not simply to the law *per se* or as a whole – it is the law, *ton entolōn en dogmasin*, literally 'the law of instructions through rules'.<sup>7</sup> It looks more like a specific aspect of the law that is abolished rather than the law in total.<sup>8</sup> But for the author it is not a central issue and he gives it little attention. This is because he prefers to stress, as Barth alerted us, the overall purpose of God, in which believers are chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world, and are now being created into a new temple in Him.<sup>9</sup>

But the gentiles are not alone in this building, they are fellow-citizens with Israelites; there is strong emphasis that they are no longer foreigners or resident aliens; this is part of a deliberate and prolonged critique of pagan culture, with four separate descriptions of gentiles, designed it seems to distance the gentile Christ-followers from pagan culture.<sup>10</sup> Negative self-definition in Ephesians is not against Jews as such but only against the rest of humanity outside of Christ (3:2). The author does describe his addressees in 2:11 as 'gentiles in the flesh' or by birth in a purely descriptive way. They are labelled as 'the foreskin' or the uncircumcision by 'those called the circumcision', i.e. made by hands. But this represents merely inter-group distinctions in a context that stresses what benefits now come to gentiles in Christ.

There is no equivalent distancing from Israelite culture and identity. The word Jew, does not appear at all, so there is no criticism of Jewish identity as such except in the passing reference that Christ abolished the law of instruction through rules.<sup>11</sup> Can the fact that there seems to be no explicit reference to Jewish communities not be seen as proof that Jewish identity is being negated? The answer to this lies in our presuppositions. Thus some will assume automatically that to be in Christ means to be in opposition to any kind of Jewish identity.

But although Ephesians stresses a Christ-centred identity, we must not presume that any Jewish Christ-followers would no longer be able to follow a life according to the law because Ephesians also stresses Israelite identity as central.<sup>12</sup> Thus it does not follow that the abolishing of the law of instructions through rules means the abandonment of law observance in general.

Here we need to look at the probable context of Ephesians somewhere before 90 CE, whether this is Ephesus itself or somewhere nearby in the province of Asia. In the area of Ephesus, as Paul Trebilco<sup>13</sup> and others have demonstrated, there were certainly some Jewish Christ-followers from the earliest days until the time of Ignatius. There were Jews in large numbers in Ephesus itself and the seven churches of Revelation give clear evidence of these in the areas surrounding. Without arguing in detail, it may be confidently claimed that Jewish Christianity existed, and continued to exist in or alongside the diverse groups that can be identified from the Pastoral Epistles, the Johannine Epistles, the book of Revelation and later from the letters of Ignatius. There are references to those who claim to be Jews and are not, but despite not being Jews, are stereotyped as 'a synagogue of Satan' (Rev. 2:9). There is even evidence that Ignatius had to point out the inconsistency involved in confessing Christ and practising Judaism simultaneously.<sup>14</sup> Thus, what some regard as impossible was not impossible in actual life at the period of Ephesians. Jewish Christ-believers could and did continue to keep the law and at the same time follow Christ.

There is however a unique feature concerning the work of Christ, first introduced in 2:15, which has certainly some bearing on law observance. Here the previous statements in relation to the law are seen as part of Christ's intention to make the two, the 'far off' and the 'near', at this point obviously identity references to Jews and gentiles respectively, into one new *anthrōpos* thus making peace. This reconciling peace-making proclaimed by Christ echoes in 2:13 and 2:17 the words of Isaiah 57:19 and Isaiah 52:7 where divine blessing was proclaimed to Jews in the land (those who are near) and also to Jews who were dispersed in the exile (those who are far away).<sup>15</sup>

We note here the etymological and other associations between shalom, peace, and the traditions concerning the figure of King Solomon. Solomon was celebrated as the one who brought peace, having united the northern and southern tribes in the worship of God in a newly built temple. In light of these traditions, Isaiah 57:19 is thus read as proclaiming a vision of a united Israel, of 'all Israel' much in the same vein as Solomon had created a united monarchy, but in Ephesians the two thus united are now Jews and non-Jews.<sup>16</sup> Kreitzer draws attention to the fact that in Eph. 2:17-19, there are some remarkable similarities to one of the petitions made by Solomon to Yahweh in connection with his Temple dedication speech in 2 Chron. 6.<sup>17</sup> The use of the rare word for God's dwelling place, *katoikētērion*, in 2:22 is significant. Thus Kreitzer concludes that 'the writer of the letter to the Ephesians turns to the traditional descriptions of Solomon as a Temple-building king who ruled over a unified people in order to stress his point about the need for unity within the congregation he addresses.'<sup>18</sup>

What then is the significance of the work of Christ in relation to ethnicity and the creation of one new *anthrōpos*? As noted already, unity through Christ across ethnic difference is a dominant theme in this letter. Being addressed to gentiles, the significance of the work of Christ is highlighted by calling to remembrance their former way of life in the pagan world-'then' in contrast to 'now' in Christ (2:13).<sup>19</sup> What function does the denigration of gentile society serve in this con-

text? Can it be argued that the condemnation of their gentile past is an indication of a new non-gentile identity – a new status to which they should adhere, stressing instead a ‘Christian’ identity in Christ? The evidence for such a view depends on how the one new *anthrōpos* of 2:15 is to be understood.

### The New *anthrōpos*

Is the author claiming in 2:11-22 that ethnicity has no longer any actual significance in the church? Is it now entirely irrelevant whether one is a Jew or a gentile? Have Israel’s privileges, responsibility and identity been transferred to the gentiles?<sup>20</sup> Is ethnicity really a thing of the past in Christ? There is indeed strong emphasis here in putting one’s gentile life truly in the past, making it *passé*. Can it also be inferred from this that the author of Ephesians is in this way seeking to distance his audience not just from sinful patterns of life but from their ethnic ancestry as well? And thus might there be some truth in the suggestion that what is proposed is essentially a ‘third entity’-a newly constituted group of people who are neither Jewish nor gentile but Christian, to all intents and purposes, a third ‘race’, as a few scholars still hold?<sup>21</sup>

This concept has a mixed ancestry and has tended in practice towards anti-Judaism, not least because it fails to stress continuity with Israel. In the nineteenth century the term ‘higher unity’ was often used with reference to the situation in which the difference between Jew and gentile was overcome; according to F. C. Baur, Ephesians presents Christianity as ‘a unity standing above the antitheses of Jew and Gentile’.<sup>22</sup>

The point needing to be noted here, however, is that all the emphasis is upon negating one’s gentile past, rather than that of both Jews and gentiles. There are no specific opponents and certainly no reference to Judaisers; Israelite identity seems to be accepted without explicit criticism. The saints, *hagioi*, is used both for Jewish and all believers, but the ‘we’ reference at 1:12 has primary reference to Israelites. Apart from the strong emphasis upon the breaking down of the dividing partition, it could be claimed that an Israelite-related identity is being presumed, even promoted. Whereas Paul in Romans enumerates the advantages of the Jews, the analogous list in Ephesians 2:12 presents this indirectly as the privileges which the gentiles did not have.<sup>23</sup> And yet the gentile Christians though closely related to, are not quite completely identified with, Israel.<sup>24</sup>

It is proclaimed in Ephesians 2:11-22 that Christ’s work is such that the two groups of Jews and gentiles are made one in Him, yet a question remains concerning what form this ‘becoming one’ is going to take. The language of two into one implies the existence of two entities, but do these two entities continue to exist after the uniting, or are they entirely fused into one new entity? Do they in fact become not only one but one and the same?

Alternatively, do they continue as discrete and distinct entities but now without hostility and in a harmonious relation?<sup>25</sup> It is explicitly stated in 2:16 that it is hostility, *tēn echthran* (rather than ethnic status) that is brought to an end by the reconciliation of both to God in one body in Christ. As Yee asserts, ‘The author’s endeavour ought not to be read as a levelling and abolishing of all ethnic differences... but as a repudiation of the ethnocentric perspective which perceives the differences as grounds for estrangement and discrimination’.<sup>26</sup>

If as seems plausible, the dividing wall image reflects the notion of the balustrade in the temple that limited the access of gentiles,<sup>27</sup> then this is, in fact, a metaphorical statement. Similarly the new *anthrōpos*<sup>28</sup> image is a metaphorical repre-

sentation of the reconciliation effected by Christ between Jew and gentile. There could be no new man, a fusion of Jew and gentile in natural or actual terms. Nor could there have been one new *anthrōpos* who was neither Jewish nor gentile, a culture free clone, (despite the RSV's gratuitous addition of 'in place of the two'). We must not essentialize what is basically metaphorical. Though the celebratory style and sustained rhetoric suggests that the one new *anthrōpos* is already realised<sup>29</sup> rather than merely announced, it must also be recognized that this verse refers to the purpose of God in Christ (*hina*), 'so that He might create one new *anthrōpos*, so making peace'.

The 'not yet' is clear when read in light of 4:22-24 where readers are exhorted to put off the old *anthrōpos* and to put on the new *anthrōpos*. The baptismal imagery of putting off and putting on clothing is dangerous when applied carelessly to identity. Clothes can be easily or quickly discarded, but identity is something else, 'a task rather than a possession'.<sup>30</sup> When the strong emphasis on putting on the new *anthrōpos* in 4:22-24 is set alongside the parallel emphasis on growing in 2:21 and 4:15-16, an ongoing process is plainly denoted.

Ephesians is suggestive of a building site on which a previously existing dividing wall has been demolished and in which a new building is now taking shape. However, whilst the design of the building is already evident, the building itself is still very much in process of construction. So too is the identity of the members of the *ekklēsia*. The alienation of the outsiders and the enmity between insiders and outsiders has been overcome by Christ, and the church, the household of God<sup>31</sup>, is truly destined to become a 'home for the homeless'.<sup>32</sup>

Belonging to the household of God as to any group involves on-going identity construction, rather than a brand new identity. Philip Esler has recognized that in the case of the Pauline groups the development of a distinct identity is required, one that will be lodged as social identity in the minds and hearts of the members—meaning that sense of who they are that derives from belonging to this group, but he nevertheless concludes 'yet such identity will need to co-exist with whatever remains of the member's original Judean and Greek identities'.<sup>33</sup>

### An Alternative Society

The consistent emphasis on the church (rather than on local churches) in Ephesians arises not from a preference to look inwards in deference to political involvement. Ephesians on both the implicit and explicit level is one of the most political of New Testament texts.<sup>34</sup> Principalities and powers (3:10) are to be understood as relating primarily to social and political forces in pagan society.<sup>35</sup> Though defeated by Christ, these are forces that Christ-followers must oppose in their daily lives, and which must relate in the first instance to Roman domination. The symbols of domination, victory temples, imperial and other cults were all-pervasive in cities such as Ephesus. As in Israel, Iraq and even Northern Ireland today, it would have been impossible to escape political and social pressure in 'a society saturated with symbols of imperial power'.<sup>36</sup> Yet whilst separation from certain gentile patterns of life is strongly advocated, there is no pressure for a complete withdrawal from society. In fact, in contrast to the Qumran community, 'there is every good reason to suspect that Ephesians was addressed to a community that remained integrated with the urban fabric of society'. Yet, despite this, a hidden transcript in Ephesians sets God as the Father of all, not the emperor, and the language of principalities and powers designates Christ, not Augustus, as the true peace creator,<sup>37</sup> the victor over every political entity by the construction of a new universal

*anthrōpos*. Christ not Caesar is the Saviour of the world.<sup>38</sup>

The political consciousness of Ephesians emerges also in the emphasis on the household, the smallest legal unit in Greco-Roman society but which is simultaneously both the focal point of Christ-followers, and the template for the household of God.<sup>39</sup> Whatever the extent of the takeover of the model, the fact remains that for this author the church is the household of God, and to that extent not subject to another Lord. As is increasingly being recognized, the situation of the Jews and Christians vis-à-vis their pagan neighbours cannot be treated in isolation from each other.<sup>40</sup> So at some periods in the Ephesus region, it may have been beneficial for Christ-following households to be perceived as groups of Jewish communities despite the diversity in terms of the actual membership. The destiny of the smaller groups of Christ-followers with varying links to, and attitudes towards, Judaism could not always be easily dissociated from the effects resulting from imperial application of particular policies towards Jews. The political context under Domitian was such that flexibility in association and perhaps even in identity construction was a necessary attribute for survival as well as for growth.<sup>41</sup>

What needs to be noted in relation to the complicated triangle of Jews, Romans and Christ-followers is that the political forces of the period under Domitian's rule were such that the creation of a distinct identity for the Church was not a simple task.<sup>42</sup> A hasty separation from Jewish communities and a public opposition to Jewish related identity may have been in some instances beneficial, but in others exceedingly counter productive. The freedom to manoeuvre was very restricted when both Christian and Jewish communities were under severe constraints because of the *fiscus judaicus* and its collection for Rome, but even more so because of the long-term suspicion that Jewish groups were guilty of disloyalty to the state, particularly in relation to the increasingly significant imperial cult.<sup>43</sup>

In some instances it might be wiser to strengthen links with Jews rather than weakening them and, thus, not be publicly perceived as an isolated new religious movement without the traditional right to exist customarily enjoyed by Jewish communities?<sup>44</sup> Thus the celebration of the one new *anthrōpos* and the peace that Christ had achieved, whilst a cause for rejoicing within the household of God, may have been a cause for persecution from the wider society. But the author of Ephesians is no blinkered ideologist without any contextual or even pragmatic concerns; rather, the opposite is true. It might even be suggested that the lack of explicit reference to actual problems between Jews and gentiles in the church, may be perceived as a deliberate silence so as not to give increased attention to this type of conflict – *that enmity needs to be removed is a basic assumption of the text*. The author may be deliberately depicting an enhanced scenario of actual relations between groups for the sake of the desired hope of a positive outcome.

Whatever the actual circumstances in front of the text in Ephesians- whether there was real hostility between differing groups, and a fear of persecution if the wrong links are made or maintained, the wrong image projected, the author offers the reconciling work of Christ as the key to peace-making, and the end to ethnic hostility. This alternative community based on 'the gospel of peace' (6:15) proclaimed by Christ (2:17) stands in sharp contrast to the imperial value system promoted by Rome.

## Reconciliation of Diverse Communities

Ephesians addresses a community in process of construction and hence one

in which identity is also somewhat fluid. This is reinforced when we note the frequent use of *sun*-compounds and a corresponding emphasis upon oneness and unity. There is one Lord, one hope, one faith, one baptism, (4:4-5) one body (2:16,4:4), one Spirit, (2:18, 4:4) one new *anthrōpos* (2:15b), one God and Father of us all (4:6) and one (universal) church (3:10,5:24-32).

The corporate dimension is central here-it is group acceptance rather than individual peace and reconciliation that is emphasized by the frequent use of *sun*-compounds. The primary dimension is union with Christ and then union with others as demonstrated in 2:5-6 – it is together with Christ that believers are made alive, raised up and made to sit in the heavenly places. The *sun*-compounds proliferate at certain points in the letter; the gentiles are fellow-citizens (*sumpolitai*) with the saints (2:19), joint-heirs, joint-members of the same body, and joint-partakers of the promise (3:6). Believers are joined together and built together with Christ, the coping stone, and with the Jewish Christ-followers into a holy temple, a dwelling place of God in the Spirit(2:20-21).Developing in parallel with the temple imagery, the image of the body,<sup>45</sup> Christ followers are to grow up together into Christ, the head of the body, from whom the whole body is joined and knit together( 4:15-16).The *sun*-constructions are even used negatively to advocate dissociation from the evils of pagan society.<sup>46</sup>

It must be strongly emphasized that the force of all the *sun*-compounds, when taken together with the parallel stress upon one and becoming one, is lost if they are to have no more significance than a recognition of, and possibly encouraging a return to, the Jewish roots of the faith without any contemporary relevance for growing together or reconciliation with groups of Jewish Christ followers.

The concern in Ephesians is not simply about acceptance and reconciliation between individual Jewish and gentile Christ followers,<sup>47</sup> but extends beyond that. The force of the concentration on *sun*-compounds is diminished and even misunderstood if they are taken to reflect relations between individuals rather than groups. In the region around Ephesus, the third city of the Empire with a population around 200,000<sup>48</sup> (and a strong Jewish minority who possibly had rights of citizenship)<sup>49</sup> there would be substantial diversity among the population, probably also reflected in the Christ communities, not least in attitudes to the practice of magic, and worship in the Artemis cult. There would also be strong pressure to conform to the established forms of civic loyalty and practice deemed necessary to the well-being of the state.<sup>50</sup>

Without resorting to 'mirror reading', it is possible nevertheless to draw correlations between Ephesians and its social context.<sup>51</sup> Thus we do think that there were real social problems among the gentile Christ-followers whom the author addresses. There are texts that suggest that these gentiles were weak, infants still, being rendered unstable by differing forms of teaching, and not growing up together in Christ with their fellow Jewish Christ-followers whether in one household or, more likely, in several households cf. 2:14-16, 4:17-5:21.

The rhetorical function which the unflattering image of gentile life serves here is that of exaggerating its radical difference from walking with Christ. It serves to distance not only in time but in spirit, these gentile Christ-followers from the life and patterns of living they formerly practised. Yes, what the author says may resonate with Jewish critiques of gentiles, but that is a secondary factor here in a pastoral concern that views distancing from former gentile life patterns as crucial to being joined in fellowship to Jewish Christ-followers<sup>52</sup> whether in one household or in other parallel households. It is for this reason that, in sharp contrast to

previous concerns for unity, the *sun*-compounds are used negatively in 5:7: do not associate with (the sons of disobedience) and 5:11: do not share in (these works of darkness).

In the limitation of *ekklēsia* to refer only to the universal church we have clear indication that thinking on this theme has developed substantially since Paul's day.

The church is an established fact, and it is only its composition and identity that still require construction and/or elaboration. The frequent imagery of buildings' construction is not accidental but pointedly focuses attention on process rather than product. And yet, despite the unified concept of the church, there is much vagueness and possibly deliberate imprecision as to the actual house churches or assemblies addressed. It is most likely that there were a number of varied groups in loose association with each other. The author's use of varying metaphors denoting unity in diversity as e.g. the one body, the one household of God and the one universal *ekklēsia* are symptomatic of a need for diverse groups to acknowledge what they have in common, rather than the distinctions and enmity that divide them.

Thus we are led to the hypothesis that Ephesians, like Romans,<sup>53</sup> though addressed to gentiles in Christ, nevertheless envisages contacts with synagogues or household assemblies of Jewish Christ-followers. Even if there were a few Jews among the Christ-followers this would not be adequate to account for the emphasis upon oneness, stressed so powerfully throughout Ephesians. If, on the other hand, there were no Jewish assemblies of any kind in the region around, then the emphasis upon Jew and gentile being one would have no real social significance.<sup>54</sup>

But if we posit for Ephesians, rather, a context with varieties of Christ-groups, then the references to unity and the *sun* language indicating joint association are given more validity. The 'we' in Eph. 1:2 would then refer to Jewish Christians in association with the author (usually regarded as being himself Jewish), whilst the 'you' would indicate the gentile addressees. The Jewish roots of the church are thus taken as given, and not only in the sense of events in the past with present significance. At times and places it would have been politic to emphasize Christian distinction from Jews, but at others it was wise to keep silent and allow the civic and/or the Roman authorities<sup>55</sup> to determine how they were to be labelled.<sup>56</sup>

This seems to be the situation reflected in Ephesians. There seems at places to be an almost complete appropriation of Jewish identity by Christians despite a gentile majority church membership. This could serve the function of encouraging Jewish Christ-followers to feel at home in the gentile majority Ephesian households.<sup>57</sup> It could also help to justify the existence of Christian sub-groups under the umbrella of Jewish identity, whether temporarily or for a longer period. The text of Ephesians taken along with the envisaged context of Ephesus around 90 CE indicates a strong Jewish milieu for the gentile believers who are the main addressees. Far from being indifferent to Jews whether inside or outside the church, Israel is presented as central to the identity of the believers.<sup>58</sup>

The church in Ephesus, though mainly gentile, appears to have both past and present associations with Jews and Jewish institutions, and may even also sometimes be associated with Jews by outsiders. It is entirely plausible to presume that the gentile Christ-followers continue to share some aspects of community life with their fellow-Jewish believers. It may also be plausible that whereas in an earlier period, the acceptance of gentiles qua gentiles was the issue, it may be that

now the issue may concern the acceptance of Jewish Christians qua Jews.<sup>59</sup>

The reference to 'winds of doctrine promoted by cunning'(4:14) and the exhortation in 5:11, not to be co-participants in unfruitful works of darkness" would suggest that there is much diversity in Ephesus and that the addressees of the letter are not immune to influences whether from within or outside of the Christ communities. The fact that the *sun*-compounds previously used positively recur in 5:11 in negative form might again suggest a relation to differing groups rather than merely to individuals.<sup>60</sup> Thus boundaries may still be permeable and group designations ambiguous as the process of identity construction in face of the Empire and in relation to Israel continues.<sup>61</sup> Acceptance and recognition at the social level of widely differing groups of Christian or Jewish assemblies in the Christ movement may be causing problems,<sup>62</sup> not the least of these being animosity from gentiles who were tending to find their social acceptance with their own ethnic groups outside the Church.

We need to be cautious in interpreting the 'two become one' simply as evidence of the strife of an earlier era.<sup>63</sup> As already noted above, the announcement of reconciliation achieved is more likely also meant as an impetus towards contemporary reconciliation, and an indication that enmity has not been entirely overcome. The affirmation that Jews and gentiles are one in Christ does not mean this is an accomplished fact but might well imply the opposite.<sup>64</sup> We have argued that this is borne out by the fact that the one new *anthrōpos* announced in 2:15 refers to the purpose of God in Christ, rather than to an already completed project. We have found here a community under construction and a corresponding constructing of identity in Christ. The work of Christ has achieved reconciliation in principle between Jew and gentile and a new humanity of Jews and gentiles reconciled in Christ is being created, but rather than having being achieved, it is still very much in process. For this reason alone, Jewish and gentile identities are not factors only of the past.

### **Being in Christ and Israelite Identity**

Christian identity is not a substitute for previous Jewish and gentile identities. As Esler claims, '... belief in Christ was made additional to, not in substitution for, Israelite law and identity.'<sup>65</sup> The church is not equated with Israel. There is no sign in Ephesians that the author sets out to undermine Jewish identity. He does not perceive this negative foil to be necessary for the creation of specifically Christian identity. He is self-conscious in the use of ethnic related terms, so he is by no means ethnically naive. He favours Israelite and Israelite related identity and there is no doubt concerning the central role of Christ and being in Christ. But there is no sign that a negation of Judaism is essential to the affirmation of a distinctive Christian identity. The Israelite symbolic universe is foundational to his thinking and Christ is not depicted in opposition to it. If we demand a negation of Jewishness, we must import this somehow into the text because the text presents Israelite identity as central and it is contradictory then to try to negate 'Israeliteness'. Likewise if gentiles are presented as joint-heirs with Israelites, this cannot refer merely to their being built on apostles and prophets as something in past history. Israelite identity cannot at one and the same time be presented as foundational, and simultaneously undermined, since it is in this direction gentiles are to proceed.

On this scenario, circumcision and uncircumcision are not indifferents for this author. Like Paul, he recognizes their reality and ongoing presence. But also like

Paul, he does not envisage the church as a third group neither Jewish nor gentile, but has rather developed the work of Christ in an ethnically significant direction,<sup>66</sup> so that the two are not confused, their past or present identities, however qualified, are not entirely negated,<sup>67</sup> but the new association, the church, in which they glimpse a new humanity in Christ is now paramount.

The silence concerning relations with Jews whether inside or outside the church cannot be interpreted as indifference to circumcision or uncircumcision. It would be difficult on the basis of Ephesians alone to envisage the 'one new *anthrōpos*' in isolation from Israel. In fact, Israel's place in the symbolic universe of the text is simply presupposed. It is presumed that gentiles, whilst remaining gentiles, instead of creating a new humanity in opposition to, or displacement of, Israel must develop a deeper understanding of their links with Israel and thus a more Israelite-related identity, though they are never identified as co-Israelites. The new *anthrōpos* is thus new in the specific sense that difference is no longer a cause of hostility but a cause for celebration.

Most significant is the role played by Paul in Ephesians. He is celebrated as the recipient of a profound mystery hitherto unrevealed; the content of this mystery is that the gentiles are fellow heirs through the gospel. As the author looks back to Paul, who identified himself as an Israelite, he writes that what Paul's mission was to accomplish was not to make the gentiles Israelites like himself, but co-heirs as gentiles with Israel. If Paul's mission had been described as making the gentiles into Israelites, then it would follow that this Jewish and gentile combination could be a displacement of historic Israel. But one cannot be a joint heir with Israel if Israel is an entity only of the past. This is not the case since 2:22 claims, 'you are being built up (*sunoikodomeisthe*) into a dwelling of God by the Spirit'. As Gombis asserts, 'just as triumphant deities in the ANE had temples or palaces built in their honour, so here in Eph.2 the triumphs of the exalted cosmic Lord Christ are memorialized with the building of his temple, the people of God made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers'.<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

The movement we have noted in and through this text is not one away from Israelite inheritance and identity, but one in which this is positively recognized in groups with a developed ethnic consciousness due to their impingement upon one another both in the past and in the present. The preferred identity which the author seeks to construct is one based on resolution of ethnic enmity by depicting Christ as the peace-maker between those who are alienated from one another due to ethnically significant issues. His solution is not to downplay ethnic awareness or to ignore the hostility usually associated with it, but to seek resolution in that reconciliation and peace with difference, which he presents as the outcome of the Christ-event.

For those of us who were born or reside in Northern Ireland, the vision of Christ as peace-maker between divided communities, as the one who truly can remove the enmity and hostility associated with abiding differences-whether in religious, political or cultural affiliation, the letter to the Ephesians has something significant to say. Christ does not merely bring peace of mind, psychological well-being, but *shalom*, the total health and well-being of being right with God and finding peace even with enemies. To depict the peace that Christ enables merely as a sentimental, internalized emotion experienced only in worship, is to deny the gospel of Christ and its power to transform even the most depraved societies

or individuals. 'He is our peace' can be a real political challenge, as dedicated groups and individuals of differing persuasions have already demonstrated in the last three decades without concern for their own welfare. It is a real political and social peace that Christ enables and, moreover, demands of those who truly belong to His kingdom. This cannot be a one-sided peace, favouring one group over another, but must take account of the ethnic/cultural differences that cause hostility and end in death and destruction. As Eph 1-2 indicates, through the power of Christ hostility arising from difference can be turned into a cause of celebration of the blessings of God in Christ.<sup>69</sup>

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## Notes

- 1 In the ancient world the Enlightenment concept of religion as a separate realm of human experience was not recognized, and one's geographical location was crucial in the depiction of identity. See Esler's excellent discussion of this issue, giving

preference to terming 'Jews' of New Testament times as Judeans, (2003): 64-71. For further discussion of this issue, see my 2006:3-10.

- 2 See Deming 2003:387 (384-403)
- 3 On the concentration on the root 'καί' in this passage and in 1 Cor. generally see Roetzel 1995: 211-33 and my response (1995: 234-54).
- 4 The differences between Ephesians and the generally accepted Pauline letters are numerous. The concept of the church as the church universal (as distinct from local churches) is one of the most obvious, but the distinct vocabulary of Ephesians with some 90 words not found elsewhere in Paul's undisputed letters and some 40 words not found elsewhere in the New Testament is also significant. On authorship etc. see Best 1998: 2 and Lincoln 1990: lxxxi-lxxxii. John Muddiman notes that 'Ephesians uses slightly different words in the same sense as Paul and the same words in slightly different senses from Paul'. This acknowledgement does not prevent Muddiman claiming that 'there are fragments in Ephesians of what Paul originally wrote to the Laodiceans alongside statements and omissions that he would not have made', 2001:298.
- 5 Kreitzer notes that an association is made in the *Testament of Solomon* between King Solomon as Temple-builder and the *akrogōniaios* as the focal point of the Temple's construction in a way similar to how Ephesians refers to Jesus Christ as the key component, the cornerstone, of the new temple, thus suggesting that the writer of Ephesians is deliberately associating him with the person responsible for the construction of the first Temple.(2005:505; 484-512).
- 6 Cf. Dahl 1986:37
- 7 See Olson 1994:151-53
- 8 Cf. Yee 2005:157. Yee argues that the stark depiction from a Jewish perspective of the depravity of gentile society is evidence of the effects of Jewish exclusivity upon Jew/gentile relations, thereby attributing the onus for enmity to Jews rather than to both groups, as I would prefer. He reads Ephesians as written from a Jewish world view where the 'far off' language of 2:13a echoes the view of the periphery as a place of negative extremes and the Jews as central (118)
- 9 Barth, 1957: 60,110
- 10 Ephesians 'seeks to impose a worldview which involves transformation of identity, resocialization, and increasing social distance from a non-Israelite heritage and culture', Skhul 2005 :10
- 11 'Ephesians... insists on the relation of "saved by faith" to the issue of "good works"'. (Paul's) doctrine of justification has been separated from the issue of the Jewish law and ethicized.' See Muddiman 2001:18
- 12 Cf Macdonald 2004: 421.
- 13 Trebilco 2004: 712-17
- 14 Cf. *Magnesians* 10:3, *Philadelphians* 6:1. On this see Campbell 2006:151 and Zetterholm 2002:203-8.
- 15 Kreitzer 2005:501
- 16 Kreitzer 2005: 500.
- 17 Kreitzer notes that in Solomon's petition there are references to foreigners who come to worship at the Temple in Jerusalem (found in 1Kings 8:41-43/2 Chron.6.32-33). These resonate via the Hebrew root *nokri* with Ephesians' references to *xenos* and *paroikos* (though a different word, *allogrios* is used in the LXX). In addition, 2 Chron. 6:32 speaks of these foreigners as coming from a land 'far away'. The description in 2 Chron. 6:33 of the Temple as 'your dwelling place' also uses the rare word *katoikētērion* (*theou* =) which is found in Eph. 2:22 for the dwelling place of God (and elsewhere only in Rev 18:2 in the NT) (Kreitzer:2005:501).
- 18 Kreitzer 2005: 502.
- 19 Cf. 'at one time' (2:11), 'at that time' (2:12), 'but now' (2:13), 'no longer' (2:19) 'no longer as the gentiles' (4:17)
- 20 As argued by Garlington 1991:253
- 21 Cf. Best 1993: 42. Cf also Lincoln 1981: xciii. See also Sanders 1983. Sanders asserts

that 'Paul's view of the church, supported by his practice, against his own conscious intention, was substantially that it was a third entity.' (178) The concept of a 'third race' is problematic. For the history of the concept see the thorough work by Rader 1978. It seems it is difficult to hold a theory of the church as a third entity beyond Jewish and Gentile identity without some vestiges of antijudaism. The attempt to rid the church of Jewish influence drove such aspirations in the Third Reich. As Jacob Meuzelaar maintains, 'an "abolition of all differences" in the body of Christ has in the past....again and again led to the "Christian" view that the Jew as Jew no longer has a right to existence' cited in Rader, 1978:223. Cf. also Campbell, 1992:110-16.

22 Cf. Rader: 1978: 171-72

23 Cf. Dahl.1986:35

24 'They and the Jews now share the same socio-political space.' (Yee 2005:197-98.) This might be significant if, as some interpreters argue, the aim of the letter is to emphasize to gentile Christians, tending to drift away from their roots, the Jewish context of their faith.

25 As Gerhardsson states in relation to decisions at the summit meeting at Jerusalem, 'This decision did not mean that two churches had been set up side by side....The Church, the apostolate and the gospel were regarded as being one. In support, we need only recall the vital importance of Paul's conviction that Christ is not "divided", and that the church is undivided in essence, and must therefore stand as a unity, though inclusive of diversity...' (1961:279). According to John 10:30, Jesus claims 'I and the Father are one', (*hen* as in Ephesians 2:14). But there could be no question in John, a text nearly contemporary with Ephesians, of the Father and the Son being confused in essence, or becoming the same, a point that seems not to be considered in relation to the two becoming one in Ephesians.

26 Yee:2005:166

27 Contra Yee, who holds that whilst the wall may refer to the *soreg* in the Temple, or the law *per se*, more likely it 'refers to the social barrier which is closely associated with some of the boundary markers used by the Jews to separate themselves from the gentiles', (2005:151)

28 We will not use the terms, new personality, new humanity, new man but instead retain the Greek word 'anthrōpos' transliterated, so that, as far as is possible, we do not read modern presuppositions into the text. Cf. Barth 1974:292 and 301-02. Barth does use 'new person', arguing that Gal. 3:28 should mean 'you are all one *person*, not one *thing* (meaning rather the bride of Christ). Thus Barth claims, 'The members of the church are not so equalised, leveled down or straight jacketed in a uniform, as to become a '*genus tertium*' that would be different from both Jews and Gentiles'.

29 Association with baptismal celebration might explain these emphases. Cf. Dahl:1986.31-39

30 As Tanner maintains regarding Christian identity (1997:124-25)

31 It is significant how words with the 'οικ' stem proliferate in Eph. In 2:19-22 alone there are no less than six occurrences to accentuate the new status of gentiles no longer as *paroikoi* (foreigners) but *oikeioi* (household members). Cf. Gombis 2004:417. Cf. also Horrell:2001: 305

32 In the Greco-Roman world, where one's culture was associated with citizenship in the *polis*, the use of the terms *xenoi* (aliens) and *paroikoi* (resident aliens) contrasts sharply those at the centre and those on the margins, thus serving unequivocally as 'signals and emblems of difference.' See Yee 2005:191-92 and Elliott 1990

33 Esler:2003:140

34 But see Finney's comment concerning 1 Corinthians, 'For Paul, the sheer paradox of the crucified Messiah becomes the paradigm for an identical paradoxical relation between life in the *ekklēsia* and the established structures of the Greco-Roman world-central to which was the seeking of honour, power and status.', ( 2005:20-33; 31); see also pp.29-30. For a comprehensive overview of this theme; see Carter

2006a

- 35 For a discussion of the possible meanings of 'powers' in Ephesians; see Yee, 2005:24-28
- 36 Cf. Macdonald, 2004:423 and 426 respectively.
- 37 This is a clearly intended contrast between the 'gospel' of the 'salvation' and 'peace and security' established by Augustus and his successors with that the peace achieved by Christ in line with the vision of *shalom* for Israel according to LXX Isaiah 57:19. On the Roman imperial ideology generally and its links with Pauline theology, see Finney 2005:27-31; Georgi 1997:92
- 38 See Reed 2006:93-106
- 39 For a history of the household code and its use in New Testament interpretation, see Bauman-Martin 2004:253-279. This article is critical of the thesis of Balch 1981 that the *Haustafel* form in general, and the Petrine code in specific was derived from an Aristotelian *topos* of 'household management' (*oikonomia*), which urged that the patriarchal household order must be maintained for purposes of state order, cf. esp. pp. 262-63. Bauman-Martin argues that whilst the codes of Hellenistic Judaism present the closest correlate to the *Haustafeln* (262), the codes should not be grouped together, but each read in context, (263 n.37) following Elliott 1990:210.
- 40 The association of the term *atheos*, a *hapax legomena* in the New Testament, with civic loyalty is found in Josephus's *Against Apion*. Macdonald suggests that it is quite feasible that the term may have been applied to church members as early as the first century by outsiders who perceived that the movement was closely associated if not co-terminus with Judaism. She considers that the unusual use of the term to refer to the past life of believers may reflect a response to non-believers who had previously applied the label to church members, (2004:430-32).
- 41 'The picture that emerges is one of flexible and dynamic shifts in social posture in relation to a variety of forces, including the changing fate of Jewish communities in the empire.' (Macdonald, 2004:422).
- 42 On this see my chapter on 'The Tripartite Context: Paul's Mission between State and Synagogue' 2006: 68-85.
- 43 For a careful study of the origins and development of the Roman imperial cult and the differences in its form and expression between the east and the west; see Finney 2005:21-26
- 44 Carter maintains that there was no such concept as a *religio licita*, 2006b.
- 45 Another difference between the image of the body in Paul's generally accepted letters and in Colossians/Ephesians is that in these, the head and the body are distinguished, i.e as two distinct entities.
- 46 The negative use of *sun*-compounds in 5:7 and 5:11 indicates an intensification in the emphasis on separation from the pagan world, reflecting some similarities with Qumran. Cf. Perkins 1997:147. And yet Ephs is not advising withdrawal like Qumran. Singing and worshipping continue without advice to hide (despite some insecurity), advocating wisdom in the world rather than separation from it. Cf Macdonald, 2004:428
- 47 Cf. Perkins 1997:71
- 48 Muddiman:2001:35 (following Koester 1982)
- 49 Muddiman:2001:120
- 50 In order to guarantee their survival, Christ-followers would be involved in the same cultural negotiations as Jews, with the added complication that they may have operated either as a sub-group within the Jewish community or as a *collegia* subject to the rules governing such groups. On this see Ascough's view that, 'although there is no one association inscription that has all the features of either Philippians or 1Thessalonians (and thus no one association that is exactly the same), the comparative process reveals that on the social map of antiquity the associations provide a ready analogue for understanding the community structure of Paul's Macedonian Christian communities' (2003:190).

- 51 As e.g Macdonald, 2004:436-37
- 52 There arises an issue here as to the identity of 'the saints' or 'the holy ones' with whom the gentiles become fellow-citizens, cf 2:19 and 3:6. Paul describes the collection as 'aid for the saints', *diakonōn tois hagiois* (cf. the general references in Acts 9) This reference indicates Jewish Christ-followers in Jerusalem. Does Ephesians also sometimes use the term ambiguously in order to be as inclusive as possible? In 2:19, it seems most reasonable to take this as a reference to Jewish Christ-followers, especially in light of the distinction between 'we who first hoped' and 'in whom you also...' of Ephesians 1:12-13. On this see Perkins 1997:70-71. Cf. also M. Shkul (2005) who claims that 'Ephesians articulates identity and social guidance in the absence of opponents while conflicts or internal power struggles within early Christianity are silenced', (2). Cf. also Trebilco 2004: 554-569
- 53 On this see my chapter 1995:259-86. Cf. also Best 1993:13. Although he does not support this reading of Ephesians 1:1, Best notes that the positioning of 'in Christ Jesus' in the sentence... 'appears to imply the association of "saints" with Ephesus and "in Christ Jesus" with "faithful", so as to suggest two groups of recipients, "the saints" and "the faithful".'
- 54 Cf. K M Fischer 1973. Fischer seeks to avoid any suggestion of a 'third entity' that is neither Jewish nor gentile, but posits a specific post-Pauline context where gentiles are losing the vision of Paul and were in danger of repudiating Jewish tradition which needed to be reasserted, ( 1973:79-81).
- 55 See Wilson, 1991:9-16, Macdonald, 2004:429-30.
- 56 Labelling can be both a labelling by outsiders, and also a projection of a group's preferred identity, involving some self-labelling in keeping with the perception of identity creation as self-conscious. Shkul concludes that 'naming involves ingroup identification of saints as well as defining outsiders, 'non-Israelite sinners' and 'the circumcised' who are allocated stereotypical roles in promoting Christianness and in group identity', (2005:8).
- 57 Cf. Roetzel 1991:142-43
- 58 Cf Macdonald, 2004:434
- 59 Cf. Roetzel, 1991:142
- 60 The negative use of *sunkoinōneite* in 5:11 echoes the positive use in Rom. 11:17 (referring to the gentile and Jewish branches sharing in the one tree).
- 61 As Macdonald notes, '...under Domitian's reign the fate of members of the *ekklēsia* may have changed depending on whether they were being viewed as Jews, apostate Jews or as distinctly "Christian" and at times there may have been advantages to being viewed as one, but not the other', (2004:442).
- 62 W. Schmithals proposed that the letter's purpose may be 'to seal the acceptance by the gentile Christians from the Pauline communities of their Christian brothers who came from the synagogue and also at the same time to acquaint the latter with the Pauline tradition' (1983:122). Alternatively, as Muddiman suggests, the motivation for our present Ephesians, may be the reconciliation of Pauline and Johannine Christian groups, (2001:37-41).
- 63 See Kittredge (1998:146-49), contra Dahl 2000: 446. Trebilco claims that the drawing of internal boundaries within the Christian movement was a feature among groups at Ephesus, 2004:716.
- 64 Muddiman:2001: 19
- 65 Cf. Esler 2003:276
- 66 Cf. Yee, 'The author's skill consisted of his ability to draw into use the technical language of ancient political rhetoric in such a way that he could speak of Christ as a fervent campaigner whose ultimate aim is to create a mankind which is in concord by bringing to an end human enmity and estrangement', 2005:170.
- 67 Cf. Dahl: 1986:34
- 68 2004: 403-418
- 69 This paper is written in appreciation of Professor J.C. McCullough's work in Union Theological College, N. Ireland and in gratitude for his help in translating into

English (for private use) J. Munck's *Christus und Israel* when we were just commencing postgraduate research. It was presented at a weekly public lecture at the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies on 25 September 2007 and has been published by permission of Professor J. C. McCullough from *Irish Biblical Studies*.

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