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MAIN THEMES IN PAULINE THEOLOGY

1. Who did Paul think he was?

1.1 The Second Founder of Christianity?

There were three absolutely crucial figures in the first generation of Christianity – Peter, Paul, and James the brother of Jesus. Of these, Paul probably played the most significant role in shaping Christianity. Prior to Paul what we now call ‘Christianity’ was no more than a messianic sect within first century Judaism, or better, within Second Temple Judaism – ‘the sect of the Nazarenes’ (Acts 24.5), the followers of ‘the Way’ (that is, presumably, the way shown by Jesus).¹ Without Paul this messianic sect might have remained a renewal movement within Second Temple Judaism and never become anything more than that. Almost certainly that is how James would have preferred the new movement to remain. Peter may have been more ambivalent – somewhere in between James and Paul, a bridge-figure perhaps, a *pontifex* indeed. But it was Paul who transformed this new Jewish sect which believed Jesus to be Messiah into something more. Paul’s mission *was the single most important development in the first decades of Christianity’s history*. Paul’s mission and the teaching transmitted through his letters did more than anything else to transform embryonic Christianity from a messianic sect, quite at home within Second Temple Judaism, into a religion hospitable to Greeks, increasingly Gentile in composition, and less and less comfortable with the kind of Judaism which was to survive the ruinous failure of the two Jewish revolts against Rome (66-73, 132-135 CE).

The crucial impact of Paul’s work was made during his mission in the Aegean, recounted in Acts 16-20. For one thing it marked a decisive shift *westwards*. This development alone was sufficient to shift the centre of gravity in earliest Christianity from Jerusalem and the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean towards the metropolitan centres of Asia Minor, Greece and then Rome. For another, the churches founded by Paul were increasingly *Gentile*, non-Jewish, in membership. These two factors alone might have been sufficient to ensure the transformation of a Jewish sect into a predominantly Gentile religion. But in the longer term the third reason was even more decisive. For *it was during his Aegean mission that Paul wrote most of his letters* – almost certainly his most important letters, but possibly *all* the letters which can be attributed to Paul himself.² Paul’s letters are the only Christian writings which can assuredly be dated to the first generation (thirty-five years) of Christianity. And it is these letters which ensured that Paul’s legacy would continue to influence and indeed to give Christianity so much of its definitive character.

In other words, the eight or so years of Paul’s Aegean mission stand alongside the three years of Jesus’ own mission, the first two or three years of the Jerusalem church’s existence and the initial of the new sect expansion led by the Hellenists.³ Like these earlier periods, the period of Paul’s mission was absolutely crucial for Christianity’s existence and enduring character. And it is Paul’s Aegean mission and its lasting outcome, in terms of both churches established and letters composed and

¹ Acts 9.2; 19.9, 23; 22.4; 24.14, 22.

² Certainly 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 (and 2) Thessalonians, probably Galatians, and possibly Philippians, Colossians and Philemon are all to be dated to Paul’s Aegean mission.

³ Acts 6-8; 11.19-26.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

circulated, which makes appropriate the title sometimes accorded to Paul – ‘the second founder of Christianity’. This title was first given to Paul at the beginning of the twentieth century, initially with some degree of disparagement: ‘the second founder of Christianity’ who has ‘exercised beyond all doubt the stronger – not the better – influence’ than the first (Jesus).⁴ But it has been revived more recently as a way of giving proper recognition of the debt which Christianity owes to Paul.⁵ And as a title it is deserved not because Paul was the first to preach the gospel to Gentiles, or the first to preach Christ in Rome, or the first to break out from the matrix of Second Temple Judaism; but because *it was Paul’s mission which made it impossible for Gentile believers to be retained within the traditional forms of Judaism, and because his writings became the most influential reinterpretations of the original traditions and forms of the new movement.*

Precisely because Paul stands at the fulcrum or transition point, where a Jewish messianic sect began to become something more, he is a controversial figure. For most Jews interested in Christianity’s origins, Paul is one who abandoned his past, and sold his birthright. He is a traitor to his people, an apostate from Israel, now a Christian and no longer a Jew. So we start by asking, Who did *Paul* think he was? How did he see his own role? How would Paul have thought of himself? How would Paul have introduced himself to a stranger?

There are a number of passages in his letters where Paul speaks in explicitly autobiographical terms. Apart from the self-introduction of his letters, where he describes himself most often as ‘Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ’, the most relevant are:

- Rom. 11.1 – ‘I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin’;
- Rom. 11.13 – ‘I am apostle to the Gentiles’;
- Rom. 15.16 – ‘a minister of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles, serving the gospel of Christ as a priest’;
- 1 Cor. 9.1-2 – ‘Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord? . . . If to others I am not an apostle, at least I am to you’;
- 1 Cor. 9.21-22 – ‘To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law (though not myself actually under the law) in order that I might win those under the law; to those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though not actually outside the law of God but in-lawed to Christ) in order that I might win those outside the law’;
- 1 Cor. 15.9-10 – ‘I am the least of the apostles, not worthy to be called an apostle . . . but by the grace of God I am what I am’;
- 2 Cor. 11.22 – ‘Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they seed of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? . . . I more’;
- Gal. 1.13-14 – ‘You have heard of my way of life previously in Judaism, that in excessive measure I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, and that I progressed in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my people, being exceedingly zealous for my ancestral traditions’;
- Gal. 2.19-20 – ‘I through the law died to the law . . . No longer I live, but Christ lives in me’;
- Phil. 3.5-8 – ‘circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss on account of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord’.

Four striking aspects of Paul’s self-identity come to vivid expression in these passages.

⁴ W. Wrede, *Paul* (London: Philip Green, 1907)180.

⁵ M. Hengel, and A. M. Schwemer, *Paul Between Damascus and Antioch* (London: SCM, 1997) 309.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

1.2 No longer ‘in Judaism’

Gal. 1.13-14 – ‘You have heard of my way of life *previously in Judaism*, that in excessive measure I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it, and that I progressed *in Judaism* beyond many of my contemporaries among my people, being exceedingly zealous for my ancestral traditions’.

It is clear from Gal. 1.13-14 that Paul regarded his ‘way of life within Judaism’ as something past. As a Christian, he would no longer describe himself as ‘in Judaism’. However, it is important to appreciate that the ‘Judaism’ referred to in Gal. 1.13-14 is not to be confused with what we today denote by the term ‘Judaism’ or describe as ‘Second Temple Judaism’. The historical term (‘Judaism’) was coined in the second century BCE to describe the Judeans’ spirited religio-nationalistic resistance to their Syrian rulers.⁶ It will be remembered that the regional Syrian superpower were attempting to enforce an empire-wide homogeneity of religion by suppressing the distinctives of Israel’s religion, particularly Torah, circumcision, and laws of clean and unclean. The Maccabean revolt resisted this to the death. And ‘Judaism’ was the term which emerged to denote this resistance. So 2 Macc. 2.21 describes the Maccabean rebels as ‘those who fought bravely *for Judaism*’. 8.1 describes their supporters as ‘those who had continued *in Judaism*’. And 14.38 describes the martyr Razis as one who had formerly been accused of *Judaism* and who had eagerly risked body and life ‘*on behalf of Judaism*’. Reflecting the same traditions, 4 Macc. 4.26 describes the attempt of the Syrian overlord Antiochus Epiphanes ‘to compel each member of the nation to eat defiling foods and to renounce *Judaism*’. So *Ioudaismos* was the term coined in the Maccabean period to denote the unyielding resistance which the Maccabees maintained against *hellēnismos* and *allophylismos* (‘foreignness’).⁷

Gal. 1.13-14 confirms that Paul used the term ‘Judaism’ with this same sense: the ‘way of life’ he described as ‘in Judaism’ was his life as a zealous Pharisee; the ‘way of life’ was marked by a readiness to persecute, even to destroy eveh fellow-religionists who (as we shall see) were considered to pose a threat to the holiness and distinctiveness of this ‘Judaism’. The same point emerges from Paul’s other look backwards – Phil. 3.5-6.

Phil. 3.5-8 – ‘circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ’.

Here too it is clear that what Paul had turned his back on and now regarded as so much ‘garbage’ (*ta skubala*) was particularly the same Pharisaic zeal and righteousness.⁸

So, the ‘Judaism’ Paul converted from was his zealous Pharisaism. Previously he had been as ‘zealous’ as Phinehas in Numbers 25 and as the Maccabees. That is, he had dedicated himself to safeguarding Israel’s holiness. Like them he had been willing to take violent action (persecution) against those who threatened Israel’s set-apartness to God. We will go into this in more detail in the third lecture.

It was this ‘zeal’, then, from which Paul had been converted, turned away from, by his encounter with the risen Christ on the Damascus road. So we can certainly say that as a result of his conversion and commission to serve as an ‘apostle of Jesus Christ’, as ‘apostle to the Gentiles’, Paul no longer thought of himself as belonging to ‘Judaism’. But in so saying, Paul was thinking

⁶ 2 Macc. 2.21; 8.1; 14.38.

⁷ 2 Macc. 4.13; 6.24.

⁸ *Ta skubala* can denote ‘excrement’ (BDAG 932).

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

only in terms of Pharisaic Judaism, that is, of the Pharisaic understanding of Israel's heritage, or in particular, of the zealous faction of what we today call Second Temple Judaism.

But can or should we say more? Had Paul, for example, ceased to think of himself as a Jew?

1.3 Paul the Jew?

If Paul no longer thought of himself as being 'in Judaism', does it not also follow that he no longer thought of himself as a Jew? For it is difficult to avoid an ethnic sense in the term 'Jew' (*Yehudi*, *Ioudaios*). The term, after all, derives from the region or territory known as 'Judea' (*Yehudah*, *Ioudaia*). And Paul remained ethnically Judean in origin, even though he had initially been brought up as a Judean living in the diaspora. It is true that for more than a century *Ioudaios* had been gaining a more religious (not dependent on ethnic) connotation – better translated as 'Jew' rather than 'Judean'.⁹ But recent discussions have concluded that ethnicity remained at the core of Jewish identity.¹⁰ So the question stands: How could Paul have left 'Judaism' behind without leaving behind his religious (or ethnic, or cultural) identity as a 'Jew'?

Something of the ambiguity in which Paul's identity was caught is indicated by two references in his letters. In Romans 2 Paul addresses his interlocutor as one who calls himself a 'Jew': '... you call yourself a Jew and rely on the law and boast of your relation to God' (2.17). But Paul then goes on to indicate his disapproval of the attitudes and conduct which he attributes to the interlocutor: 'If you call yourself a Jew ... (why) do you dishonour God by breaking the law? (2.17-24). Here he seems to distance himself from the 'Jew'. Yet in Galatians 2 Paul represents his rebuke to Peter at Antioch, and continues by appealing to Peter, 'We (two, you and I) are Jews by nature and not Gentile sinners' (2.15). In this case Paul's continuing identity as a 'Jew' was precisely the basis of his exhortation to Peter.

More striking is the fact that a few sentences later in Romans 2, Paul offers a definition of 'Jew' which removes the defining factor of Jewishness from what is outward and visible in the flesh (presumably ethnic characteristics as well as circumcision itself). This is what he says: 'For the Jew [we might translate "the true Jew", or "the Jew properly speaking"] is not the one visibly so, nor is circumcision that which is visibly performed in the flesh; but (the Jew) is one who is so in a hidden way, and circumcision is of the heart, in Spirit not in letter.¹¹ His praise comes not from men but from God' (2.28-29).¹² We should not conclude that Paul thereby disowned his Jewish identity. For

⁹ S. J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999) concludes that prior to the Hasmonean period *Ioudaios* should always be translated 'Judean', and never as 'Jew' (70-1, 82-106); the shift from a purely ethno-geographical term to one of religious significance is first evident in 2 Macc. 6.6 and 9.17, where for the first time *Ioudaios* can properly be translated 'Jew'; and in Greco-Roman writers the first use of *Ioudaios* as a religious term appears at the end of the 1st century CE (90-6, 127, 133-6).

¹⁰ J. M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE - 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996) 404. P. M. Casey, *From Jewish Prophet to Gentile God: The Origin and Development of New Testament Christology* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1991) similarly concludes his discussion on 'identity factors', that ethnicity outweighs all the rest (especially 14). Note also the observation of L. H. Schiffman, *Who was a Jew?* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1985), that 'Judaism is centred on the Jewish people, a group whose membership is fundamentally determined by heredity', and his argument that even heretics did not lose their 'Jewish status' (38, 49, 61).

¹¹ For detail see my *Romans* (WBC 34A; Dallas: Word, 1988) 123-4. The seer of Revelation uses similar language – Rev. 2.9 and 3.9.

¹² Note how Paul retains the word play from Gen. 29.35 and 49.8: in Hebrew, 'Jew' = *Yehudi*, and 'praise' = *hodah*. 'In popular etymology it [the patriarchal name Judah (*Yehudah*)] was often explained as the passive of *hodah* "(someone) praised" (J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* [AB 33; New York: Doubleday, 1993] 323). The pun, of course, would probably be lost on Paul's Greek-speaking audiences.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

in fact he was using the term 'Jew' in a positive way. Indeed, he immediately proceeds to affirm 'the advantage' of 'the Jew' in the very next sentence: 'What advantage has the Jew? . . . Much, in every way . . .' (3.1-2). Moreover, the contrast between outward appearance and inward reality is one which had been long familiar in the religion of Israel¹³ and more widely.¹⁴ At the same time, however, by switching the emphasis away from the outward and visible, Paul in effect was playing down the role of the term 'Jew' as an ethnic identifier. 'Jew' as a term denoting distinctiveness from the (other) nations was no longer relevant. On the contrary, the positive mark of 'the Jew' was nothing observable by others but was determined primarily by relationship with God.¹⁵ So a degree of ambiguity remains.

Even more striking is 1 Cor. 9.21-22, already cited.

To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order that I might win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law (though not myself actually under the law) in order that I might win those under the law; to those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though not actually outside the law of God but in-lawed to Christ) in order that I might win those outside the law.

The striking feature in this case is the fact that Paul, even though himself ethnically a Jew, could speak of *becoming* 'as a Jew'. Here, 'to become as a Jew' is obviously to follow the patterns of conduct distinctive of Jews, to 'judaize'.¹⁶ In other words, Paul speaks here as one who did not acknowledge 'Jew' as his own identity, or as an identity inalienable from his person as an ethnic Jew. Instead he treats 'Jew' almost as a *role* which he might assume or discard. The term denotes not so much an actual identity, an identity integral to him as a person, but rather an identity which could be taken on or put off as needs or circumstances demanded.¹⁷ Here again, therefore, it is clear that Paul wanted to disentangle the term 'Jew' from the narrower constraints of ethnicity, and to treat it more as denoting a code of conduct or a manner of living.¹⁸

In short, whereas Paul seems to have been willing to regard his time 'in Judaism' as past, he was nevertheless unwilling to abandon the term 'Jew' as a self-referential term. As a term marking off 'Jew' ethnically from 'Gentile', or 'Jew' culturally from 'Greek', it still had a functional role.¹⁹ As a term denoting an inner reality and relationship with God in which non-Jews could participate, it still had meaning to be cherished. But as a term giving the distinction between Jew and non-Jew any continuing religious validity, or as signifying a divine partiality towards the 'Jew', its role was at an end.²⁰

¹³ Cf. particularly Jer. 9.25-26.

¹⁴ See especially A. Fridrichsen, 'Der wahre Jude und sein Loeb: Röm. 2.28f.', *Symbolae Arctoe* 1 (1927) 39-49.

¹⁵ Note the similar argument regarding circumcision in Phil. 3.3: circumcision is reaffirmed, but redefined in terms of the work of the Spirit in the heart; see my 'Philippians 3.2-14 and the New Perspective on Paul', in *The New Perspective on Paul* (WUNT 185; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005; revised, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) ch. 22 (465-7).

¹⁶ The meaning of 'judaize' should not be confused by the 19th/20th century use of 'judaizer' to refer to Paul's Jewish opponents = Jews who wanted Gentile converts to become Jewish proselytes. The term was used at the time of Paul to denote the action of non-Jews living like Jews. See my *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) #27 n.255.

¹⁷ C. K. Barrett, *1 Corinthians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1968) 211.

¹⁸ Cassius Dio comments on the name 'Jews': 'I do not know how this title came to be given them, but it applies to all the rest of mankind, although of alien race, who affect [better 'emulate' – *zēlousi*] their customs' (37.17.1 – *GLAJJ* #406 = 2.349, 351).

¹⁹ Hence Paul's frequent use of the pairs, Jews/Greeks, Jews/Gentiles – Rom. 1.16; 2.9, 10; 3.9, 29; 9.24; 1 Cor. 1.22-24; 10.32; 12.13; Gal. 2.15.

²⁰ Hence Rom. 2.6-11; Gal. 3.28.

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

1.4 'I am an Israelite'

Apart from Gal. 2.15, Paul never called himself a Jew; and even there he uses the term only as a way of claiming common ground with Peter.²¹ Paul shows similar ambivalence with regard to other terms usually understood to denote national or cultural identity. In Phil 3.5 'Hebrew' is a status which he seems to consign to the rubbish bin – 'a Hebrew of the Hebrews, . . . But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ' (3.7-8). Yet in 2 Corinthians 11 Paul affirms his continuing identity as a 'Hebrew' in vigorous rejoinder to those who were operating in opposition to him in Corinth: 'Are they Hebrews?', he asks; and quickly affirms, 'So am I' (11.22). Evidently, there was something important about himself and his missionary role which could still be expressed by the term 'Hebrew', however foolish he thought it to continue investing too much significance in the term (11.21).

Membership of '*the tribe of Benjamin*' and descent from Abraham are caught in much the same ambivalence. The former seems also to be something once valued but now discarded as of lasting importance. Being of the tribe of Benjamin, once counted as 'gain', but now is regarded 'as loss on account of the Christ' (Phil. 3.5). Yet in Romans 11 the status is affirmed without disclaimer: 'I am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin' (11.1). And *descent from Abraham* ('of the seed of Abraham') is again strongly affirmed, albeit polemically in 2 Cor. 11.22, and similarly without qualification in Rom. 11.1. In the same polemical context Paul's identity as an '*Israelite*' is also asserted alongside his being a 'Hebrew' and 'of the seed of Abraham' (2 Cor. 11.22). And belonging to the race of Israel is part of the heritage discounted in Phil 3.5-7. But again 'I am an Israelite' is affirmed as self-identification *ex anima* and without qualification in Rom. 11.1.²²

What is striking about the Rom. 11.1 references is that the verse comes after Paul has attempted to redefine both who can be counted as 'Abraham's seed' (ch. 4; also Gal. 3), and what constitutes Israel as Israel (Romans 9). The identity of Israel is not defined or determined by physical descent. For the promise came through Isaac alone, and not through Ishmael, even though Ishmael too was a child of Abraham (9.7-9). Nor is it defined or determined by doing what the law requires, living like a Jew. For it was Jacob who was called, not Esau (Rom. 9.10-13). No, *the identity of Israel is defined and determined solely by the call of God*; 'the purpose of God in election operates not in terms of keeping the law but from him who calls' (9.12). And that calling includes Gentiles as well as Jews – all 'whom God calls' (9.24-26).²³ In so arguing, we should recognize that Paul was attempting a redefinition of 'Abraham's seed' and of 'Israel' which transcends (or should we say, absorbs) the ethno-religious distinction indicated by the contrast, Jew/Gentile.²⁴ The significance of Paul's self-identifying confession, 'I am an Israelite' (Rom. 11.1), therefore, becomes clear. That it includes an ethnic identification is not to be disputed. In the context of Paul's exposition in Romans 9-11 the point is hardly deniable. For he insists that in the end 'all *Israel* will be saved' (11.26), where 'Israel' must be the same Israel, the ethnic Jews, the great majority of whom were rejecting the gospel of Jesus Messiah (11.7-12, 25). Ethnic Israel continues to be 'beloved'; 'the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable' (11.28-29).

²¹ Only in Acts does Paul declare, 'I am a Jew' (Acts 21.39; 22.3).

²² Note also Rom. 9.4: Paul's kindred according to the flesh 'are [still] Israelites' – 'are', not 'were'; the covenant blessings (9.4-5) now enjoyed by believing Gentiles remain Israel's blessings.

²³ See my *Romans 537*; also *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark/Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 510-1.

²⁴ Note that in the climax of his argument in Romans (Rom. 9-11), Paul switches from the predominant Jew/Greek, Jew/Gentile usage ('Jew' appears nine times in Rom. 1-3) to predominant talk of 'Israel' (in Rom. 9-11, 'Israel' 11; 'Jew' 2); and that in Rom. 9-11 the topic is not 'Israel and the Church', as so often asserted, but solely 'Israel', that is, his people viewed from God's perspective (see my *Romans 520*; *Theology of Paul 507-8*).

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

So when Paul confesses, 'I am an Israelite' he is confessing an identity primarily and precisely as *determined by God*. It is a different kind of identity from the term 'Jew', where identity is expressed by making a distinction from other nations – Jew and not Gentile. And it is a different kind of identity from one determined by conformity to halakhic principles, as was to become the emphasis in rabbinic Judaism.²⁵ Rather, Paul's whole concern was to reassert Israel's identity as primarily determined by God and in relation to God, and thus as transcending ethnic and social distinctions and as absorbing ethnic and social diversity.

1.5 'In Christ'

Probably, however, we should allow our appreciation of how Paul thought of himself to be determined primarily by *frequency of usage*, rather than the few explicit self-references thus far reviewed. That directs us at once to Paul's pervasive use of the phrases 'in Christ' and 'in the Lord' in his letters. The phrase identifies by self-location, by indicating where one sets oneself, where one belongs. As such, it is Paul's primary reference point for understanding himself as well as his converts. The phrase 'in Christ' appears some 83 times in the Pauline corpus (61, if we exclude Ephesians and the Pastorals). Similarly, 'in the Lord' is used 47 times in the Pauline corpus (39, if we exclude Ephesians). And we should not forget the many more 'in him/whom' phrases with the same referent.²⁶ The term 'Christian' had recently been invented as a new word, a neologism to denote those deemed to be followers of the one known as '(the) Christ' (Acts 11.26). Paul never uses the term. But the phrase 'in Christ' at times does service in its place, and is often translated as 'Christian' in modern translations.²⁷ Its co-referent in corporate terms is the less frequently used, but obviously important talk of 'the body of Christ' (particularly Rom. 12.4-8 and 1 Cor. 12).²⁸

The importance of the self-understanding thereby encapsulated is indicated by two of the passages quoted earlier:

Gal. 2.19-20 – 'I through the law died to the law . . . No longer I live, but Christ lives in me';

Phil. 3.5-8 – 'circumcised the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what was gain to me, these things I have come to regard as loss on account of the Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss on account of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord'.

In both cases we see a shift in identity, or in what constitutes self-identity for Paul. He has 'died to the law' (Gal. 2.19), a phrase which epitomizes Paul's conversion. As a result of his conversion he had abandoned what he had previously valued about and for himself (Phil. 3.4-6) – his ethnic identity, his righteousness as a Pharisee, his zealous defence of Israel's covenant prerogatives, his faithful observance of the law. As a consequence of his encounter with Christ, he counted all that as so much 'garbage' (3.8) in comparison with what now really mattered to him.²⁹ And what really

²⁵ See C. T. R. Hayward, *Interpretations of the Name Israel in Ancient Judaism and some Early Christian Writings* (Oxford University, 2005) 355.

²⁶ Full details in my *Theology of Paul* #15.2 (with bibliography). See also C. J. Hodge, 'Apostle to the Gentiles: Constructions of Paul's Identity', *BibInt* 13 (2005) 270-88.

²⁷ See e.g. BDAG 327-8 gives various instances where the phrases can be treated as periphrases for 'Christian' (328); see further *Theology of Paul* 399 n.48.

²⁸ *Theology of Paul* 405-6, but noting the variation in usage (n.76). See further below #4.

²⁹ See more fully my 'Philippians 3.2-14 and the New Perspective on Paul': 'The sharpness of the contrast is not so much to denigrate what he had previously counted as gain, as to enhance to the highest degree the value he now attributes to Christ, to the knowledge of Christ, and to the prospect of gaining Christ' (*New Perspective on Paul* 475).

INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR ON SAINT PAUL

Ariccia, 19-29 April 2009

mattered now was to ‘gain Christ’, to ‘be found in Christ’ (3.8-9), to ‘know Christ’ (3.8, 10), to become like Christ in death as well as resurrection (3.10-11). Alternatively expressed, ‘Christ in him’ was now the determining and defining character of his living (Gal. 2.20). Similarly in Rom 8.9-11 Paul comes as close as he ever does to providing a definition of a Christian, of what determines whether a person ‘belongs to Christ’ – ‘If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, that person does not belong to him’ (8.9). The indwelling Spirit, or alternatively, ‘Christ in you’ (8.10), is what determines Christian status.³⁰ That was what now determined Paul as a person, his values, his objectives, and his identity. The other identifiers need not and should not be entirely discounted and devalued. But in comparison with being ‘in Christ’ nothing else really counted for anything very much at all.

One indicator of the shift in Paul’s self-understanding is given by the transition from Romans chapter 11 to chapter 12. For in Rom. 9-11, as already noted, the concern was exclusively with Israel, including his hopes for ethnic Israel. But in Romans 12 the first social context within which Paul wanted his readers/hearers to recognize and affirm themselves was *the body of Christ* (12.3-8).³¹ We will again return to this in lecture 4. Here we need simply to note that for Paul the community called out and constituted by Christ was to be the primary reference by which Christians’ identity and mode of living were determined. Paul would hardly have thought otherwise about himself, as his ‘in Christ/Lord’ language clearly indicates.

1.6 A changing identity

‘Identity’ is a much used term today in attempts to achieve satisfactory self-definition. The problem is that it is a more slippery term than we often care to admit. Is a person’s identity defined or determined by his or her parents? By physical appearance? By place of birth and upbringing? By DNA? By memories? By education? By career? By likes and dislikes? By friends or family? The same person will have many identities – a son or daughter, a brother or sister or cousin, a father or mother, a colleague, a friend, and so on. So when we talk of Paul’s identity we could speak of his multiple identity – a Jew, an Israelite, a believer in Jesus Messiah, and more. Does one disqualify the other, make it any the less true?

What we can speak of is Paul’s *changing* identity. He no longer thought of himself as ‘in Judaism’. He was now ‘in Christ’. His self-understanding as a Hebrew, as of the tribe of Benjamin, as a Jew, was more ambivalent, not valued by him as he had previously valued them. His identity as one of the seed of Abraham, as an Israelite was still highly valued but had been redefined.

And when we ask the question, ‘Who did Paul think he was?’, the simplest answer is the phrase he used evidently of himself in 2 Cor. 12.2 – ‘a person in Christ’.³² He had not ceased to be an ethnic Jew, but no longer counted that as definitive of his relation to God, and therefore of his identity. The key factor for Paul himself, was that his identity was primarily determined by his relationship to Christ, even though that did not entirely deny the value of his other identities (particularly as a circumcised Jew). Gal. 3.28 sums up Paul’s position clearly: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; there is no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’.

³⁰ See also A. du Toit, “‘In Christ’, “in the Spirit” and Related Prepositional Phrases: Their Relevance for a Discussion on Pauline Mysticism’, *Focusing on Paul: Persuasion and Theological Design in Romans and Galatians* (BZNW 151; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007) 129-45.

³¹ See further my *Romans 703; Theology of Paul* 534-5, 548.

³² That Paul intended a self-reference at this point is almost universally agreed among commentators.

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All this is of continuing relevance not only for our understanding of Paul, but for our understanding of Christian identity. For Paul did more to define the identity of *Christianity* than any other contributor to the New Testament. Indeed, Paul himself embodies and expresses Christian identity as no one else does. For Christianity and Christians generally must never be allowed to forget

- that Christianity came out of the religion of Israel – that within the purposes of God Christians belong with Israel;
- that Jesus is only Jesus Christ as Israel's Messiah;
- that all the first Christians were Jews;
- that two-thirds or three-quarters of the Christian Bible are Israel's scriptures;
- and that the saving promise of God fulfilled in and through Christ is the promise God made to Abraham.

So we Christians can only understand *ourselves* in the terms given us by the Hebrew Bible, by the Jewish scriptures – that is, in Jewish terms. *The Jewishness of Christianity is integral to Christianity*. And it is Paul who wrestles most effectively with the tensions and questions which Christianity's Jewishness continues to raise for us. As Paul wrestled with what it meant to be a Jew who believed in Jesus Messiah, so must we wrestle with what it means to be a Gentile who believes in the Messiah of Israel. As Paul wrestled with the issue of what is central in Israel's heritage and what continued to be the Word of God for him, so must we. And as Paul resolved these issues, so far as he did resolve them, by making the key defining factor the purpose of God and the relationship with Christ, so may we learn to resolve the issues which plague us by the same priorities. Not tradition, not Church, not even Scripture, is the primary test of Christian identity, of belonging to Christ, but only being 'in Christ'.