

How Jewish Is God? Divine Ethnicity in Paul's Theology

PAULA FREDRIKSEN

augfred@bu.edu

The Hebrew University, Jerusalem 91905, Israel

*For E. P. Sanders,
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Paul and Palestinian Judaism*

Land, language, family connection, gods: these were the prime markers of ancient ethnicity, both for pagans and for Jews. Ethnicity, like divinity, was a category that spanned heaven and earth: gods and their humans formed family groups, and gods often shared in the ethnicity of the peoples who worshiped them. In this regard, the Jewish god was no exception. What was exceptional was the Jewish god's claims to cross-ethnic supremacy: at the end of days, the gods of the nations as well as their peoples would acknowledge Israel's god alone. Paul's gospel to τὰ ἔθνη ("the nations") coheres completely with this Jewish eschatological paradigm, and the Jewish identity of Paul's god illumines essential aspects of Paul's language of gentile ἀγιασμός ("separateness, sanctification") and υἰοθεσία ("adoption as sons").

Divine ethnicity might seem like a strange idea, but in Greco-Roman antiquity, gods often shared the ethnicity of the peoples who worshiped them. In this regard, the Jewish god was no exception. What *was* odd, in the view of their

E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress; London: SCM, 1977) revolutionized New Testament studies. That great book began the serious academic retrieval of Second Temple Judaism as the defining context, in positive ways, of Paul's life and work. Thank you, Ed, for your moral summons, as well as for your enduring intellectual achievement.

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non-Jewish contemporaries, was the Jews' insistence that their particular god was *also* the universal god, the highest god, the supreme god. Even odder was the claim of some Jews of apocalyptic bent: the Jewish god, they said, would ultimately be worshiped by ethnic others, both human and divine.

This idea of linked ethnicity, human and divine, illumines essential aspects of Paul's gospel to the gentiles. Foreign gods, Paul says, will "bend knee" to the returning Davidic messiah and, thus, to his father, the god of Israel (Phil 2:10, presumably at or after the parousia; cf., e.g., Ps 97:7). Pagan peoples (τὰ ἔθνη), through holy πνεῦμα, will be both set apart ("sanctified") and provided with new lineage—thus, with a new family. Further, and ultimately, they will be "ruled" by the "root of Jesse," that is, by the eschatological Davidic messiah (Rom 15:12, Isa 11:10). Moreover, like their gods, all the nations will also worship the god of Israel. Before turning to Paul's vision of redemption in Christ, however, we must consider, first, ancient ideas of ethnicity; second, the Jewish ethnicity of Israel's god; and, third, the ways that the Greek translation of Jewish scriptures accommodated ancient Mediterranean ideas about divine multiplicity.

I. DIVINITY, ETHNICITY, AND MULTIPLICITY

The simplest way to articulate the idea of ancient constructs of ethnicity is to list some of the relevant vocabulary: γένος ("people, family, race"); ἔθνος ("people group"); συγγένεια ("kinship"); συγγενεῖς ("kinfolk"); gens ("family"); domus/oἶκος ("household"); mos maiorum, fides patrum, παραδόσεις τῶν πατέρων, ἔθνη, τὰ πάτρια ἔθνη, τὰ πάτρια ("ancestral custom"); πατρίς ("fatherland"). These words, taken together, express a concept cluster connecting blood relations (family), shared customs, inherited protocols for showing respect to gods (what we might refer to—cautiously!—as "religion"), and ancestral land or locality.

Συγγένεια—"kinship"—also served as a term for citizenship: citizens of a city were imagined as members of the same γένος (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 12.3.2 §§125–126, also stressing the connection to gods). This family connection extended not only horizontally, between citizens of the Hellenistic polis; it also extended vertically, between heaven and earth. Greek and Roman gods were known to have taken human sexual partners, from whose progeny whole human populations might descend. Sometimes the fruit of these unions might be the founder of a city. (Venus, Aeneas, and Rome provide a familiar example.) Sometimes this divine descent might extend to other citizens.¹ Sometimes ancestor-gods glittered in the family

¹For example, as evinced in the Roman claim to be "Aeneadae." For discussion, with sources, see Christopher P. Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy in the Ancient World*, Revealing Antiquity 12 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 12, 154 n. 16. He notes that this "belief that such [divine] heroes were also the ultimate ancestors of cities or nations was widespread in Greek thought, and was then taken up by the Romans" (12).

tree of important political figures and dynasties.² In war, the gods of the vanquished were bested by the gods of the victors—a natural extension of this idea that gods and humans formed family groups.³

These junctures between heaven and earth were conceived so concretely that they served as the basis for intercity diplomacy. Citizens of two different cities might trace their genealogies—or, in our view, generate them—back to common divine ancestors. This ancient family link then served to stabilize current intercity agreements. A Jewish refraction of this practice of kinship diplomacy remains in 1 and 2 Maccabees, repeated by Josephus. Thanks to Heracles's relationship with a granddaughter of Abraham, Judeans and Spartans established diplomatic *συγγένεια* (1 Macc 12:21; 2 Macc 5:9; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.15 §§240–241). “After reading a certain document,” announces a Spartan king to the Jewish high priest, “we have found that Judeans and Lacedaemonians are of one γένος, and share a connection [οἰκειότης] with Abraham” (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.4.10 §226).

Hellenistic and early Roman cities, in short, were not secular spaces. They were family-run religious institutions.³ Much of the city's activity that we might consider “cultural” or “athletic” or “political”—competitions in rhetoric or in foot racing, theatrical performances, spectacles, meetings of the city council (the βουλή or the curia)—were dedicated to the presiding god(s). Keeping gods happy went a long way toward protecting the common weal. Jews who were citizens of these cities were accordingly and occasionally placed in an awkward situation: because of the liturgical peculiarities of their own god, their showing respect to their “other gods,” the gods of their cities, could present problems. Were they part of the urban γένος or not? If they were, then why did they not worship the same gods (Josephus, *C. Ap.* 2.6 §65; cf. *Ant.* 12.3.2 §§125–126)?

Jewish sources both Hebrew and Greek, as well as pagan sources, express ethnicity through this concept cluster aligning heaven and earth. A prime example occurs in Gen 10, supplemented by Deut 32:8–9.⁴ Right after the flood and the

²Alexander the Great descended from Heracles, as did the family of Ptolemy; Julius Caesar and the Julii, through Aeneas, famously enjoyed a connection to the goddess Venus; the Seleucids claimed descent from Apollo. In *Kinship Diplomacy*, Jones provides a fascinating discussion of the generation, and diplomatic manipulation, of these various human-divine household groups.

³That gods were defeated when their humans were was an extension of the normal identification of peoples and pantheons: we hear echoes of this idea in those Christian apologies that insist on the high status of Israel's god despite the Jews' defeat by Rome. Speaking in the voice of a skeptical pagan, Christian author Minucius Felix wrote, “The lonely and miserable nationality of the Jews worshiped one god, peculiar to itself; and he has so little force or power that he is enslaved, with his own special nation, to the Roman gods” (*Oct.* 10.4 [ANF]; cf. Tertullian, *Apol.* 26.3; cf. 25.14–16, on other defeated, ethnic gods; Origen, *Cels.* 4.32; Faustus apud Augustine, *Faust.* 15.1). Jews were themselves no less traumatized by the theological implications of military defeat; see Adiel Schremer, “The Lord Has Forsaken the Land: Radical Explanations of the Military and Political Defeat of the Jews in Tannaitic Literature,” *JJS* 59 (2008): 183–200.

⁴This paragraph draws on the fundamental study by James M. Scott, *Paul and the Nations*:

survival of Noah and his family, Gen 10 speaks of the renewal of humanity through Noah's three sons. The Table of Nations in this chapter traces out the descent of seventy "nations" (גוים/ἔθνη) "according to their lands, their languages, their families, and in their nations" (vv. 5, 20, 31). It is noteworthy that "gods" are conspicuously missing from this bundle of ethnic identifiers. At this point in the biblical narrative, other gods (אלהים) have yet to appear. In Deut 32:8–9, however, when Moses reprises this episode, he speaks of God's dividing humanity "according to the number of the gods" (NRSV).⁵

The relation of these lower gods to Israel's god is managed variously in biblical and extrabiblical antipagan polemics. Jubilees characterizes these superhuman beings as evil spirits who lead the nations astray; Wisdom of Solomon repeats invective against human-made representations of these beings, "idols." These anti-pagan polemics will not detain us here.⁶ The chief point to note, rather, is that, in biblical imagination, this clustering of gods, lands, languages, and human descent groups indicates ethnic distinctions between "the nations." Altogether, their global total—the πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν, as Paul says (Rom 11:25)—is seventy nations.

Herodotus (fifth century BCE) offers a similar concept cluster when defining τὸ Ἑλληνικόν, the ethnicity of "Greekness." He lists shared blood (ὄμμαιμον), a "family" and descent connection. Like the book of Genesis, he singles out language (ὁμόγλωσσον). The vertical silo of heaven/earth lines up around shared sanctuaries and sacrifices (θεῶν ἰδρύματα τε κοινὰ καὶ θυσίαι) and, governing these, the heritage of shared customs (ἤθηα ὁμότροπα; *Hist.* 8.144.2–3). Peoples are "ethnic," and so are their gods.⁷

The Old Testament and Jewish Background of Paul's Mission to the Nations with Special Reference to the Destination of Galatians, WUNT 84 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

⁵This verse has an intriguing textual backstory. The LXX gives "angels" as the divine appointees, ἀγγέλων θεοῦ echoing the בני אלהים ("sons of God") of 4QDeut^d, where the MT has בני ישראל ("sons of Israel"). In Jub. 15:31, these "ruling spirits" deceive the nations: they are descended from the watchers; cf. Jub. 10:2–9. See Paul Sanders, *The Provenance of Deuteronomy 32*, *OtSt* 37 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 154–60; on the plurality of divinities in Jewish scriptural traditions, see further William Horbury, "Jewish and Christian Monotheism in the Herodian Age," in *Early Jewish and Christian Monotheism*, ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Wendy E. S. North, *Early Christianity in Context* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 16–44 (see esp. 20–21 for many primary references in Jewish sources to "gods").

⁶For a full consideration of the vocabulary and polemical logic of Jewish texts coping with categorizing these superhuman powers while concerned "to assert the incomparable power of the high God" of Israel, see Emma Wasserman, "'An Idol Is Nothing in the World' (1 Cor 8.4): The Metaphysical Contradictions of 1 Corinthians 8.1–11.1 in the Context of Jewish Idolatry Polemics," in *Portraits of Jesus: Studies in Christology*, ed. Susan E. Myers, WUNT 2/321 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 201–27; quotation from 227. On the related issue of "monotheism" and "henotheism," see also n. 16 below.

⁷The cross-identification of gods seems to run in a cultural systole/diastole with these constructions of divine ethnicity (so similarly Jones, *Kinship Diplomacy*, 65): the Roman Jupiter took on characteristics of the Greek Zeus, images of Minerva replicated aspects of Athena, and

My third example of ancient constructs of ethnicity comes from the apostle Paul, Rom 9:3–5. In this passage Paul lists the identifiers of *his* kinship group, Israel, his συγγενεῖς. To members of this descent group belong the “adoption of sons,” υἱοθεσία. (Note that, in contrast to the ἔθνη, Israel’s “sonship” is not contingent upon Christ’s πνεῦμα.) This sonship establishes the family connection between heaven and earth: the god of Israel is also Israel’s “father.” To them is the δόξα, translated “glory” in the RSV and in the NRSV. This vague-sounding attribute refers both to heaven and to earth, that is, both to the glorious presence of Israel’s god and to the place of that presence, Jerusalem, or, more specifically, the temple, his earthly dwelling place. To them are the covenants (διαθήκαι) and the giving of the law (νομοθεσία) and the “worship.” This last item, λατρεία, “cult,” again indicates place—the altar of Jerusalem’s temple—as well as the inherited or ancestral practices and traditions for enacting that cult (what Paul elsewhere calls αἱ πατρικαί μου παραδόσεις, Gal 1:14).

These distinctive privileges echo the shared blood, sanctuaries, sacrifices, and customs listed by Herodotus: both sets of protocols, pagan and Jewish, bind the human ethnic groups to one another (transtemporally across generations as well as contemporally within the current group) and to their god(s). In addition, in contrast to Genesis and Herodotus, Paul cannot use ὁμόγλωσσον, shared language, as a specific identifier for his people, who were broadly divided in his lifetime between Semitic languages (Hebrew and/or Aramaic) and Greek. But, as we will see, Paul does lift up ethnic language—God’s no less than Israel’s—in a very important connection as a family/ethnicity identifier. Finally, among Paul’s kinfolk by family descent (κατὰ σάρκα) is God’s eschatological champion, the Davidic messiah (cf. Rom 1:3, 15:12). I will return to these last two ideas, Χριστός and γλώσσα, further on.

Regarding Jewish constructs of divine ethnicity, our second preliminary concern, did Jews think that the Jewish god was “Jewish”? That is to say, did they “ethnically identify” him with themselves—or, rather, did they think that *he* ethnically identified himself with them?⁸ With them specifically as “family”? With Jewish “place,” that is, the land of Israel or, specifically, Jerusalem, the Jews’ *metropolis*? With Jewish ancestral practices? With Jewish “identity-markers,” such as Shabbat or circumcision?

so on. But this homogenizing Hellenistic overlay could mask difference, too. The Semitic god בעל שמי, “Lord of Heaven,” resided beneath his Olympian name (“Zeus”), and while Romans and Carthaginians contested over title to the favor of the divine Heracles, the Carthaginian deity was a hellenized expression of the Tyrian Melkart. See further Glen W. Bowersock, *Hellenism in Late Antiquity*, Jerome Lectures 18 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 18–25; see also, specifically on the theological dimension of the Punic wars, Richard Miles, *Carthage Must Be Destroyed: The Rise and Fall of an Ancient Mediterranean Civilization* (New York: Viking, 2011).

⁸I use the masculine pronoun because, in the first century (and long thereafter), the Jewish god is gendered male.

Of course, the answer we get depends on which Jew we ask: Philo would probably nuance these questions differently from the ways that Paul would and does. As our quick survey of Rom 9:3–5 already hints, however, I think that the answer is yes. First, the Bible foregrounds the language of love/ῥωπή/ἀγάπη that characterizes Israel's relationship: God "chooses" Israel because he "falls in love" with them.⁹ Second, God sets them apart from all the other peoples of the earth by giving them his instruction (e.g., Lev 20:22–24). He reveals himself to them alone at Sinai, when he gives them the law. He specifically refers to himself as the "father" of Israel and speaks of them as his "son" (e.g., Exod 4:22). With the (almost) synchronous founding of two Jerusalem-based "houses," that of the Davidic dynasty and that of God on the Temple Mount, this father-god becomes in a special way the "father" of the anointed rulers of David's line as well (Pss 2:7, 89:26–27, 2 Sam 7:14). God may be everywhere, but his earthly dwelling place is the temple itself (see Pss 76:2, 84:1; cf. 1 Cor 3:16, Matt 23:21).

Finally, God himself keeps a premier Jewish practice. This idea, expanded upon in Jubilees, is present already in Jewish Scripture. According to Gen 2:2–3, God rested on the Sabbath, a privilege and a responsibility that he will share uniquely with his own people, Israel.¹⁰ In Jubilees, we find out that God kept not only the first Shabbat: he continues to keep Shabbat weekly. How? And how does the world continue to do what it does, if one day out of seven God is not "working"? The angel reveals to Moses:

He [God] gave us a great sign, the Sabbath day, so that we might work six days and observe a Sabbath from all work on the seventh day. And he told us—all the angels of the presence and all the angels of sanctification, these two great kinds [who are also circumcised! 15:27]—that we might keep the Sabbath with him in heaven and on earth. And he said to us, "Behold, I will separate for myself a people from among all the nations. And they will also keep the Sabbath. And I will sanctify them for myself, and I will bless them. . . . And they will be my people and I will be their god. And I have chosen the seed of Jacob from among all that I have seen. And I have recorded them as my firstborn son, and have sanctified him for myself forever and ever. And I will make known to them the Sabbath day." (Jub. 2:17–20; O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*)¹¹

⁹"It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you" (Deut 7:7–8 NRSV). "Although heaven and the heaven of heavens belong to the LORD your God, the earth with all that is in it, yet the LORD set his heart in love on your ancestors alone and chose you, their descendants after them, out of all the peoples, as it is today. Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart" (10:14–16 NRSV).

¹⁰This question was debated in Second Temple Jewish circles: see A. J. Droge, "Sabbath Work/Sabbath Rest: Genesis, Thomas, John," *HR* 47 (2007): 112–41, here 128–34.

¹¹See further James Kugel, "4Q369 'Prayer of Enosh' and Ancient Biblical Interpretation," *DSD* 5 (1998): 119–48, esp. 123–26.

Thinking socially, not theologically, for the moment: the Sabbath was one of the most visible and, together with circumcision, one of the most commented upon of Jewish practices in the diaspora. It distinguished Jews from other populations in their cities of residence. If heaven itself holds circumcised angels—who keep God company on Shabbat while lower angelic orders keep the world running to time—and if God himself, not only in Genesis but also evermore thereafter “rests” one day out of seven (with these circumcised angels for company), then God is “Jewish.” If God spoke Hebrew when he revealed his will to his people, then God is “Jewish.” If he is the father of the people Israel and of Israel’s rulers, referring to each as his “son,” then God is “Jewish.” If, of all the places on the earth, his glorious presence dwells most particularly in Judea, within Jerusalem’s temple, then God is “Jewish.” And if, ultimately, at the end of time, all other humans *and* their gods will acknowledge him by conforming to two fundamental protocols of Jewish worship—that is to say, with no other gods and without images (see Exod 20:3–4, Deut 5:7–8)—while they gather together with a reunified Israel in Judea, on הר בית יהוה (“the mountain of the Lord’s house,” Isa 2:2–4), then God is “Jewish.”

I mean of course that the god of Israel is “Jewish” in antiquity, by antiquity’s criteria of ethnicity: land, language, kinship, and custom. What confuses this idea, or makes it seem complicated or paradoxical to us, is the biblical god’s no less insistent claim to universality and to absolute, indeed to unique, divinity. We will turn to those ideas momentarily, when we consider ancient “monotheism.” Let me close this segment of our preliminary considerations by noting quickly that many *pagans* were likewise convinced that the highest god was “Jewish.”

This pagan conviction arose out of two ancient idiosyncrasies of Jewish religious culture: its aniconism and its cultic focus on Jerusalem. Pagans knew that Jerusalem’s temple held no statue of the god. Josephus had publicized this fact; Tacitus and Dio Cassius both comment on it (*J.W.* 5.5.5 §219; Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.4; Dio, *Hist.* 37.17.2). This aniconism was, for the rest of the world, an odd thing liturgically, but it was extremely interpretable theologically (see, e.g., Philo, *Leg.* 3.36; *Decal.* 66–76). Pagan philosophical *παιδεία* (“culture”) held that the highest god was not capable of representation, being radically transcendent, beyond body of any sort, “visible” to the mind alone. By worshiping their god without recourse to images, both in their main sanctuary in Jerusalem and throughout their communal spaces in the diaspora, Jews, in paying homage to their own god, paid homage to the highest god (so Tacitus, *Hist.* 5.5.4). Origen observed similarly: “The supreme god is called ‘the god of the Hebrews’ even by people alien to our faith” (*Cels.* 5.50).¹²

¹²Trans. Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980). The emperor Julian, himself a convert from orthodox Christianity to “classical” paganism, made the same identification. Informing Jewish subjects that he wished to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, Julian pledged to “invest all my enthusiasm in restoring the temple of the Highest God [ὑψίστου θεοῦ]” (*Ep. et leg.* No. 134 [Bidez and Cumont]).

The Jews' cultic focus on Jerusalem reinforced this association of their god with pagan *παιδεία*'s highest god. The nations of the world not only worshiped images; they sacrificed before them. Jewish prayer houses or synagogues or "schools," however, not only held no images: Jews made no blood offerings (at least in principle) outside of Jerusalem. This means that, well before the year 70 CE, Jews were the only conspicuously nonsacrificing population in the diaspora. *Mente sola*—Tacitus, again (*Hist.* 5.5.4)—they worshiped through prayer and the study of the law. This *absence* of an all-but-universal practice—making offerings before images—behaviorally and socially reinforced the Jews' claim that theirs was the highest god.¹³

But what, then, about all the other gods, the gods of the nations? How did Israel—and Israel's god—relate to them?

This question leads us to our third preliminary consideration: the ways that the LXX facilitated the expression of divine multiplicity. Our attachment to the idea and to the rhetoric of "monotheism" can make our appreciation of antiquity's god-congested universe more difficult than it need be. Ancient monotheism did not mean a belief that "only one god" existed. In antiquity, by our measure, monotheism was a species of polytheism. That is, while one god might reign supreme, at the metaphysical summit of superhuman powers, ancient people (whether pagans, Jews, or, eventually, Christians) knew that other divine powers ranged below. Ancient monotheism expressed the *architecture* of heaven, not its absolute population. As long as one god stood on top—"megatheism," one historian has suggested; not "monotheism"¹⁴—as many as needed or wanted could operate in the lower cosmic realms.

Where and how did Jews encounter the gods of the nations? In their cities of residence, certainly, and in dreams (think of Moschos son of Moschion¹⁵), and

¹³In other words, pagan philosophical criteria, interpreting these idiosyncratic Jewish traditions, ended up affirming the Jews' claims of theological superiority. The idea that high gods neither want nor need sacrifices but that lower gods do was originally pagan, hence Porphyry's reference to Theophrastus, *On Abstinence* 2.27.1–3.

¹⁴Pagan monotheism, both that of educated elites and that of patriotic city dwellers ("Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" Acts 19:28), has recently been explored in two excellent scholarly anthologies: *Pagan Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, ed. Polymnia Athanassiadi and Michael Frede (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999); and *One God: Pagan Monotheism in the Roman Empire*, ed. Stephen Mitchell and Peter van Nuffelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). In this last book, see esp. the essays by Christoph Marksches ("The Price of Monotheism: Some New Observations on a Current Debate about Late Antiquity," 100–111, conceptualizing the issue vis-à-vis the study of ancient religions), Angelos Chaniotis ("Megatheism: The Search for the Almighty God and the Competition of Cults," 112–40, on the ways that the claim εἰς θεὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ, "one god in heaven," asserted superiority, not singularity), and Nicole Belayche ("*Deus deum ... summorum maximus* [Apuleius]: Ritual Expressions of Distinction in the Divine World in the Imperial Period," 141–66, on divine hierarchy and plurality). Belayche observes that the Jews' high god functioned as "an ethnic god, as indeed he also was" (145).

¹⁵For discussion and the text of this inscription, wherein Moschos Ioudaios commemorates

whenever they beheld the night sky. (Our planets still answer to the names of these gods.) But first of all, foreign gods presented themselves in Jewish scriptures. אלהים (*ʾēlōhîm*) as a plural are there associated with other nations: as Israel confronts these peoples, so Israel's god confronts their gods (e.g., Exod 12:12). Who are these other gods, and where do they come from? Eventually Jews will generate myths accounting for other divinities as errant angels, or as their offspring or as failed members of the heavenly court. Often in biblical narrative, however, the gods/אלהים are just there.¹⁶

Once the אלהים became θεοί, new interpretative possibilities opened up. Greek enabled ways to distinguish between degrees of divinity, speaking of multiple gods while making clear the supreme divinity of the Jewish god. This distinction was not native to Hebrew, where, as we have seen, the plural form אלהים could indicate either the Jewish god himself or a multitude of other deities. Indeed, the LXX translators of Exod 22:28 took advantage precisely of the Hebrew word's ambiguity when they rendered the older text's "Do not revile God [אלהים]" as "Do not revile the gods [τοὺς θεούς]."¹⁷

Extremely usefully, also, the LXX acquired δαιμόνια, "demons." These beings, like the structure of the Hellenistic cosmos itself, articulated divinity along a gradient, as a category spanning heaven and earth. Δαίμων in Greek originally had no negative connotation in the way that the English *demon* now does: the word simply indicated "a lower god." "Lower" within Greek philosophical-scientific discourse meant, literally, spatially "lower": below the divine intelligences embodied in stars and planets,¹⁸ closer to earth, which stood in the center of antiquity's map of the universe.¹⁹

his obedience to the prompting of two pagan gods, see Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–1987), 3:65.

¹⁶See further Michael S. Heiser, "Monotheism, Polytheism, Monolatry, or Henotheism? Toward an Assessment of Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible," *BBR* 18 (2008): 1–30. Some biblical passages, for example, Isa 44:9–20 or Jer 10:1–16, can and eventually will be interpreted as "monotheist," but the burden of these polemics is to mock the powerlessness of idols. Idols are representations, not the superhuman powers themselves.

¹⁷On the LXX rendering of Exod 22:28(27) and its "liberal" interpretation by Philo and by Josephus, see Peter W. van der Horst, "Thou Shalt Not Revile the Gods," *SPhiloA* 5 (1993): 1–8.

¹⁸Philo deftly captures this nexus of ideas in his commentary on Genesis. The firmament, Philo said there, is "the most holy dwelling place of the manifest and visible gods [θεῶν ἐμφανῶν τε καὶ αἰσθητῶν]" (*Opif.* 7.27): manifest and visible gods are "lower" than, thus subordinate to, the highest god, who was invisible.

¹⁹Pagan δαίμονες could be either good or evil; see Henry Chadwick, "Oracles of the End in the Conflict of Paganism and Christianity in the 4th Century," in *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière: Antiquité païenne et chrétienne; Vingt-cinq études*, ed. Enzo Lucchesi and H. D. Saffrey, *Cahiers d'orientalisme* 10 (Geneva: Cramer, 1984), 125–29, on Plutarch and Porphyry; James Rives, "Human Sacrifice among Pagans and Christians," *JRS* 85 (1995): 65–85, esp. 80–83; Maijastina Kahlos, *Debate and Dialogue: Christian and Pagan Cultures, c. 360–430*, Ashgate New Critical

This Greek idea of a gradient of divine power cohered with and facilitated Hellenistic Jewish theologies. “The אלהים of the גוים are idols,” the psalmist had sung in Hebrew (Ps 96:5). “The θεοί of the ἔθνη are δαιμόνια,” however, is the way that his words were sounded in Greek: “the [lower] gods of the nations are demons” (Ps 95:5 LXX; cf. 1 Cor 10:20). This translation (or reinterpretation) of “idols” as “demons” held theological significance. Idols (as Jewish texts tirelessly taught) were human-made representations of powers: “they have eyes that cannot see; they have ears that cannot hear” (Pss 115:5–6, 135:16–17, and frequently elsewhere). A demon, however, is not an image of a supernatural power but the power itself, the (lower) divinity. *Any* human can destroy an idol; *no* human can destroy a god. This Jewish translation of Ps 95 (96), then, at once both elevated and demoted the Greek gods, granting that they were more than mere idols while placing them, qua δαιμόνια, in positions subordinate to the Jewish god on Hellenism’s own cosmic map. To paraphrase Augustine, the difference between Jews and pagans was that Jews called gods “demons,” while pagans called demons “gods” (*Civ.* 9.23).

To sum up, before turning specifically to Paul: (1) In antiquity, cult is an ethnic designation, and ethnicity is a cult designation. Put otherwise, gods and humans form family groups. Divine-human “family” by definition spans heaven and earth. In this way, gods share in the ethnicity of the peoples who worship them. (2) Just as other ancient people have a family relationship with their divinities, so do ancient Jews with theirs. They are his people, Israel; he, their god and father, shares many of their ethnic identifiers (land, language, locality, family connection, and custom, namely, the Sabbath, not to mention the circumcised angels). The Jews’ god is “Jewish.” (3) For all ancient people, all gods exist. Jewish “monotheists,” however, also conceived of their own god as supreme, a point that some pagans willingly conceded. But Jews also and uniquely made the claim—especially in apocalyptic inflections of their tradition—that their god represented the religious destiny of all humankind. Not only would all other gods “bow down” to Israel’s god (Ps 97:7); so too would all humanity. Or, as Paul says in Romans, “Is God the god of the Jews

Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 172–81. Origen, evidently annoyed by the pagan Celsus’s conflation of lower gods, angels (“messengers”), and demons, enunciates clearly this difference between pagan and septuagintal, thus Christian, views: “Celsus fails to notice that the name of daemons is not morally neutral like that of men, among whom some are good and some are bad; nor is it good like the name of gods, which is not to be applied to evil daemons.... The name of daemons is always applied to *evil* powers ... they lead men astray and distract them, and drag them down” (*Cels.* 5.5).

Some Hellenistic Jews, such as the author of Wisdom and, eventually, the apostle Paul, took δαιμόνια as exclusively evil, bound up as they were with the cultic worship of images. We find this same view in later Christian writers, for example, Justin; see Annette Yoshiko Reed, “The Trickery of the Fallen Angels and the Demonic Mimesis of the Divine: Aetiology, Demonology, and Polemics in the Writings of Justin Martyr,” *J ECS* 12 (2004): 141–71. On the particular link between (malevolent) demons (qua pagan gods) and blood sacrifices, see Justin, *2 Apol.* 5; *Dial.* 19, 22, 43 (there aimed against Jewish sacrifice), and frequently.

only? Is he not also the god of the ἔθνη?” (3:29). In other words, even the universality of (eschatological) worship does not dilute this god’s ethnic specificity.

In speaking in these ways, Paul thinks “ethnically.” His world divides up between two human groups, Israel *κατὰ σάρκα*, his *συγγενεῖς*, and “everybody else,” “the nations,” or, as he calls them otherwise, “the foreskin” (*ἀκροβυστία*). He shares this sharp “us/them” dichotomizing with his great scriptural source, Isaiah, I think for the same reason: whether for Isaiah or for Paul, *the more intense the pitch of apocalyptic expectation, the greater the contrast between Israel and the nations.*²⁰ The narrative function of the nations in these traditions is precisely to represent *not*-Israel, all those other nations who have not known God and who do not know God. Eschatological redemption emphasizes and intensifies this high contrast between Israel (knowing God) and everyone else (not knowing God until the end-time). The sharp us/them distinction, to phrase this slightly differently, is drawn on *theological* lines, and, therefore, it articulates ethnic lines as well. Consider Isa 66:18–20, which echoes Gen 10:

I am coming to gather all the nations and tongues, and they will come and see my glory.... From them I will send survivors to the nations ... to the distant islands that have neither heard my fame nor seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations as an offering to the Lord ... to my holy mountain, Jerusalem, says YHWH.

God’s Jewish ethnicity, even eschatologically, remains constant. This divine ethnicity, refracted through the lens of prophetic eschatology, reveals and highlights three interconnected ideas: first, that Israel alone has “known” God; second, that the other nations have not known God; and, third, that at the end-time, these nations, too, will know God, and they, too, will worship him in Jerusalem, on the Temple Mount. Despite its insistence on God’s ethnicity, in other words, Jewish tradition presses this larger claim peculiar to its religious culture: Israel’s god is *also* and ultimately the god of all other ethnic groups as well. He is the nations’ god qua Jewish god who dwells in Jerusalem. But the nations (and their gods) by and large will know this only at the end-time. Seen in this light, the establishment of his kingdom is quite literally the Jewish god’s ultimate act of cross-ethnic outreach.

The ethnic-theological difference between Israel and the nations, the nations’ ignorance of the true god, is what binds all of these other ἔθνη together into one

²⁰For an analysis of Paul’s ethnic reasoning as a point in the development of the rabbinic concept of “the goy” as an individual non-Jew, see two recent articles by Ishay Rosen-Zvi and Adi Ophir, “Goy: Toward a Genealogy,” *Diné Israel* 28 (2011): 69–112; and “Paul and the Invention of the Gentiles,” *JQR* 105 (2015): 1–41. On ethnic reasoning as constitutive of later forms of gentile Christianity, see Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race? Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). On the way that Isaiah undergirds Paul’s thought, especially in Romans, see J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul “in Concert” in the Letter to the Romans*, NovTSup 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

undifferentiated mass of lumpen idolators. In the end, for Isaiah as for Paul, this sharp dichotomy is resolved *theologically* but *not ethnically*: Israel remains Israel (ὁ λαός), the nations remain the nations (τὰ ἔθνη; cf. Deut 32:43 LXX, Rom 15:10). Paul, convinced that he was living in the very last days, and convinced no less of the importance of his own role in bringing the ἔθνη to the worship of the god of Israel, emphasizes and dichotomizes this ethnic difference even more than does Isaiah.

But Paul's circumstances are also different from those of his great scriptural source. His mission (and those of others, such as whoever first established the community at Rome) had generated "eschatological gentiles"—ἔθνη who *do* know God and who, *as* ἔθνη, worship him alone—in advance of the apocalyptic end-time. (Their existence, combined with his vision of the risen, thus soon-returning Christ, indeed supported Paul's conviction that he lived and worked at the very edge of the end-time: 1 Thess 4:15–18; Phil 4:5; 1 Cor 7:29; 10:11; 15:51–52; 2 Cor 6:2; Rom 13:11–12; 16:20, 25.) Paul's discourse of ethnic dichotomizing accordingly left him with a conundrum: he, like us, has no good term for the ἐκκλησία's non-Jewish ex-idol-worshippers. They are *not* "converts"/προσήλυτοι: the only thing for these pagans to "convert" to in the mid-first century was Judaism, an idea that Paul heatedly rejects. Yet they are not "godfearers"—at least, fumes Paul, they had better not be!—affiliated with Jewish communities and yet still involved with their own gods as well.²¹ Nor are they "Christians"—a term, and arguably a concept, that had yet

²¹Confusion still characterizes scholarly references to "godfearers." These gentiles were not "halfway" converts, nor were they "monotheists" (especially not in the modern, anachronistic sense of that term), nor had they "renounced idolatry." They were voluntarily Judaizers, non-Jews who assumed some interest (in varying degrees) in Jewish practices, active pagans who added the god of Israel (to some extent or other) into their native pantheons. For a review of the inscriptional evidence, see Irina Levinskaya, *The Book of Acts in Its Diaspora Setting*, BAFCS 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 51–82; for a discussion emphasizing such persons' continuing "paganism," see Paula Fredriksen, "If It Looks Like a Duck, and It Quacks Like a Duck...: On Not Giving Up the Godfearers," in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al., BJS 358 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Series, 2016), 25–34.

Did eating meat sacrificed to lower gods mean that Paul's ex-pagan pagans were somehow still involved in idol worship (1 Cor 8 and 10)? Paul evidently thought not, unless presence at public cultic events were involved. At private dinners, questions about the status of things served was subordinate to community concerns (i.e., not partaking if doing so risked scandalizing another member of the ἐκκλησία, 10:28–29). For all we know (and as E. P. Sanders long ago pointed out), such instruction might very well represent a diaspora Jewish standard of behavior: the status of foodstuffs in mixed company would have been an issue for those Jewish communities well before the creation of Christ-following ones. See Sanders, *Jewish Law from Jesus to the Mishnah: Five Studies* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 281. For Paul on the issue (or, for him, the nonissue) of the imperial cult, see now John M. G. Barclay, "Why the Roman Empire Was Insignificant to Paul," in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 363–87.

to be invented.²² So what word appropriately names these people? Paul stumbles around: they are ex-pagans/ex-gentiles (“When you were ἔθνη,” 1 Cor 12:2; cf. 10:1), and yet they are still pagans/still gentiles (“Now I am speaking to you ἔθνη,” Rom 11:13). Sometimes he calls them ἅγιοι, “holy” or “separated-out” ones; at other times, ἀδελφοί, brothers (we will soon look at both sets of associations closely). But if we take the last chapters of Romans as in some sense Paul’s final word, ἔθνη remains his term of choice (15:8–12, 16–18, 27; 16:4 [the ἐκκλησίαι τῶν ἐθνῶν], 26).²³

II. COSMIC REDEMPTION AND GENTILE ADOPTION

The normal and normative ethnic embeddedness of divinity in the ancient Mediterranean, where gods and peoples form family groups, meant that Paul

²²On the anachronism of the term “Christian” for this first generation of the movement, see esp. William Arnal, “The Collection and Synthesis of ‘Tradition’ and the Second-Century Invention of Christianity,” *MTSR* 23 (2011): 193–215; Anders Runesson, “Inventing Christian Identity: Paul, Ignatius, and Theodosius I,” in *Exploring Early Christian Identity*, ed. Bengt Holmberg, WUNT 226 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 59–92, further developed in “The Question of Terminology: The Architecture of Contemporary Discussions of Paul,” in *Paul within Judaism: Restoring the First-Century Context to the Apostle*, ed. Mark D. Nanos and Magnus Zetterholm (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 53–78; John Marshall, “Misunderstanding the New Paul: Marcion’s Transformation of the *Sonderzeit* Paul,” *J ECS* 20 (2012): 1–29. Marshall notes, “Using a category of ‘Christianity’ is fundamentally erroneous when interpreting Paul. It exercises transformative influence on his writings in the same way the [later] pseudepigraphical Pastoral epistles do.... By reading Paul’s writings as instances of ‘Christianity,’ the new, but later, religion is already retrojected onto the letters, the force of Paul’s eschatological conviction is blunted, and the specificity of his address to Gentiles is effaced. These effects of the term ‘Christianity’ are largely distorting in the way it takes over and transforms, Christianizes, or simply eradicates Paul’s conviction at Rom 11.26 that ‘all Israel’ would be saved” (6).

²³Joshua Garroay proposes “Gentile-Jews” as Paul’s term for these people: given their hybrid ethnoreligious status—gentiles whose πίστις (“trustfulness” or “faithfulness”) toward the god of Israel’s messiah has grafted them into Israel (cf. Rom 11:17–24)—the hyphenated term, he argues, is apt. But Paul’s metaphor of the olive tree does not overcome, to my mind, the distinction between Israel and the ἔθνη that he insists on even as he hymns their common redemption at the letter’s end, 15:9–12. Through Abraham/Christ, these gentiles do indeed become God’s adopted children (Gal 4). But Jews are Jews “by nature” (φύσει, Gal 2:15), through being of the same γένος as the patriarchs, blood descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Rom 9:4–5). These two groups, Jews and “everybody else,” are to be eschatologically conjoined, but they nevertheless remain distinct: Jews belong in the olive tree κατὰ φύσιν, “naturally”; non-Jews are grafted into the tree παρὰ φύσιν, “against nature” (Rom 11:24). See Garroay, *Paul’s Gentile-Jews: Neither Jew nor Gentile, but Both* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). On the eschatological preservation of ethnic distinction, the fundamental study is Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). On Gal 6:16 referring not to the ἐκκλησία but to ethnic Israel, see 208 n. 28 below.

affirmed a paradox. The nations who in Christ turn from their own gods are to worship Israel's god *in Jewish ways*: no other gods and no images. In this sense, his gentiles "Judaize"; that is, they as non-Jews assume some (singularly) Jewish practices. But nonetheless—and Paul is absolutely adamant on this point—these ex-pagan pagans are still *not-Israel*. What, then, is their relationship with Israel and, thus, with Israel's god? How, in Christ, is this relationship established? Paul's answer: by *ἁγιασμός* and by *υἰοθεσία*. Both are the accomplishment of holy *pneuma*.

Ἅγιασμός mobilizes the language of temple imagery and of the sacrificial protocols of Leviticus.²⁴ Paul's gentiles, he says, are *ἄγιοι* in the Levitical sense of separated-out (*שְׁטִיף*). From what? From the "common" (*לֵוִי*), that is, from those gentiles who do *not* know God (1 Thess 4:4–5). Paul's gentiles, as *ἄγιοι*, are fit for intimate contact with the divine. They proleptically experience this new closeness both through the in-dwelling of divine spirit and through the "sacrifice" of the bread and wine (1 Cor 10:14–18, explicitly likening community participation in the Lord's table to sacrifices in the Jerusalem temple). In their support of Paul's mission, they metaphorically stand by Israel's altar, making "a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18; cf. 2 Cor 2:15—the community is itself the "sweet smell" of the sacrifice of Christ). This temple imagery does not substitute for, supersede, or displace Jerusalem's temple, in my view; rather, it resonates with and reaffirms it. If Paul did not value the sanctity, dignity, and probity of the Jerusalem cult, he would not have named it in Rom 9, nor would he have used it as a touchstone for gentile community identity here.

Υἰοθεσία mobilizes the language of lineage, kinship, and inheritance: through reception of Christ's spirit, or of God's, gentiles become *ἀδελφοί*, "brothers." Eschatological fraternity—one of Paul's most brilliant improvisations—is a very rich, original, and complex concept. Paul's ideas on gentile "adoption" in (and into) Christ reveal his thought at one and the same time at its most *Roman*, at its most traditionally *Jewish*, and at its most *ancient*.

Roman legal culture had long availed itself of this form of fictive kinship—sons not begotten but made—as a way to settle and to stabilize the next generation of "family" both for issues of property/inheritance and for issues of ancestry/continuation of patrilineal cult.²⁵ The new son was thereafter responsible to and for his

²⁴Paula Fredriksen, "Judaizing the Nations: The Ritual Demands of Paul's Gospel," *NTS* 56 (2010): 232–52, here 244–49.

²⁵Michael Peppard (*The Son of God in the Roman World: Divine Sonship in Its Social and Political Context* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2011], 50–60) quotes Cicero (202 n. 7) that the laws of adoption concern "the inheritance of the name and of the property and of the sacred rites of the family" (*Dom.* 35). On the Roman legal and cultural context of adoption, see further Suzanne Dickson, *The Roman Family*, *ASH* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Jane F. Gardner, *Family and Familia in Roman Law and Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998); Christiane Kunst, *Römische Adoption: Zur Strategie einer Familienorganisation*, *Frankfurter althistorische Beiträge* 10 (Hennef: Clauss, 2005). James M. Scott assembles a tremendous amount of material, both Greco-Roman and scriptural, around issues internal to Paul's letters (*Adoption as Sons of*

“new” paternal ancestors and to and for the *genius* of his new father and family (*gens*). In Paul’s reuse of this idea of adoption, it is immersion and conferral of spirit (variously the spirit of God, or of Christ, or simply “holy spirit”) that binds the Christ-following gentiles into a new family, so that they, too, can inherit.

Especially in Gal 3–4, arguing against apostolic competitors who want male Christ followers to be circumcised, Paul stresses that this sonship, *υιοθεσία*, comes only through spirit (thus *πίστις*, faithfulness to or confidence in the good news, Gal 3:2–5), not through flesh (the site of circumcision; thus, through Jewish law). Spirit binds the believer in and to Abraham’s seed (*σπέρμα*), Christ, bringing the gentile into a new family as a son and, thus, as an heir (4:7; cf. 3:26, 29). The ex-pagan gentile thereby becomes a “son of Abraham” apart from the law, apart from the flesh, so that he, too, can inherit the promised redemption (3:6–9). The spirit of Christ, God’s son, indeed, binds the entire community of Christ followers together (4:6), so that there is “neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male and female: you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:28).

“All one,” a single family, but exclusively according to “the spirit of his [God’s] son” (Gal 4:6). *Κατὰ σάρκα*, “according to flesh,” however, these people still retain their ethnic and social differences, which Paul elsewhere emphatically asserts and which the lack of circumcision, for gentile male Christ followers, evinces and even reinscribes. Redeemed gentiles rejoice *with* Israel but do not “join” Israel or “become” Israel (Rom 15:7–12). Runaway slaves return to their owners (Philemon).²⁶ Corinthian women submit to the authority of their husbands (1 Cor 11:3–16). United in and by spirit, Jewish and gentile Christ followers together await Christ’s return and the cascade of final events (surveyed in 1 Thess 4, 1 Cor 15, Phil 2, and Rom 8–16). *Κατὰ σάρκα*, however, these siblings remain distinct, as indeed is the case with all human adoption.

Here Paul’s allegiances to his *συγγενεῖς*, Israelites *κατὰ σάρκα*, are unambiguous and, therefore, transparent upon biblical paradigms (cf. Rom 9:4–5). Abraham in these final days may have become the father of “many nations” through the spirit of his *σπέρμα*, the Christ, but Israelites themselves have many “fathers”—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve patriarchs of the eponymous tribes. To them God has made many promises (15:8; cf. 9:4, 11:29).²⁷ It was precisely to fulfill those promises that

God: An Exegetical Investigation into the Background of υιοθεσία in the Pauline Corpus, WUNT 2/48 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992]), though he emphasizes biblical aspects of Paul’s idea of adoption more than the Roman.

²⁶On Philemon as a letter that “did not so much proclaim Messiah Jesus as discuss a private business transaction about a slave,” see J. Albert Harrill, *Paul the Apostle: His Life and Legacy in Their Roman Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 18.

²⁷On this distinction between “the promise to Abraham” (in the singular) that benefits gentiles and the irrevocable “many promises” to Israel, Stanley K. Stowers notes, “For Israel, there were many promises, not one. Because Romans is about gentiles, the promises peculiar to Jews bear only a mention [i.e., in 9:4 and 15:8].... In 15.8, Paul speaks of the fathers (plural), who include Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and many others who are not fathers of the gentiles in the same way

Christ came as a servant to his own blood kinsmen (“the circumcision,” 15:8; cf. 1:3, 9:6). The salvation of all Israel—ethnic, genealogical, fleshly Israel—is, indeed, the gospel’s goal (Rom 11:25–26), “for the gifts and the promises of God are irrevocable” (11:29). Πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ—all Israel, all twelve tribes (11:26; itself, of course, an eschatological concept)—are the “natural” heirs to their god’s kingdom.

These distinctions bear emphasizing, because many readers often think that Paul speaks of an undifferentiated humankind united “in Christ.” “Israel” in these interpretations changes from the real (or realistically imagined) historical kinship community that Paul describes in Rom 9:4–5 to a metaphor for the church, “spiritual” Israel, “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16).²⁸ Paul’s much-touted proclamation of oneness in Christ, Gal 3:28, trumps all those many other places where Paul speaks of communities striated by significant internal distinctions: apostles, prophets, interpreters, healers (1 Cor 12:7–26, Rom 12:4–8); male and female (1 Cor 11:5–16; cf. 14:34–36); Jew and Greek (Rom 2:9, 11); Israel and the nations (Rom 11:25–26, 15:9–12).

Paul’s kinship language, however, does indeed put his different *gentiles* all on the same basis: they are siblings together with and through Christ, who is “the firstborn of many ἀδελφοί” (Rom 8:29). But within this family unity, Paul nonetheless asserts his own people’s singular, enduring identity. Ethnic Israelites, quite apart from Christ, already have υἰοθεσία (Rom 9:4; cf. Exod 4:22, “Israel is my firstborn son”); they are already in a family relationship with Christ (Rom 9:5, Christ is from Israel κατὰ σάρκα); and the ἔθνη—the redeemed nations—rejoice with God’s λαός, his people Israel (Rom 11:1; 15:10; Deut 32:43).

In his reconfiguring gentile lineage via Abraham through υἰοθεσία, adoption, Paul is at his most innovatively Roman: gentiles-in-Christ now count as sons, thus heirs. They are now responsible to the patrilineal cult of their new adoptive family, and they can, together with Israel, inherit God’s kingdom. And, in his adherence to the biblical paradigm, wherein God through the giving of his law has separated Israel out for himself, wherein Israel remains Israel even (as in Isaiah) at the end-time, Paul is at his most traditionally, most recognizably Jewish.

But in its eschatologically inspired “cross-ethnic” outreach, whereby some gentiles before the parousia—and, at the very end, all seventy nations (their πλήρωμα,

as Abraham. Only Abraham received the promise that in his seed the gentiles would be blessed. This promise does not lessen the significance of the other fathers for the Jews (9.5)” (*A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994], 133).

²⁸Galatians 6:16 (“Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, and on the Israel of God”/ και ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ’ αὐτούς και ἔλεος, και ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ) has long been read by many (though not by all) commentators as indicating the Christian church rather than ethnic Israel. Against such a construal, most recently, see Susan Grove Eastman, “Israel and the Mercy of God: A Re-reading of Galatians 6.16 and Romans 9–11,” *NTS* 56 (2010): 367–95; see too Krister Stendahl, *Final Account: Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 5, 40.

“fullness” or “full number;” Rom 11:25)—turn to worship Israel’s god, Paul’s adoption model ultimately coheres with the broader, ancient, pan-Mediterranean construction of divine–human relations: *gods and their humans form family groups*. Thus, despite their new Abrahamic lineage, the “father” who ultimately counts for these gentiles is *not* Abraham. It is God (cf. Gal 3:26). *God*, not Abraham, is whom these gentiles—like their older brother Jesus and like ethnic Israel—can now call “Father” (Gal 4:7, Rom 8:15).²⁹ Note, too, the significance of the divine appellation whereby gentiles-in-Christ address the Jewish god by his “Jewish” family name, in the “native” *γλῶσσα* of the Jewish family tongue. God’s new sons call him Ἀββᾶ (Gal 4:6, Rom 8:15).

III. ETHNICITIES, DIVINITIES, AND HISTORY

How does this argument about the ethnicity of ancient gods, and specifically about the Jewishness of Paul’s god, interact with current scholarly conversations about ethnicity in antiquity, about ancient “monotheism,” and about the post–New Perspective Paul?

“Ethnicity” in antiquity, as I hope I have demonstrated, is, like “divinity,” a category that bridges heaven and earth. The language of divine–human parenting, of deities’ special (sometimes “biological”) connection to human groups, of their role in revealing what become “ancestral customs” tells us something important about ancient conceptualizations of divinity and of (steeply hierarchical) family. Ancient gods, local in two senses, attached both to places and, quite literally, to peoples.³⁰ Kinship diplomacy would have been impossible had these attachments been constructed and imagined in any way other than “realistically.” When we

²⁹For this reason, I am persuaded by Richard Hays on the question of how to translate Rom 4:1: *Τί οὖν ἐροῦμεν εὐρηκέναι Ἀβραάμ τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα*; The RSV translates: “What then should we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?” But Paul addresses *gentiles* in the assembly at Rome (1:5–6), and the whole point of “adoption” through Abraham is that the gentiles do *not* have a connection *κατὰ σάρκα*: if they did, they would not be candidates for “adoption” (Rom 8:23, made sons through spirit; 8:14; cf. Gal 4:5–7). Hays proposes instead: “What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham [to be] our forefather according to the flesh?” (*The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005], 61–84). For a counterargument, see John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 483 n. 88.

For Romans as addressed explicitly and solely to gentile Christ followers, see Stowers, *Rereading of Romans*; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Paul’s Interlocutor in Romans 2: Function and Identity in the Context of Ancient Epistolography*, ConBNT 40 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2003); and the essays recently assembled in *The So-Called Jew in Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, ed. Rafael Rodríguez and Matthew Thiessen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016).

³⁰On mapping and ethnicity in antiquity, see esp. Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge:

think “ethnicity,” we need to see how gods function as active members—indeed, as the supreme member(s)—of human kinship groups.

Why is this so hard for us to see? For two reasons, I think, and they are related. First, in our own historical context, “ethnicity” is a category of anthropology, not of theology. Thus, when we peer at our ancient people groups with their ethnicities in mind, we too often stand with our backs to their sky. We fail to see how *they* saw their gods: as active and involved social agents and as senior family members, easily angered by human failures to show *pietas*, correct deference.³¹

The second reason why divine ethnicity—specifically, the ethnicity of Paul’s god—is hard for us to see has to do with our habitual ways of conceiving of “God.” The formative development of Christian (thus, Western) theological thinking occurred in the second century, through appeal to the categories of Middle Platonism. It was during the second century that the Jewish god qua high god underwent a double identity crisis. Gentile Christian theologians—Valentinus, Marcion, Justin—all insisted (as had Paul) that the high god was the father of Christ. But they insisted with equal vehemence (and very *unlike* Paul) that the high god was not to be identified with the active deity of Jewish scriptures. That Jewish god was demoted to a demiurgic status, whether as a middling deity poised between the high god and Satan (Ptolemy, *Letter to Flora* apud Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33.7.1–6) or as the moral opposite of the high god and, in some sense, his opponent (Tertullian, *Marc.* 1 *passim*), or as a ἕτερος θεός (“another god”), the pre-incarnate Son (Justin, *Dial.* 56). The high god formerly of Jewish tradition, meanwhile, assumed the radical transcendence and ethnic featurelessness of the high god of philosophical παιδεία.³² In short, for gentile Christian theologians in the course of the second century, God the Father lost his Jewish identity. It is hard to think back through twenty centuries to the time—Paul’s time—when for Jews the one god of all was the one god of all

Cambridge University Press, 2010), 51–84; also Scott, *Paul and the Nations*, correlating biblical lands and peoples.

³¹In so doing, we miss an obvious explanation for Paul’s “persecutions,” both giving and getting; see Martin Goodman, “The Persecution of Paul by Diaspora Jews,” in *The Beginnings of Christianity: A Collection of Articles*, edited by Jack Pastor and Menachem Mor (Jerusalem: Yad Ben-Zvi, 2005), 179–87; Paula Fredriksen, “Why Should a ‘Law-Free’ Mission Mean a ‘Law-Free’ Apostle?” *JBL* 134 (2015): 637–50, here 644, 648–49, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1343.2015.2974>; Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle*, 77–93.

³²“The nature of the Ungenerated Father of All is incorruption and self-existent,” explained Valentinus’s disciple Ptolemy, “simple, and homogeneous light” (*Letter to Flora* apud Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33.7.7 [ANF]). This god, insisted Marcion, the *summum bonum et optimus* (Tertullian, *Marc.* 1.24.7; 1.27.2; 2.11.3), was pure benignity (1.2.3), absolutely good (1.26.2)—and, before the revelation of Christ, utterly unknown. God “abides eternally above the heavens, invisible, holding personal intercourse with none ... the Father of All,” taught Justin (*Dial.* 56). Unbegotten and without passion, this god was also without form, unchanging, unnamed (*1 Apol.* 9.1; 10.1; 13.4; 25.2).

quite specifically *because* he was the god of Deuteronomy, Numbers, Leviticus, Exodus, and Genesis.

But the “one” god was never the “only” god, not even in his own book. Paul knew this. Therefore, calling Paul—or any ancient person, pagan, Jew, or Christian—a “monotheist” only confuses this issue.³³ In none of these systems was the high god solitary. Within specifically Jewish thought, God’s “oneness” did not prevent him from fathering other supernatural beings, his “sons” (בני אלהים), some of whom, according to various Second Temple traditions, went on to have careers as the gods of the nations.³⁴ For Paul, these other gods provided the cosmic forces that the returning Christ, at his parousia, would subdue (e.g., 1 Cor 15:24–28, Phil 2:9–11). How can the label “monotheism” help us to describe and to understand this god-filled universe? Rather than constantly qualifying the term (“ancient monotheism,” “polytheistic monotheism,” “messy monotheism”), we should just retire it.³⁵

Finally, how does—or should—the Jewish ethnicity of Paul’s god complicate current Pauline scholarship? New Perspective scholars used Sanders’s *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* as a springboard into the argument that Paul did not repudiate Judaism per se, just its “ethnic identity markers”: circumcision, Sabbath, kashrut, and so on.³⁶ Needless to say—but I will say it anyway—this is tantamount to the Old Perspective, which holds that Paul (the universalist Christian) had indeed renounced (ethnically particular) Judaism. Different versions of this last view have very recently been championed yet again.³⁷ But if Paul’s god himself remained “Jewish,” how does it make sense to conceptualize Paul’s gospel as a principled renunciation of Jewishness?

Further to the point: thinking with this ancient idea of divine ethnicity—and specifically with the idea of Paul’s god’s ethnicity—entails recognizing how much of Paul’s message to gentiles was ethnically specific as well. His gospel promoted Israel’s god in Jewish ways: no more λατρεία to lower gods and no worshiping of images. Its origins lay in Paul’s experience of the resurrection of the messiah:

³³Pagan “monotheism,” like its Jewish and Christian inflections, attests to heaven’s hierarchical organization, not to its absolute population. In philosophical perspective, the highest god was solely self-existent, the lower gods contingent in some sense upon him (or “it”). Christian “monotheists,” adopting septuagintal usage, called these other gods δαιμόνια: rebellious divine subordinates but subordinates nonetheless. Much after this period, later christological and Trinitarian orthodox theologies will complicate Christian ideas about the high god’s “oneness” in different ways.

³⁴See n. 5 above.

³⁵For the full argument, see Paula Fredriksen, “Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time Has Come to Go,” *SR* 35 (2006): 231–46, here 241–43.

³⁶Since 1977, this leitmotif has shaped the work particularly of James D. G. Dunn and of N. T. Wright.

³⁷N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 2 vols., Christian Origins and the Question of God 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*.

“resurrection” and “messiah” are two other ideas specific, indeed peculiar, to Judaism. He expounded his message by appealing to Jewish texts, practices, and customs. By receiving divine spirit, Paul’s gentiles would turn from their own gods to Paul’s god, enabled thereby to fulfill that god’s law.³⁸ Paul’s gentiles were to assume, *as gentiles*, those behaviors and convictions otherwise associated solely with Jews. In a word—and in the contemporary meaning of that word—Paul urged his gentiles to “Judaize.”³⁹

The rhetoric especially of Galatians and the habitual discourse of New Testament scholarship obscure the ethnic specificity of this behavior that Paul enjoined on non-Jews. What is at stake if we acknowledge it? Nothing less, I think, than our conceptualization of “Christian origins.” Paul’s message neither articulated nor embodied a “parting of the ways,” though by the second century, in some circles, he will be read that way (and is still read that way). His argument with Peter in Antioch notwithstanding (Gal 2:14), Paul himself urged his ex-pagan pagans to Judaize; and, especially in light of his vivid eschatological expectation and foreshortened time frame, he never contemplated a movement separated from—much less antagonistic toward—the traditions and (many of the) practices of Israel.

What we call “Christianity” is post-Pauline—indeed, arguably, it is even un-Pauline.⁴⁰ If we want to understand Paul’s gospel, and Paul himself, in his own context, we will interpret it, and him, not over against Judaism but within it.⁴¹

³⁸Paula Fredriksen, “Paul’s Letter to the Romans, the Ten Commandments, and Pagan ‘Justification by Faith,’” *JBL* 133 (2014): 801–8, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbibllite.133.4.801>.

³⁹On outsiders’ adopting the customs of others and antiquity’s “verbing” of ethnic nouns (to hellenize; to persianize; to Judaize), see the remarks of Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 46–50; earlier, and specifically on “Judaizing” see Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties*, HCS 31 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 185–92; Steve Mason, “Jews, Judaeans, Judaizing, Judaism: Problems of Categorization in Ancient History,” *JSJ* 38 (2007): 457–512. For the full argument about Paul’s own Judaizing, see Fredriksen, “Why Should a ‘Law-Free’ Mission?,” 637–50.

⁴⁰John G. Gager, *The Jewish Lives of the Apostle Paul*, American Lectures on the History of Religions 18 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 13. See, too, his *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), for a narrative history of Paul’s gentile afterlives in the second and third centuries; more recently, see Fredriksen, *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle*, 167–74.

⁴¹Fredriksen (*Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle*) places Paul’s activity entirely within his native religious (thus, ethnic) context. For different and differing interpretations of various aspects of Paul’s life and work along these same lines, see the essays collected in Nanos and Zetterholm, *Paul within Judaism*; in *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Gabriele Boccaccini and Carlos A. Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016); and in Rodríguez and Thiessen, *So-Called Jew in Paul’s Letter to the Romans*.