

Paul, Pagans and Eschatological Ethnicities: A Response to Denys McDonald

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Paula Fredriksen

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

Abstract

An invited response to Denys McDonald's *JSNT* essay: "‘Ex-Pagan Pagans’? Paul, Philo, and Gentile Ethnic Reconfiguration’.

Keywords

Paul, Philo, Ancient Ethnicity, Pagans, Abraham

Denys McDonald in his article "‘Ex-Pagan Pagans’? Paul, Philo and Gentile Ethnic Reconfiguration’ (2022) pushes me to think harder about my own interpretation of Paul's letters. I thank him warmly for his lively engagement with my work. In what follows, I will explore where we disagree and why: on ways to configure 'conversion', both in general and in the case of Philo in particular, and how issues of 'ethnicity' inflect that idea; on the meaning of $\sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\omega$ verbs in the context of Jewish prophecies about events at the End time, and how this affects our reading of Paul; on Paul's definition of the biblical ethnonym 'Israel'; on Paul's views on Jewish Law for both Jews and for gentiles within his version of the Christ-movement; and finally, on configurations of ethnicity in the context of Paul's construal of eschatological redemption in Christ. But let me begin with an issue on which we largely agree: family matters.

Corresponding author:

Paula Fredriksen, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel.

Email: augfred@bu.edu

I. Ancient Ethnicity, both Human and Divine

Ancient *συγγένεια*, kinship, literally domesticated relations between heaven and earth. In antiquity, gods and humans formed family groups.¹ Divinity attached both to peoples and to places. Sometimes these relations were constructed genealogically, with people-groups or their rulers descended from distant divine-human couplings.² Sometimes, as was the case with Israel, this relationship was constructed not biologically but legally, through covenants mutually established between the god and foundational ancestors or, in the case of Israelite kingship, between the god and the ruling house of David. Land, language, custom, cult, gods, family/‘blood’: all were intertwined and defining components of a people’s identity.³ Our modern term ‘ethnicity’ gestures toward these ancient constructs of *συγγένεια*. Traditional gods in this sense were no less ‘ethnic’ than were the groups that they attached to. True of Greco-Roman gods; true no less of the Judean god. ‘Ethnicity’ in other words was an idea that spanned heaven and earth.⁴

As McDonald rightly observes, this ethnic reasoning was both fixed and fluid. In terms of fixity, ancient people-groups had an environmentally determined *φύσις* ‘nature’. Geography, climate, astral configurations, divinities: all these factors went into the mix seen as determining a group’s defining social, moral and religious behaviors and characteristics. Ancients were ethnic essentialists.⁵ Yet ethnicity could also be massaged and manipulated, becoming, in our terms, ‘fluid’ and ‘constructed’. Kinship diplomacy provides a parade example of such simultaneously primordialist and constructivist ‘ethnicity’. Diplomats negotiated treaties, trade agreements and alliances by retrospectively generating genealogies linking the two parties under negotiation to a common divine ancestor.

1. ‘The idea of a religious identity distinct from one’s ethnic, civic, or family identity was unthinkable’ (Woolf 2017: 30).
2. Venus, via Aeneas, was the heavenly *genetrix* of the Julii family; Alexander the Great descended from Heracles, as did the family of Ptolemy; the Seleucids claimed descent from Apollo. For the political pay-off of these divine-human genealogies, see especially Jones 1999.
3. In Gen. 10, for example, God divided post-diluvian humanity into seventy *גוים* *עֲשָׂרֵהוּ* ‘according to their lands, their languages, their families, in their nations’ (vv. 5, 20, 31); when Moses reprises this event in Deut. 32.8-9, he adds the distinction of the nations’ ‘gods’ (NRSV). Similarly, Herodotus defines τὸ *Ἑλληνικόν* by appeal to shared blood, language, sanctuaries, sacrifices, and customs, *Hist.* 8.144.2-3. Rom. 9.4-5 lists Paul’s criteria for belonging to the Israelite nation, which we will look at closely below.
4. On this interplay of human and divine ethnicities, Fredriksen 2018; Belayche, 2010: 145.
5. See esp. the magisterial study by Isaac (2004). For an example of such environmental determinism, Ptolemy, *Tretrabiblos* 2.2, quoted in Horrell 2020: 81; for Horrell’s exploration of ancient ethnic fluidity and fixity, 47-92 and passim.

Diplomats and political leaders, in other words, were untroubled constructivists; but they imagined their genealogies realistically in order for the system to work.⁶

The variable weight given to these various indicia of ethnicity, in brief, were situationally activated.⁷ Sometimes (as with kinship diplomacy) genealogy mattered supremely; sometimes adopting the ancestral customs of others trumped or finessed the notional fixity of ‘blood’. Cross-ethnic behaviors could be expressed on a sliding scale: outsiders could ‘Persianize’ or ‘Hellenize’ or ‘Judaize’, mimetically enacting ethnic otherness to some degree or other (whatever that would mean): adopting and adapting foreign dress, or language, or custom, or showing respect to the gods of another group. Or crossing-over could be conceptualized maximally. Idumeans and the royal house of Adiabene, their respective genealogies notwithstanding, became ‘Judeans’ through the assumption of Jewish ancestral practices; so, too, did Philo’s ἐπηλύται and προσήλυτοι. Ethno-religious outsiders could ‘become’ insiders.⁸

‘Conversion’ – our word for this ethnic boundary crossing – bears a lot of baggage. It first of all privileges our modern idea of ‘religion’. The ghost of A.D. Nock hovers close to hand, and with it all his emphases on the heroic individual’s dramatic psychological and existential commitments, his or her punctiliar renunciation of former ways, ‘the reorientation of the soul’ (Nock 2019: 7).⁹ McDonald cites my own formulation that such a crossing over was ‘tantamount to changing ethnicity’ and to reconfiguring one’s ancestry (p. 24, referring to Fredriksen 2017: 54-55). True. But to conceptualize this reconfiguration of kinship primarily as ‘conversion’ risks over-dramatizing it.

Such changes in people-groupness (συγγένεια) in fact happened fairly routinely, whenever a woman married, or whenever a family adopted a son. More than God or the historian, it turns out, can change the past: marriage and adoption did, too. Both the wife and the adopted heir assumed the cult, thus the ancestors and the gods, of their new family.¹⁰ If we tamp down the existential drama inherent in our term ‘conversion’, we can see such crossovers as instances of the ‘fluidity’ of ancient constructions of in-group and out-group. Both bride and

6. True also for Hellenistic Jewish diplomats, who managed an alliance with Sparta by matching Heracles with a granddaughter of Abraham’s, 1 Macc. 12.21; 2 Macc. 5.9; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.15 §240-41; 12.4.10 §226.

7. As indeed the indicia of ‘identity’ as well, on which Rebillard 2012.

8. On outsiders’ adopting the customs of others and antiquity’s ‘verbing’ of ethnic nouns, see the remarks of Nongbri 2013: 46-50; earlier, and specifically on ‘Judaizing’, see Cohen 1999: 185-92; Mason 2007. On the Hasmonean conquest and incorporation of Idumeans, Josephus, *AJ* 15.9 §254; on the royal house of Adiabene, 20.2.1 §17-20.4 §38-46. Philo’s comments on incomers are carefully reviewed by McDonald, Section 2.2, pp. 27-29.

9. For an important corrective to Nock’s heroic individual who converts at a moment of dramatic reversal, see Crook 2004.

10. Plutarch, *Mor.* 19, on wives worshiping the gods of their husbands; on the duties of adopted sons, Cicero, *Dom.* 35; see further Peppard 2011: 50-60.

adoptee, through a legal act, reconfigured ‘family’, which involved them in new relationships with new relatives both human and divine.

At issue between McDonald and me is less how these ancient patterns of ethnic reasoning worked than the question of how Paul fits within them. For McDonald, Paul’s gentiles, in turning to Israel’s god, become Israel or join Israel; for me, Paul’s gentiles remain, ethnically, just what he calls them: τὰ ἔθνη, and ‘Israel’ is the Jews. To build his case, McDonald begins with Philo and with Philo’s ideas about outsiders converting to Judaism. Let us turn to Philo, then, first.

2. Philo and Ethnic Reconfiguration

McDonald lifts up three criteria for ‘religious conversion’ to Judaism: (1) exclusive commitment to Israel’s god; (2) incorporation into the Jewish people; and (3) Torah obedience (McDonald: 27).¹¹ Philo’s ideas, he maintains, conform to these criteria. He notes, rightly, that Philo, having no word for ‘conversion’, draws on metaphors of migration (with Abraham as a foundational figure) and of pilgrimage (McDonald: 27-28). I think that we can infer from Philo’s disapproval of the radical allegorizers’ behaviors that he viewed physical circumcision as part and parcel of meeting criteria (2) and (3), a male’s joining the community and ‘obeying’ Torah (*de migr. Abr* 16.89-93). But Philo spoke of ‘incorporation’ as forging a new political allegiance: Philo deploys the language of citizenship, and of the in-comer’s entering a new πολιτεία – civic language rather than, in a first-order way, family language. Finally, the object of ‘obeying’ or ‘observing’ Mosaic law, the third requirement, was to sponsor and support a life of (Jewishly conceived) virtue.¹²

Philo, McDonald concludes, ‘therefore, gives evidence that these three steps in effect constitute an ethnic reconfiguration, one in which “religion” cannot be easily separated from ethnicity’ (29). Yes and no. Philo nowhere says this, of course. Incomers are to be treated ‘like’ the native born and are to be welcomed by the native born: still, they are not native born, but ‘in-comers’. *The terminological distinction is precisely what registers the difference.* From our historians’ perch, we may use the etic framing of ‘ethnic reconfiguration’. Philo, however, nowhere to my knowledge calls such people, *tout court*, ‘Israelites’ or ‘Jews’.¹³

11. See also Donaldson 2007: 488-90; and Cohen 1999: 156-62.

12. Philo’s identifying Torah with natural law further complicates this issue, on which see Hayes 2015: 105-39.

13. See Birnbaum 1996.

3. Paul and Ethnic Reconfiguration

McDonald describes Philo in this way in order to set up his comparison of Philo's views on 'conversion' to those of Paul (McDonald: 29-42). But the two men are not readily compared. Philo was an aristocratic Alexandrian, a quondam diplomat and a philosopher writing biblical commentaries largely for consumption by other educated Jews like himself – and perhaps for some non-Jewish Alexandrians who might frequent philosophizing *salons*. Paul was an itinerant, charismatic wonderworker and free-lance religious expert prophesizing the imminent (and Jewishly conceived) end of history to Greek-speaking pagans. Philo's in-comers come in as a decision prompted (so Philo) by judgment, by love of virtue and by a desire to practice piety to honor the one God (e.g., *Spec.* 1.51-52). Paul's pagans become ex-pagans so that they can be spared the approaching apocalyptic wrath of God (e.g., 1 Thess. 1.10), in the brief meanwhile themselves, like Paul, becoming empowered by Christ's spirit to perform charismatic works of power (e.g., 1 Cor. 12 and 14). No one would confuse an Alexandrian synagogue convocation – or even a private Philonic study group – with a meeting of Paul's ἐκκλησίαι.

Very different messages; very different motivations; very different effects. Yet McDonald claims for Paul 'a similar kind of inclusion strategy for gentile Christ-followers' as Philo's for proselytes, one 'that involves a new divine allegiance, new kinship ties to a particular ethnic people, and new ethical demands' (McDonald: 29). Yes and no. I observe:

Step 1: Turning to Israel's God

'Turning' for Paul is not the same thing as in-coming/'conversion' is for Philo. Philo's in-comers enact their new allegiances by migrating from their native places and practices, by receiving circumcision and adopting responsibility to and for other Jewish ancestral practices, and by joining the Jewish 'civic' community (πολιτεία), wherein they are 'Jews' of a special sort.¹⁴ And they do so in the 'normal' course of events.

Paul plays from a different score, centuries old, about events to occur at time's end. In those texts, God calls to the nations to turn *from* their false gods and idols and to turn *to* the worship of him alone. Ἐπιστρέφω is not a synonym for 'to

14. Circumcision as a premier marker of a gentile's going over to Judaism was commented on both by pagans and by Jews. Pagan remarks are collected and copiously annotated in Stern 1974–1984. For discussion with extensive references to pagan, Christian and Jewish comments on proselyte circumcision, see Fredriksen 1991: 535–37. Recently, Matthew Thiessen (2016) has turned attention to an important Jewish counter-tradition challenging the efficacy of proselyte circumcision, interpreting Paul within this context, i.e., not that gentiles *should* not convert to Judaism, but that they *could not*.

convert', which in a Jewish context, for males, entails circumcision.¹⁵ Prophetic texts bespeak no eschatological *brit milah*. In apocalyptic prophecy, the word means 'turning toward', acknowledging the god of Israel. 'Turn to me!' God cries to the nations (ἐπιστρέψατε; Isa. 45.22 LXX). 'All the nations will turn in fear to the Lord God ... and bury their idols' (ἐπιστρέψουσιν; Tobit 14.6).¹⁶ 'You turned to God from idols ... to wait for his son from heaven' (ἐπιστρέψατε; 1 Thess. 1.9-10). His glorious self-revelation at the end of time is the god of Israel's great act of cross-ethnic outreach. The nations (and in some texts – like Paul's – their gods, too¹⁷) will worship God together with Israel, often on his 'holy mountain', Zion. Gentiles are included in Israel's redemption, but they are not required to become Jews to do so. They forsake all other gods to worship Israel's god. They do not, in Philo's sense – or in ours – 'convert', becoming Jews of a special sort. They do, in Isaiah's sense – and in Paul's – become *gentiles* of a special sort, *eschatological* gentiles. More on this below.

Step 2: Incorporation into an Israelite Community

Who then are these people? McDonald, foregrounding Abrahamic adoption, asserts that 'Paul's inclusion strategy parallels Philo's description of the proselyte's incorporation into the Jewish people' (30), but as we have just seen, Paul's gentiles are not proselytes: they do not 'convert'. They instantiate a previously theoretical eschatological population: ex-idol-worshipping gentiles. Paul, a member of a radioactively apocalyptic movement, sees time's end pressing upon his generation *now*, mid-first century. This prophesized population, through this new messianic movement, was coming into actual social existence – thereby confirming Paul in his convictions that Christ, present already *κατὰ πνεῦμα* within the body and the bodies of his followers, was about to return definitively and publicly to defeat pagan gods and to effect the resurrection of the dead (e.g., 1 Cor. 15.20-28). In the (brief) meanwhile, what does Paul call them?

a. In 1 Cor. 12.2 – exactly once – Paul uses the past tense, 'When you were ἔθνη'. Cavan Concannon, in his study oriented around precisely that verse, points out that Paul continues even in the Corinthian correspondence itself to discriminate between 'gentiles' and 'sons of Israel' (2 Cor. 3.7, 13-15). 'The identity of the Corinthians remains fluid and "in-between" in Paul's rhetoric' (Concannon 2014: 115). In all Paul's letters, ἔθνη prevails as his term of choice. Paul does not

15. *Contra* Horrell 2020: 143, who relies on Holtz 1986: 54-59. See too the following note.

16. For the extended argument on how to interpret -στρέφω verbs in this apocalyptic context, Fredriksen 1991: 544-48, reprised in 2017: 28-29, 77, 102-104, 119-20.

17. These gods, defeated by the returning Christ, will themselves 'bend knee ... to the glory of God the Father' (Phil. 2.10-11; cf. 1 Cor. 15.23-28; hostile cosmic powers, Rom. 8.38). On Christ's Parousia entailing a cosmic theomachy with pagan gods, Fredriksen 2022a.

identify Christ-following gentiles with Israel: they retain their own category, an eschatologically, pneumatically generated one.

b. Paul the ethnic essentialist thinks of τὰ ἔθνη as ‘sinners’ φύσει, by nature (Gal. 2.15). In 1 Thess. 4.5, in 1 Cor. 6.9-11, in Gal. 5.19-21, and especially in Rom. 1.18-32, he itemizes the moral turpitude into which their native gods and cultic practices have plunged them. This, φύσει, is how pagans behave. But Paul’s ex-pagan pagans, having received spirit, are now ethically reformatted so that they can ‘fulfill the law’ (e.g., Gal. 5.14; Rom. 13.10; more on this below). Accordingly, Paul refers to them by another term, ἅγιοι. ‘Holy ones’ might be a theologically overstuffed translation of this term: its original meaning is ‘separated out’. In Paul’s reuse of a Levitical, sacrificial idea for these ex-pagans,¹⁸ they have been ‘called to be separated out’ from those other ἔθνη, the ones who do not know God (e.g., 1 Thess. 1.9).

c. Given their new moral empowerment, whereby these separated-out ex-pagans, despite their φύσις, can now act according to Paul’s version of idealized Jewish behaviors (chaste marriages, prioritizing community, providing for the poor, and so on), Paul also designates them a καινὴ κτίσις, a ‘new creation’.¹⁹ By his lights, that is what they are, rendered so by reception of Christ’s πνεῦμα (2 Cor. 5.17). Spirit, not flesh, is the pathway to eschatological righteousness, which is why, *for gentiles*, neither circumcision nor foreskin matters, but ‘keeping the commandments of God’ (1 Cor. 7.19). So too to his Galatian gentile communities contemplating listening to other apostles: neither proselyte circumcision nor foreskin is anything, Paul insists, but καινὴ κτίσις (Gal. 6.16), the gentiles’ eschatological re-creation.²⁰ Spirit has made these peoples into something long ago foreseen but, in the moment, utterly new.

d. Finally, Paul designates these people as ἀδελφοὶ κατὰ πνεῦμα. They have been adopted into the family of Abraham, thus becoming legitimate heirs along with Israel to the promise to Abraham, that his offspring would be like the stars (Gen. 15.5; Rom. 4.16-18). Time and agency provide salient contrast between Jewish and gentile υἱοθεσία, however. Gentile adoption had occurred within Paul’s own lifetime, via Christ; God himself had long ago adopted Israel (Rom. 9.4). Linked now κατὰ πνεῦμα in Christ, the two groups κατὰ σάρκα remain distinct.

To make the same point differently: Abraham is Israel’s ‘father’ genealogically, whether those Jews are ‘in Christ’ or not. Abraham is the father of gentiles pneumatically, and only if those gentiles are in Christ. The ‘Israel of God’ (Gal.

18. On gentile ἀγιασμός and Paul’s sacrificial temple metaphors, Fredriksen 2017: 18, 94-100, 112, 117, 151-58, 164, 186 n. 4, 190 n. 24.

19. For the full argument on gentiles-in-Christ as καινὴ κτίσις, Fredriksen 2022b.

20. For Jews, covenantal – that is, eighth day – circumcision of course still matters, Rom. 3.1; 9.4-5; Phil. 3.5.

6.16), then, contra McDonald (39-40), are those of Paul's ἀδελφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα who (currently) share in Abraham's promise through trust (Rom. 4.12); they are the 'remnant, at the present time chosen as a gift' (Rom. 11.5). Both bands of brothers are subsets of larger ethnic aggregates: Paul's ex-pagans, of the πλήρωμα τῶν ἐθνῶν; Paul's fellow Jews-in-Christ, of πᾶς Ἰσραήλ (Rom. 11.25-26). The first group has achieved eschatological righteousness as a gift; the second group is the elect and foreknown remnant that points ahead to the redemption of the whole.

Does sharing in God's covenant with Abraham mean that these ex-pagans now share as well in God's covenants with Israel? McDonald thinks yes (e.g., 31-35). I think not. When Paul lists the privileges divinely granted to Israelites, his genealogical brothers and kinsmen according to the flesh, he names διαθήκαι and ἐπαγγελίαι, along with a host of other indicia that are not shared by Christ-following gentiles – such as the temple cult (λατρεία), the divine presence in Jerusalem's temple (δόξα), the patriarchs in the plural (πατέρες), a 'blood' connection with the messiah, the Torah (νομοθεσία), and a divinely conferred, ancient 'sonship' (υἰοθεσία; Rom. 9.3-5). These privileges are what make ethnic Israel Israel: they describe and define Jewish φύσις. Gentiles-in-Christ are indeed related pneumatically to Abraham, thus becoming heirs to the promise. But they are not thereby related to Isaac,²¹ to Jacob and to the fathers of the eponymous tribes. Distinction κατὰ σάρκα perdures – hence Paul's standing metonymy circumcision/foreskin – and gentile adoption is effected solely κατὰ πνεῦμα, through Christ, not κατὰ σάρκα, which would involve circumcision. Philo's proselyte, in short, would not look like Paul's ex-pagan.

Romans 9.6-13, which immediately follows these verses, has long served supersessionist interpretations of the epistles. Paul there goes on to observe, 'Not all from Israel, are these Israel'. The NRSV introduces the word 'truly' here, without warrant in the Greek ('Not all Israel is truly Israel.') Paul's biblical ethnonym thus transmutes into a category of Christian theology, whereby 'Israel' means the mixed-ethnic body of the church.

Unfortunately, such a reading collapses Rom. 9.3-5 into utter incoherence: Paul has just finished affirming that Israel is, precisely, genealogical Israel. Chapters 9–11 of Romans focuses entirely on ethnic Israel:²² its defining privileges, its mystifying deafness to Paul's gospel, the irrevocable nature of God's gifts and promises (again, note the plural; Rom. 11.29, cf. Rom. 15.8). Chapter 9 begins a review of Jewish history by relating the interplay of genealogy, human control and divine sovereignty. God gets to direct events because he is God. Thus

21. Though McDonald: 35 reads Rom. 9.7 and Gal. 4.21 to mean that gentiles *are* so descended. See n. 24 below.

22. See now the essays assembled in Rodriguez and Thiessen 2016, esp. the contribution of Novenson 2016: 133-62.

Ishmael, despite Abraham's paternity, is not Abraham's heir.²³ That role, as God promised, would go through Sarah to Isaac. And even descent through Isaac via the same mother does not ensure the status as heir: Esau and Jacob are twins, but it is Jacob whom God loves.²⁴ God hardens Pharaoh's heart so that God's name might be proclaimed in all the earth. For that same reason, now, God is deafening Israel to the gospel. In Rom. 11.1, Paul is still referring to Israel as 'God's people' – of whom currently only a remnant (with Paul as conspicuous exemplar) understand how God is executing his plan (11.1, 5-6; 'the chosen', 11.7). God has tripped Israel in the footrace (11.11-12). God is temporarily disabling Israel from trusting in the message (11.7). He has temporarily pruned them from the eschatological olive tree (11.16-24). But the current remnant is the down payment for the whole: 'all Israel will be secured', because the gifts and promises of God – again, note the plurals – are irrevocable (Rom. 11.26, 29; cf. 15.8, where Christ's coming fulfills the promises [plural] to the patriarchs [plural]).

With the image of the eschatological olive tree, Paul's ancient ethnic essentialism comes once again to the fore. Even when pagans are ex-pagans-in-Christ, they are engrafted into the olive tree *παρὰ φύσιν*, 'against [their] nature' (Rom. 11.24). Πνεῦμα may have helped them to reform their intrinsically sinful ethnic φύσις (cf. Gal. 2.15), but evidently that 'nature' somehow still abides. When God once again engrafs the Jews, it will be done *κατὰ φύσιν*, 'according to their φύσις'. However we decode Paul's image of the olive tree (see Johnson Hodge 2004, 2007; Gordon 2016), Jews belong to it and it to them *κατὰ φύσιν* ('by nature', Rom. 11.21, 24) because the tree is 'their own' (τῆ ἰδίᾳ ἐλαίᾳ, 11.24). Thus, contra McDonald, 'the olive tree' *does not* 'reveal that Paul envisions one covenant people that consists of Jews and gentiles whose subgroup identity is distinct *not from each other, but from those not "in Christ"*' (McDonald: 37, my emphasis.) The olive tree, on the contrary, rests on a quite different idea: ethnic φύσις, even after reception of spirit, perdures, distinguishing the natural (Jewish) branches from the 'unnatural' (gentile) ones.

Abrahamic paternity via spirit (an eschatological event) is not the same as Israelite paternity via genealogy (notionally, an historical event). This is perhaps one of the reasons why, in Rom. 11.25-26, as Paul approaches the crescendo of his description of universal redemption, he shifts gentile paternity yet again.

23. NRSV Rom. 9.7 introduces 'true' before τέκνα 'children', where there is no such in the Greek. Besides, Ishmael truly *is* one of Abraham's children. At issue is the question of inheritance and who is the covenantal seed (σπέρμα), an issue raised long before Paul, in Gen. 21.12.

24. McDonald takes Rom. 9.7 to imply that in-Christ gentiles descend from Isaac: I argue otherwise above. He also reads Paul's tortuous allegory in Gal. 4, I think mistakenly, to mean that in-Christ gentiles descend from Isaac as well. I take Paul at his word: he is making a typological argument against other Christ-apostles who are urging circumcision on in-Christ gentiles: against them, Paul insists that his gentiles think of themselves *allegorically* as already 'sons of the promise' *κατὰ Ἰσαάκ*, Gal. 4.28.

Abraham is nowhere in sight. Rather, by invoking ‘the *πλήρωμα* of the nations’, Paul nods to the 70 *ἔθνη* descended from Noah in Gen. 10. There God separated Noah’s descendants ‘according to their lands, their languages, their families, in their nations’ (Gen. 10.5, 20, 31). From the descendants of Shem, God separated out Israel: the *πᾶς Ἰσραήλ* of 11.26 looks to Davidic Israel, all 12 tribes – another eschatological idea. Even at history’s finale, then, these two groups – Israel and the nations – though united in Christ, remain distinct. Paul’s cento of biblical passages in Rom. 15.9-12 reprises this theme. The nations rejoice *with* Israel, but they do not become Israel. For Paul, whether ‘now’ (mid-first century) or in the (impending) End time, ‘Israel’ is the Jews (Thiessen and Fredriksen 2022).

Step 3: Torah Observance

McDonald and I are agreed that Paul post-Damascus continues to value Jewish law positively. We disagree on whether he changes his views on Law with respect to Jews. In Galatians, in my view, Paul is not telling Jews to stop circumcising: he is telling gentiles-in-Christ not to start. (Since Israel has covenantal, i.e., eighth-day circumcision, it is irrelevant to the topic of Paul’s furious letter, which is adult proselyte circumcision.) The Law functions to reveal sin, and both Jews and gentiles are ‘under sin’ (Romans 3): but gentiles sin gentile sins (like idolatry and its perennial accompaniment, *πορνεία*) and Jews sin Jewish sins (primarily, not trusting in the *εὐαγγέλιον*).²⁵

Was righteousness under the Law for Jews, then, ever a possibility? Paul seems to think so, pointing (with no false modesty) to himself as example (Phil. 3.6). Does Paul think that Jews, now that Christ has come and is about to come, should stop living according to their ancestral practices? He nowhere says so. Are these *παραδόσεις* mere *adiaphora*? That is not how Rom. 9.4-5 sounds. The Law, for Israel, is so important that it leads to Christ (Rom. 10.4). Israel’s law-righteousness may not be complete until they have trust-righteousness, as modeled by Abraham (Rom. 4.9-12); their zeal for God may not be ‘enlightened’ (*κατ’ ἐπίγνωσιν*, Rom. 10.2), but unlike not-Israel, they are zealous for the right god, who has entrusted them with his *λόγια* (3.2), and whom they worship in the right (and ethnically specific) ways.

What about the Law for gentiles-in-Christ? Paul expects – indeed demands – that they ‘fulfill the Law’. But which laws? Dividing things up into ‘Mosaic law’ or ‘law of works’ or ‘Sinai law’ or ‘ethical law’ does not get us very far: what Paul says about Law is very context-dependent, oriented very much according to whom he’s disputing and why. But the law-fulfillment that Paul demands of his gentiles draws precisely from *Sinai*’s Ten Commandments: No other gods and no

25. See Young forthcoming; also Thiessen 2018.

images (Exod. 20.3-5); no adultery, nor stealing, nor coveting (20.13, 14, 17; cf. Rom. 13.8-9). He invokes Lev. 19.18, an internal biblical commentary on the Ten Commandments, to sum up his position. These directives are both ‘ritual’ and ‘ethical’ – a distinction native to patristic theology, not to Paul – and they come into the tradition via Moses. Gentiles-in-Christ may be responsible for less of the Law than is Israel (the ‘law of Christ’, Gal. 6.2, is perhaps a subset of the Law?),²⁶ but that stands to reason: Israel is constituted within a wider nexus of covenanted agreements than are Christ-gentiles. Philo’s ‘step 3 of the conversion pattern’ (McDonald: 28), in short, finds small echo in Paul’s exhortations to his ἐκκλησίαι. Philo’s in-comers are ‘converts’. Paul’s ἔθνη are not. So who or what are they?

4. Ex-Pagan Pagans?

‘Despite the Israelite-specific group identifiers, cultural indicia, and ethical boundaries that Paul employs in his inclusion strategy’, McDonald rightly observes, ‘Fredriksen contends that he views Gentiles-in-Christ as “ex-pagan pagans” who, unlike proselytes, are excluded from Israel’s covenant and from acquiring Israelite identity’ (42). Yes. Gentiles and Israel share in the covenant with Abraham; gentiles do not share in all the other covenants (et alia) that define Israel (whether Israel is in-Christ or not). McDonald finds this position inconsistent with my correlation of ‘religion’ with ‘ethnicity’, on which we are agreed. Paul, of course, is under no obligation to be consistent on all points with my reconstruction of ancient συγγένεια. He answers to a higher authority: the traditions of Jewish restoration theology in which he stands.²⁷

In *Paul: The Pagans’ Apostle* (2017), I designated Paul’s gentiles-in-Christ with *two* terms. The first – my own confection – was ‘ex-pagan pagans’. Deliberately jarring, the term situated these people in their immediate social context within their larger pagan religious institution, the ancient city. It emphasized how their non-Christ-affiliated neighbors would see them: as deviant members of the city’s γένος, its resident body, still responsible to the city for keeping its presiding gods in a good mood. Happy gods ensured the common weal. Short of ‘going over’ to the ‘*ius* of Moses’, as Juvenal called what we call ‘conversion to Judaism’ – a known if grudgingly tolerated occurrence – a pagan was expected to regard his gods with due *fides*/πίστις and *pietas*/εὐσεβεία. A Pauline gentile – or any in-Christ gentile – would look to his or her unaffiliated neighbor like a deviant pagan, a fact that accounts for a lot of the edgy antagonism roused by this new Judaizing sect. ‘Pagan’, despite its being a fourth-century neologism, was

26. On the multiple *torot* of the Pauline epistles, see now the generative essay by Fisch 2020.

27. See Fredriksen 2017: 131-66 and notes. For Isaiah as Paul’s librettist especially in Romans, see the beautiful study of Wagner 2002.

usable as a first-century descriptor precisely because it underscored the assumed continuities of ethnicity with cult.

But inclusive Jewish restoration prophecies do not call End-time ἔθνη ‘ex-ἔθνη’. They just call them ἔθνη – as does Paul. My other designation for Paul’s ἔθνη-in-Christ, when seen from within the movement, was thus ‘eschatological gentiles’ (e.g., Fredriksen 2017: 88). This second term, too, is my own confection, but it derives from the traditions upon which the Christ-movements, mid-century, drew. This population had been an apocalyptic trope, and an apocalyptic hope – one that Paul, through his own efforts, worked hard to bring into existence. McDonald asks, ‘If Paul sees Gentiles-in-Christ as *strictly* Gentiles, why does he describe them with terminology that only applies to Israel in biblical and related literature?’ (45, my emphasis). My answer is, Paul does *not* see gentiles-in-Christ as ‘strictly gentiles’. He sees them as ‘*eschatological gentiles*’, members of the nations who at the end of days are turning to Israel’s god. That’s a gentile with a difference.

‘Ex-pagans’ emphasizes these people’s first-century Greco-Roman social context. ‘Eschatological gentiles’ emphasizes the prophetic biblical one within which this generation stood. These people are still not-Israel, Paul thought, though they now worship Israel’s god and – graciously, apart from the works of the Law – have a place in Israel’s impending redemption. *Traditions of Jewish restoration theology broke antiquity’s normative bond between peoples and pantheons*. Second Temple Jewish culture’s expectation of the ultimate universal sovereignty of their own ethnic, history-specific deity was one of its defining peculiarities. It commanded Paul’s full commitment.

These terminological issues drive us toward a final consideration: what did Paul mean by σωτήρια ‘redemption’? In his article, McDonald drew attention to ‘land inheritance’, Jerusalem in particular, as part of the Pauline package (34-36). I think that this distracts from the bigger picture. Of course, Jerusalem matters to Paul as sacred place and space. It represents the location of God’s earthly dwelling place (Rom. 9.4). It was the launch-point of Paul’s arc of proclamation (15.19). It would be from Jerusalem that the returning Christ would manifest in glory (11.26, where Christ comes ἐκ Ζιῶν).

But Paul’s vision of redemption – like God’s promise to Abraham – is side-real, not terrestrial.²⁸ The in-dwelling spirit of Christ was already at work transforming the bodies of believers from ψυχικά to πνευματικά (1 Cor. 15.44). Christ himself had moved from a pneumatic body, a μορφή θεοῦ, into a slave-body, a μορφή δούλου, after which God had exalted him so that, upon his return – presumably once again in his μορφή θεοῦ – every superhuman knee would bend and all tongues acknowledge his messianic status, to the glory of God his

28. On which esp. Thiessen 2016: 129-60. See also Litwa 2012: 119-92, especially on the nature of pneumatic body.

father (Phil. 2.7-11). The bodies of those in Christ would be similarly transmogrified at Christ's return, when 'he will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body' (Phil. 3.21 RSV), a body not of flesh and blood but of πνεῦμα (1 Cor. 15.44-52). At his Parousia, both the quick and the dead will rendezvous in the upper air (1 Thess. 4.17), then pass with Christ beyond the moon to their new πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς, the hyper-lunar heavens (Phil. 3.20). Bodies of *pneuma* do not inherit a tellurian 'world'. They inherit the κόσμος (Rom. 4.13; cf. McDonald: 35).

How will bodies of πνεῦμα register ethnic distinctions? Paul does not say. But in antiquity's *imaginaire*, somehow, according to Paul, they could. After all, angels had bodies of similar stuff, and they could register gender, whether female or male (and, if Jewish male angels, be both circumcised and not).²⁹ So could other Greco-Roman πνεύματα and gods. But to speculate on Paul's conceptualization of σώματα πνευματικά is to push well beyond what he has left us. What we do have, however, is enough to indicate that Paul's outreach to gentiles disrupted not their own ethnicities, but their prior relationships with their own gods. As adopted sons of Abraham, these eschatological gentiles would join with the genealogical sons of Abraham, in the covenant that promised their mutual salvation.

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29. On female angels, see Ahuvia 2022; on male angels, e.g., 1 Cor. 11.10; on circumcised angels, Jub. 15.27.

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