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# No Distinction or no Discrimination?

## The Translation of *Διαστολή* in Romans 3:22 and 10:12

### 1. Introduction

Paul's heritage in Christian thought leads interpreters to anticipate that the Apostle's views will accord with contemporary principles and values, emanating from the Enlightenment. Thus when we read a phrase in his letters such as «For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek», it seems legitimate to conclude that Jews in Paul's perspective must now be regarded as being on the exact same level as Greeks.

Indeed at several points in Paul's letters there are statements that can easily be read as denying any significance to ethnic distinctions, as such, after the Christ-event. But does the Apostle really claim that there is no longer any distinction between peoples as the phrase «For there is no distinction» in Romans 3:22 and 10:12 appears to assert?

We note initially that Paul does not in Rom. 10:12 speak about Jew and gentile, but rather as he does frequently, of Jew and Greek. In Romans Paul uses the phrase Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ Ἕλληνες no less than five times.<sup>1</sup> It is also to be noted that it is clear by this terminology about Jews and Greeks, that Paul certainly means to speak explicitly about ethnic designations. When awareness of ethnic distinctions is emphasized, in the contemporary world this may resonate with recent horrific examples of «ethnic cleansing». What Paul intended by differentiation between ethnic groups should, however, certainly not be construed as discrimination against any of the groups under discussion. Differentiation and discrimination are two very different activities and should not be confused.<sup>2</sup>

On the meaning of the rare word *διαστολή*, translated as «distinction» in the phrase noted in Rom 3:22 and 10:12, B.A. Taylor in his *Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint* gives meanings of command, injunction, order or secondly

<sup>1</sup> R. Jewett: Romans (Hermeneia Commentary), Minneapolis (MN) 2007, 632.

<sup>2</sup> See S. Reicher: The Context of Social Identity: Domination, Resistance and Change, *Political Psychology* 25/6 (2004), 921-45 (930). It was Reicher's warning against reading differentiation as discrimination that helped me to clarify some of the problems with the slogan «there is no distinction.»

distinction, discrimination.<sup>3</sup> But T. Muraoka, in his *A Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint* gives the *first* meaning as discrimination, followed by «to express orders», and «to cede a tract of land».<sup>4</sup> This would suggest that one viable and possible reading of διαστολή could be «discrimination» depending on context.

The problem in ascertaining the meaning of the term is well illustrated by Robert Jewett who in his *Romans Commentary* describes διαστολή in Rom 3:22 as «a comparatively rare term meaning «summons, incision, separation»» but also notes that Karl H. Rengstorf in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* states that «we are unable to illustrate the NT use of this word with the connotation «distinction»».<sup>5</sup> This clear statement in TDNT shows that there is no fixed or agreed meaning in the New Testament for διαστολή, the word translated as «distinction». Jewett describes the phrase in which the word occurs i.e. «*For there is no distinction*» as «a formulaic statement» which, in a sense, is how it functions rightly or wrongly in current NT interpretation. It reads in fact somewhat like a slogan that could be reiterated in differing contexts.

Interestingly Joseph Fitzmyer in his *Commentary on Romans*<sup>6</sup> translates the phrase somewhat differently, thereby illustrating clearly the issue at stake in the interpretation of this verse. He translates it in Rom 10:12 as «no distinction is made between Jew and Greek»<sup>7</sup> which is rather different from asserting that there is really no difference between Jew and Greek. Fitzmyer's reading clearly

<sup>3</sup> B.A. Taylor: *Analytical Lexicon of the Septuagint*. Expanded Edition, Peabody (MA) 2009, 130.

<sup>4</sup> T. Muraoka: *A Greek English Lexicon of the Septuagint*, Leuven 2002, 121.

<sup>5</sup> K.H. Rengstorf, διαστολή: in TDNT 7 (1971) 592; Jewett: *Romans* (n. 1) 278, n. 98. Jewett does point out that though scholars are agreed in translating *diastole* as «distinction» or «difference», the search for parallels in papyri and classical sources has produced no exact parallel to Paul's usage, but notes a reference in Philo Mos 2.158.4 «of the distinction (*diastole*) between things sacred and profane, things human and divine». Ekkehard Stegemann has drawn my attention to further evidence from the papyri. In F. Preisigke and E. Kiessling: *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden*, vol. 1, Berlin 1925, 361-62, διαστέλλω is defined as «Einen Rechnungsbetrag von den übrigen, rechnerischen Beträgen getrennt nach Sachgruppen buchen, einen Gegenstand als Sondersache genau bezeichnen und von anderen Sachen unterschiedlich darstellen.» Διαστολή can also indicate a clause in a contract to which one can positively or negatively refer. This indicates that the proposed reading I make is not ruled out but possibly supported by this evidence.

<sup>6</sup> J. Fitzmyer: *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (The Anchor Bible 33), New York 1993.

<sup>7</sup> Jewett: *Romans* (n. 1) 587.

allows that a distinction might actually be made between Jew and Greek, but that in fact God makes no such distinction because He is impartial.

## 2. *Divine Impartiality in Face of Human Distinctions*

To demonstrate how divine impartiality is understood in New Testament research, we turn to Jouette Bassler's excellent monograph which gives a thorough investigation of divine impartiality in the face of difference.<sup>8</sup>

The unity of Rom 1:32-2:2 is well argued by Bassler, rejecting the artificial division between the chapters, thus maintaining that 1:16-2:11 is the first logical unit of Paul's argument to the Romans.<sup>9</sup> She also argues that divine impartiality is not only the summary closing statement of the first unit but also the thematic heading for the next main section, i.e. 2:12-29<sup>10</sup> (focused around the word chain *circumcision/uncircumcision, nomos, anomos*). Bassler found that the impartiality of God was a common maxim at the beginning of NT times, occurring frequently in widely differing contexts. Yet it seems to have featured most in the attempt to provide an explanation for Israel's increasingly difficult circumstances (sometimes seen as just punishment for her unfaithfulness). This might suggest that the concept of an impartial God can legitimately be construed in an anti-Jewish direction, especially when election is viewed as favouritism for those elected. However, as Bassler notes, divine impartiality also offered a measure of hope for Israel, and satisfied the longing for her *vindication* over against powerful gentile overlords. God's impartiality promised Israel that her oppressors would not escape punishment, nor would she fail to enjoy an ultimate reward.<sup>11</sup> Thus it is mistaken to assume that the trajectory of divine impartiality, in which Paul is clearly to be located, can mean only judgement upon Israel rather than vindication. This also indicates that belief in divine impartiality of itself does not necessarily warrant a translation of οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή as «no distinction».

This is because in the concept of divine impartiality what we have is a statement about what God *does* in relation to difference in peoples, not a statement

<sup>8</sup> J.M. Bassler: *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Maxim* (SBL.DS), Atlanta (GA) 1982.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 134-35.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 137.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 44.



about the nature of the people themselves. It is a *theological* affirmation, not an *anthropological* one. The declarations are about God acting with the same fairness and justice to differing peoples. It is about God's character and nature, not about the nature of human beings. Thus Paul in a related statement says, «the same Lord is rich to all who call upon him». (10:12) The character of God and his dealings with the world are already noted in Romans chapter 2 which speaks specifically about God's *impartiality* towards all peoples. The divine judgement does not depend on a person's *ethnicity* or any other human feature since all will be judged equally by God in accordance with their deeds, and not their beliefs – «There will be tribulation and distress *for every human being* who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek» (Rom 2:9). The Jews are first in judgement not because they are worse than others but because they know the law. Likewise there will be glory and honour for every one who does good, «the Jew first and also the Greek» (2:9-10). The reason for this form of judgement is simply because «For God shows no partiality» (2:11). Behind this verse lies the whole Old Testament conception of the justice and holiness of God. This God is not impressed by the strength of the horse or the legs of a man! He does not favour kings and people of power. Rather he supports the poor and needy, the widow and the orphan in helping them to get justice in their dealings with the high and mighty. This God does not show *favouritism* of any kind, because it is those who do righteousness who are his people – not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law find God's favour.

Does Paul suggest here that, because they face divine judgement the Jews are no longer God's people, but now fall into the same category as gentiles? Not at all – as Bassler has noted, this is good *Jewish theology* that Paul is expounding,<sup>12</sup> and this is the God of Israel that he is proclaiming. He does say that circumcision is indeed of value if you keep the law, i.e. if you actually do the law, not just assent to it (2:25). But if you do not do the law, it is of no avail to bear the covenant sign of circumcision. For a real Jew is not one who is only a Jew outwardly, a real Jew is one who is a Jew in every respect both in the sign

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 188. Thus, judgement for Israel always serves the goal of restoration; God's anger is only temporary. Stanley Stowers notes that in the use of «remnant» texts such as Isa 1:9 in Rom 9-11, Paul is following patterns typical of later Jewish scriptural interpretation (S. Stowers: *A Rereading of Romans. Justice, Jews and Gentiles*, New Haven [RI] 1994, 301-02).

of circumcision, outwardly and inwardly, but above all in actually doing the law of God.

True circumcision is not only something external and physical, but it must also be something of the heart. Here, Paul is not opposing circumcision as such; he is only stating that it ought to result in the doing of the law. What he is stressing is that God is truly impartial – he is literally no ‘face-regarder’ – οὐ γάρ ἐστιν προσωποληψία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ (Rom 2:11) – he does not look at a person to see if he qualifies by ethnicity, or colour, or creed or anything; it is nothing in the person that determines how God deals with people, it is in God himself that this is determined – by his justice and righteousness.<sup>13</sup> This also means that God is reliable. He is not arbitrary in his judgements so that one day he is for a people and another day against them – he is entirely constant and faithful. He is faithful to keep his promises, to maintain his covenant with his people Israel.

That the concept of divine impartiality has often tended to be read from an anti-Jewish perspective is evidenced in the varied textual history and interpretation of Rom 3:1 and 3:9.<sup>14</sup> If, because of the impartiality of God clearly asserted in Rom 2:11, we were to accept the interpretation that Paul opposes all ethnic distinctions, what is most surprising is that here in this very first verse of chapter 3, Paul seems to retreat from the implications of what he has just asserted in chapter 2 by asking the question «what is the advantage of the Jew?» – and giving an answer in the affirmative, «much in every way.» This has

<sup>13</sup> The basic concept here is that the forehead, πρόσωπον, represents the entire person – so if you look at the forehead this is how you regard that person, cf. Fitzmyer’s comment: «For there is no face-uplifting on God’s part» i.e. «he lifts up the face of Jew and gentile alike, or he looks with equity on both; he has no favourites», Fitzmyer: Romans (n. 6) 303 n.11.

<sup>14</sup> The hiatus caused by Rom 3:1 in relation to the claim of divine impartiality in Rom 2:11 and the apparently conflicting statement in Rom 3:9 where Paul asks again whether there is any advantage in being Jewish has led to extreme variations in the textual history and interpretation of Rom 3:1-9 as noted by C.E.B Cranfield: Romans (ICC 1), Edinburgh 1979, 180-89, Fitzmyer: Romans (n. 6), 324-31, and A.J. Hultgren: Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary, Grand Rapids (MI) 2011, 141-43. Reading διαστολή in 3:22 anthropologically also makes Paul appear to contradict himself in the first nine verses of this chapter. Keck does take seriously the view that 3:9 cannot contradict what Paul has just asserted in 3:1-2, and overcomes the problem by reading προεχόμεθα in 3:9 as asking «are we Jews surpassed by gentiles» that is, «are they better off than we are?» L.E. Keck: Romans (Abingdon New Testament commentaries), Nashville 2005, 94-95.

the effect of making Paul inconsistent or possibly contradictory within the space of a few verses, and that on a topic so significant as the evaluation of the heritage of his own people. The unlikelihood of this surely goes against reading divine impartiality as the removal of distinctions between ethnic groups. But alternatively, if the Jews still have an advantage,<sup>15</sup> then distinctions among ethnic groups remain. This hiatus in the argument by itself should be sufficient to undermine the reading «there is no distinction» with reference to ethnic difference.

### *3. Scriptural Clues Concerning Difference: Translating Διαστολή in the New Testament*

In the New Testament, apart from Rom 3:22 and 10:12, the term διαστολή normally translated as «distinction» is found only at 1 Cor. 14:7, referring to the need for a musical instrument to give a distinct note. We need therefore to seek further understanding of its range of meaning by looking at the Septuagint usage. The basic meaning of διαστολή in the Septuagint is about people or animals being separated sometimes for specific purposes. The verb διαστέλλειν is used often with the meaning «to separate from», «to separate out of» as e.g. in Micah 5:8 where it is used in a very specific example of how wild animals might separate sheep into smaller groups in order to attack them. In Gen. 25:23 we read «two nations will separate out of your belly.» Lev 10:10 speaks about distinguishing between things – «Put difference between holy and unholy – clean and unclean». (The AV has expressed it – «that ye may *put difference between* holy and unholy», cf. also 20:25). Thus it relates also to Israel's separation from foreigners – set apart for priestly service etc. Num. 16:9 says «is it a small thing that the Lord of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel to bring you near to himself to serve in the tabernacle?»

Of these instances the best example is probably Lev. 10:10 where the people are commanded to distinguish between the holy and common, the unclean and the clean, sacred and profane. Thus when Paul talks of making distinctions, he draws upon a whole encyclopaedia of terms to do with making or not making things holy, putting or not putting distinctions between A and B. It is Christ who makes the gentiles holy and enables no discrimination to be made

<sup>15</sup> We do not use «advantage» here in the sense of «privilege» which seems to link too closely with a perception of favouritism, rather than «election», cf. Hultgren: Romans (n. 14), 133-35.

against them.<sup>16</sup> What is notable in this sort of discussion is that the theme is about attributing qualities to people or putting them into categories, rather than upon the nature of the people themselves.

It may not seem to make much difference whether we translate this phrase in Rom 3 and Rom 10 as «for there is no distinction» or alternatively as «for no distinction is made». But these provide two very different readings of Romans. To distinguish A from B is to draw a distinction between them, and this is a perfectly legitimate activity – merely recognizing the difference. But if when we recognize difference between A and B we make use of the difference to treat one favourably and the other less favourably, this is no longer simply *distinguishing* by virtue of difference, but discriminating against one in favour of the other on the basis of difference. By translating as «no distinction is made», this suggests that though distinction might possibly be made, no such distinction is actually drawn. (We are using the term «drawn» here, following Moffatt's rendering, suggesting drawing a line in the sand or on a map, possibly a boundary line that separates one from the other). Now this denotes an *activity* by someone, not a state of affairs. So when we say «there is no distinction», we are asserting this is the way things really are, whereas if we read as «no distinction is drawn» we are not stating this is the way things are i.e. talking about *being* but speaking instead about what someone refuses to do, i.e. about *doing*. This is what I think Paul intends us to hear – not that God cannot see or does not recognize diversity in peoples which seems rather strange, but rather that he refuses to discriminate against certain people because he sees that they differ from others. Moreover, if we consider «there is no distinction» as a formulaic expression possibly frequently used by Paul, then it functions as a strong component of his theology and as such deserves due recognition and a clear understanding of its meaning.

<sup>16</sup> See P. Fredriksen: Judaism, Circumcision of Gentiles and Apocalyptic Hope: Another Look at Galatians 1 and 2, JThS 42 (1991) 32-64. Although I do not agree with her presentation of how this is achieved, for a good discussion of the topic see C. Johnson Hodge: If Sons Then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul, Oxford and New York 2007, 137-49.

4. *Rom 3:22 and 10:12 alongside Gal 3:28*

In my book, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, I have argued that, in light of 1 Cor 7:17-24, where Paul states three times in the space of a few verses that each should remain in the life or situation in which each was called, that both Jews and gentiles retain their identity in Christ.<sup>17</sup> To be in Christ is not to take on a new identity similar to being Greek or Roman or Judean. The latter indicate a territorial dimension to ethnicity that is not included in being in Christ. Being in Christ is more like being European or British which does not prevent the same person being both Scottish and European. The new identity in Christ will thus need to co-exist with whatever remains of the member's original identity.<sup>18</sup> In response to this understanding of 'in Christ identity',<sup>19</sup> several scholars have questioned whether or not, in the interpretation of these Roman texts, I have fully accounted for Paul's apparent assertion in Gal. 3:28 against ongoing Greek or Jewish identity, thus indicating that they are harmonizing these three texts that have important bearing on identity in Christ.

Thus the formula in Rom 3:22 and 10:12 exercises even more influence when it is read in association with Gal 3:28 where Paul asserts «There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus».<sup>20</sup> Taking the first part of this declaration, «there is neither Jew nor Greek» and setting it alongside the two references we are considering in Romans seems to offer a very convincing case that Paul opposes all ethnic distinctions, and levels all such human distinctions that often function as sources of discrimination. So the issue is, as some New Testament interpreters strongly affirm, whether Paul opposes all ethnic distinctions *per se*. And if he declares all ethnic distinctions invalid now that the

<sup>17</sup> W.S. Campbell: *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, London/New York 2006 (hbk) and 2008 (pkb), also available in Portuguese: *Paulo E A Criacao Da Identidade Crista*, Sao Paulo 2011.

<sup>18</sup> On this see P. Esler: *Conflict and Identity in Romans*, Minneapolis (MN) 2003, 140. Esler speaks in terms of sub-group identity as Greek or Judean alongside an over-arching in Christ identity.

<sup>19</sup> For a full discussion of this issue cf. my *Gentile Identity and Transformation in Christ*, in: M. Zetterholm and S. Byrskog (eds.): *The Making of Christianity: Conflicts, Contacts, and Constructions. Essays in Honour of Bengt Holmberg*, Winona Lake (IN) 2012, 23-56.

<sup>20</sup> On the difference in the last of the three pairs Paul refers to here, see E. Schüssler Fiorenza: *In Memory of Her*, London 1983, 208-11.

Christ-event has arrived, is he possibly saying that though these distinctions actually remain, they should have no significance for Christ-followers?

In which case this would make the non-recognition of ethnic distinctions an ideal for Christian community, even though it is not always lived out in practice.

Or is he saying that ontologically there are no longer such distinctions – they have been annulled with the old aeon and its value systems? F.C. Baur regarded the distinction between Jew and Greek as having been cancelled in the unity of the new man, since Christianity stands above Gentilism and Judaism as the absolute religion.<sup>21</sup> We should note that if Paul were to make such an (essentialist) claim<sup>22</sup> it would not really change the situation on the ground as it were – differences in everyday life would still actually remain, and so would discrimination due to difference. Such discrimination indeed might actually be increased due to the fact that ideally and ontologically it would appear that there can no longer be any differences over which to discriminate.

It should also be noted that the German word «diskriminieren» usually has only a negative connotation meaning «to discriminate against» – not both positive and negative as in English.<sup>23</sup> In English one can discriminate between A and B, i.e. simply *distinguish* A from B by noting the difference between them – a discriminating insight is one that is aware of fine distinctions between things, rather than discriminating against someone. The question at stake is whether one simply distinguishes between A and B or whether one discriminates against someone because one is very aware of the difference between them. Thus it is feasible to say that Paul does recognize distinctions in distinguishing Jews from Greeks, but also that no distinction is made in the sense that he does not discriminate against either. This difference needs to be kept in mind – discriminating between things means only to distinguish one from another in a neutral sense whereas to discriminate against someone is to display bias in relation to them.

<sup>21</sup> F.C. Baur: *Das Christentum und die christliche Kirche der drei ersten Jahrhunderte*, Tübingen 1860, 117. Cf. also W. Rader: *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22 (BGBE 20)*, Tübingen 1978, 171.

<sup>22</sup> On this see P. Eisenbaum: *Paul, Polemics and the Problem of Essentialism*, *Biblical Interpretation* xiii/3 (2005) 224-238.

<sup>23</sup> Only in highly specialised scientific or medical contexts is a neutral use to be understood in German.



5. *Different Readings of οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή (Rom 3:22 and 10:12)*

It is telling however that some translations do actually limit the statement made in 3:22 and 10:12 respectively. For example the Jerusalem Bible states in 10:12 «It makes no distinction between Jew and Greek», meaning that the scriptures make no distinction, rather than the essentialist statement «there is no distinction». Likewise, the German «Ökumenische Einheitsübersetzung» renders this verse «*Darin* gibt es keinen Unterschied zwischen Juden und Griechen» – as with the Jerusalem Bible («it makes no distinction») a link is made to the scriptures. Even in 3:22 the «Neue Zürcher Übersetzung» adds «*da*» («Denn *da* ist kein Unterschied: alle haben ja gesündigt [...]») so that this specifically refers to sin. The New Luther translation also inserts «*hier*» in 3:22 («Denn es ist *hier* kein Unterschied [...]») and in 10:12 («Es ist *hier* kein Unterschied zwischen Juden und Griechen [...]») to relate this also specifically only to sin. Thus what we have found is that some bible translations are aware of the problem of a bald universal essentialising statement i.e. «There is no distinction» and have sought to limit the impact and reference of Paul's assertion to what the scriptures actually say in *relation to a specific context or instance*, rather than making a universalist generalising statement.

If οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή is read as «there is no distinction», this is a universal statement that must hold good or apply in every instance and context, but if I relate my statement to *this instance or this context* by reference to «here», as in the German translations, then I am making a very different claim.

To summarise what we have noted in the differing translations, in my view the best translations i.e the German Ecumenical Translation, the «Neue Zürcher Übersetzung», the «Neue Luther Übersetzung» and the Jerusalem Bible, and older translations such as Moffatt and Weymouth are those which limit the reference to «no distinction» by indicating that either with regard to «sin» or «in the scriptures there is no distinction». This finding supports the translation of Rom 10:12 by Joseph Fitzmyer in his Romans Commentary,<sup>24</sup> «no distinction is made», thus indicating that God is impartial in face of difference, but not partisan! We now need to consider what social relevance such a concept of divine impartiality may hold in relation to our attitude towards ethnic diversity?

<sup>24</sup> Fitzmyer: Romans (n. 6), 587. Fitzmyer translates Rom 3:22 as «the uprightness of God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe, toward all without distinction» (341).

6. *What Do We Mean by the Term «Ethnicity»?*

In English the term «ethnic» is sometimes used colloquially and wrongly to denote «ethnic minorities», but this misses the point that we are all «ethnic» in some respect or another. τὰ ἔθνη is Paul's term for the non-Jewish nations, and can, from one perspective, be perceived to signify a lesser people because it perceives these nations as lacking the covenant which the Jews have with the God of Israel. Paul also frequently uses the pairing «Jews and Greeks» to describe the whole human family. His specific mission is to enable the non-Jews to share in the riches of the faith of Israel. The issue is whether he seeks to do this by declaring the *abolition of the difference* between peoples or by acknowledging it, and thus opposing discrimination due to perceived difference.

We speak of the abolition of slavery as a great good that eventually emerged out of Christian faith and it would appear that anything that abolishes a source of inequality or enmity between peoples must carry divine sanction. Also, on the contrary, if we do acknowledge difference or give it any significance, this, as noted above, could be the first step in a move towards *apartheid or ethnic cleansing*. However, the issues are not quite so straightforward. Firstly, difference is not easily removed, nor is it likely to disappear in our global society. Secondly, if diversity could be removed, it would not necessarily be desirable, nor for the good of society.

If Christians were all to become the same, consider how much we would lose in terms of diversity, particularly of minorities. Since issues of *power* are always involved, we need to be aware when we speak about rising above tribalism, and local dialects and parochial customs that it is the powerful who are anticipated as winning the global cultural wars. The powerless minorities are destined to disappear and to be replaced by the powerful. It would be relatively easy to view Christianity as part of this process of promoting global oneness, replacing all human cultures with Christian culture as some of the early Christian missionaries were expected to do as in the case of William Carey the pioneer missionary to India! On this scenario the first task is to make all Christians the same – no longer Jew and Greek, but only human beings. This might seem fine, but it poses serious problems, and not least for those first Christ-followers of Jewish birth.

Firstly, humans who are not culturally, ethnically and linguistically defined simply do not exist. Human beings can only be found in an already committed form, since they all are born into some specific ethnic group, and get their in-



itial formation as persons from a particular human family. In the very earliest days children are given a map of the world by their family, a flexible expandable map but an orientation point nevertheless, and one which, despite expansion and adjustment, will be used by them for continuously reorienting their lives in the world. What is more, they will continue to view the world influenced primarily in relation to their initial *habitus*<sup>25</sup> or group enculturation into which they were initiated. It is this contextuality of all human societies into a specific locale and culture in the world that renders them different. If this is what is intended by the opposition to and removal of ethnic distinctions, Paul is going to face insurmountable problems in any attempt to get rid of such deep rooted distinctions. Ethnicity is thus not so easily shrugged off or left behind. And as noted above, getting rid of human difference is often a cloak for a cultural imperialism which really means a take-over by the great and powerful. Who decides what will comprise Christian culture or the new global culture – and would this not now be more likely to be Chinese than American?

Before we discuss ethnicity further, we need to define what we mean by it, since the breadth of meaning allocated to it is part of the reason for the confusion around the term. It is firstly to be distinguished from modern theories of race. The Jews regarded themselves as a specific group of people, but their origins were recognized as diverse – «My father was a wandering Aramaean» (Deut 26:5 NJB). What bound a mixed group of tribes together was adherence over centuries to the one God of Israel. It was this God and his covenant with Israel, which contributed to Israel's unique identity, not racial purity. Thus strangers could become proselytes and part of Israel, it was not a racial group.<sup>26</sup> It is, therefore, mistaken to consider that by attempting to remove any conception of Israel as a distinct people, we are somehow combating racism, and ensuring equality. Belonging to the God of Israel was a very strong obligation, and the laws that were given as guidance on how to keep the covenant were laws that separated as well as united. *Essentially it was the story of Israel and her God that created a narrative which became the focus of belonging and identity, separating Israelites*

<sup>25</sup> Following P. Bourdieu: *Pascalian Meditations*, translated by R. Nice, Oxford 2000 (original French edition 1997).

<sup>26</sup> On the use of racial terminology in relation to Paul and his view of Israel, see K. Ehrensperger: *Paulus, sein Volk und die Rasseterminologie: Kritische Anfragen an den «Race»-Diskurs in neuerer englischsprachiger Paulus-Forschung* *KuI 2* (1997) 119-33.

*from other nations.*<sup>27</sup> Whilst concepts of kinship and lineage were important, they were subordinate to belonging to the God of Israel which primarily acted as the focus of this people's identity.

Thus idolatry was a dividing line that led to separation and exclusion of Israelites from others. Loyalty to the God of Israel and his law and abhorrence of the idolatry of the nations, the gentiles, together formed a specific ethnic identity for Israel. There was fleshly or physical continuity, emphasized in the lineage of Abraham and Isaac, since it was to these that the promises were given. But it was more than fleshly connection that defined Israelites, they saw themselves as defined by faith and promise rather than only by fleshly descent. And since, prior to the period of Christian origins, religion and politics and land were not perceived as separate entities, we cannot define Jews simply by their religion. Some scholars have proposed using the term Judean rather than Jew since this included their ancestral land as well as their religion.<sup>28</sup> Do the people of Israel then qualify for designation as an ethnic group? In every respect they do, they have a history in association with their God. They have an ethos, a narrative of belonging that distinguishes them from other nations. They perceive themselves as distinct though related to all nations through the promises.

This self-perception of Israel is very important because a central feature of any group's identity is that it is how they perceive themselves, even more than how others identify them. An individual's social identity is, according to Henri Tajfel, «that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from their knowledge of their membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership.»<sup>29</sup> *So identity is determined not just by belonging to a specific group of people but equally by the value placed upon that connection.* Ethnic identity posits some kind of common origin or history for its members (whether real or imagined) often through the use of a narrative or myth about the group's past. What distinguishes ethnic identity from other kinds of social and collective identity is its emphasis upon a group that involves the concept of kinship, a relation to pioneering ancestors conti-

<sup>27</sup> Cf. K. Ehrensperger: *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space Between*, London/New York 2013, esp. ch. 6.

<sup>28</sup> As e.g. Ph. Esler: *Conflict and Identity in Romans* (n. 18), 62-74.

<sup>29</sup> H. Tajfel: *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge 1982, 1-11 (2).

nuously revered and respected. The idea if not the fact of common ancestry makes it feasible for ethnic groups to think of themselves in terms of family resemblances, including the emphasis upon mutual obligation as family members and a corresponding antipathy to outsiders. From this sketch of what ethnic identity involves we can see better what we are claiming if and when it is asserted that Paul opposed the making of ethnic distinctions.

### *7. Paul's Use of Ethnic Distinctions*

So where are we to locate Paul in relation to the topic of ethnicity? What sometimes has encouraged scholars to regard Paul as opposing the making of ethnic distinctions is that Jews have often been caricatured as exclusive, not eating or socialising with non-Jews. So Paul must be seen to oppose such exclusivism and, since Paul was committed to making peace within the communities he founded, the best solution it would seem must be to oppose giving any significance to ethnic distinction in any way. But even a superficial glance at Paul's letters shows that ethnic distinctions abound within them.

The most obvious example is where Paul discusses the place of Jews and gentiles in God's purposes. *τὰ ἔθνη* is the Jewish term for non-Jewish nations viewed from a Jewish perspective. It refers to these nations viewed as «without God and without hope», and so is not simply a neutral term, but implies a deficiency as perceived by Jews. In this sense, gentile is really a theological designation, and though Paul and other Jews use it, they do not do so universally. We find Jews/nations, *Ἰουδαῖοι/ἔθνη* in Rom 3:29, 9:24, 11:14, 1 Cor 1:23, Gal 2:12-14, and 1 Thess 1:14-16. In specific ethnic discussions Paul often refers to Jews and Greeks, using Greeks here as a synonym for the rest of the world apart from Jews, no less than five times in Romans (1:16, 2:9-10, 3:9 and 10:12,) as well as in 1 Cor 1:22, 1:24, 12:13, and Gal 3:28. In Rom 9-11, Paul parallels Israel with *nations/ἔθνη* and also in Romans he parallels Greek and barbarian/*Ἕλληνες/βάρβαροι* (1:14). He can even use circumcision/uncircumcision for ethnic contrast as in Rom 2:26-27, 3:30, 4:11-12, 1 Cor 7:18. In similar manner he contrasts circumcision and *ἔθνη* in Rom 15:8-9, Gal 2:8-9. From this brief survey of Paul's use of ethnic terms we note that as is customary with Paul, he uses his terminology in context, and varies it accordingly.

In this frequent and varied use of ethnic terminology, Paul is reflecting the diverse world of the first century Roman Empire in which he lived and

worked.<sup>30</sup> It would indeed be somewhat surprising if Paul did not reflect this milieu. On the other hand if Paul opposes and seeks to obliterate ethnic distinctions, it would only be acceptable to use such with a view to getting rid of them. But that is by no means the case. He even uses himself as an ethnic example in more than one place – he still is (not was) an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin according to Rom 9:1-4, and in Phil 3:3-8 he claims additionally to be a Hebrew born of Hebrews, as to the law a Pharisee. Indeed Paul even considers this pedigree as a potential ground of boasting, but immediately rejects this option as nothing compared with being in Christ.

#### *8. Paul's Hierarchy of Values and Its Significance for Ethnicity*

I am convinced that the clue to Paul's attitude to ethnicity, perhaps even to every aspect of life, is exemplified in Phil 3 where he makes a series of comparisons, with resultant evaluations. Contrary to a popular reading of this passage, Paul does not compare only his Jewish life with Christ and evaluate it as nothing or even as refuse. What he actually states is that he counts not just his ethnic background but *«all things» πάντα* – in the gentile world as well as in Judaism – as loss (ζημίαν, 3:7), compared with being in Christ. People have found no difficulty in understanding that Paul might devalue his Jewishness in comparison with Christ, but can any sense be made of Paul's claim that all is as loss in comparison with knowing Christ? If Paul really devalues *«everything»* in contrast with Christ that would make him world-rejecting, and put him in complete denial of all of human life, which does not fit with the rest of what we know about Paul or the Christ whose example he claims to be following. Scholars have been content to regard Paul's reference to all things as loss or refuse as rhetorical exaggeration. But, for some reason, they do not consider his counting of Judaism as loss to be similar rhetorical exaggeration! However, when Judaism *in toto* is rejected in Christ, a supersessionist dichotomy is set up, which repeats the antithetical contrast that has often in the past characterised New Testament scholarship on the relation of Judaism to Christianity. Judaism then becomes the exception over against the dominant gentile world.

<sup>30</sup> As Ehrensperger has demonstrated, despite the great diversity of peoples within the Roman Empire, consciousness of difference was acute, even in the midst of bilingualism, biculturalism, see Paul at the Crossroads of Culture (n. 27), esp. ch. 4.

Thus some scholars have gone on to argue that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whiteness became the universal norm and blackness (including Jewishness) became the rejected option. This resulted in the amazing contradiction that a supposedly universalist message simultaneously rejected certain minorities, as Kameron Carter and William J. Jennings<sup>31</sup> have recently argued. Carter is quite explicit on this point – «My fundamental contention is that modernity’s racial imagination has its genesis in the theological problem of Christianity’s quest to sever itself from its Jewish roots.»<sup>32</sup> And if we allow the truth of Carter’s insight, then the thesis that «there is no distinction» may even be viewed as another attempt to do this very thing, i.e. mistakenly to devalue Judaism in order to ensure equality and impartiality for all. But, as we have argued above, the biblical understanding of the impartiality of God in Romans is in no sense an anti-Jewish perspective, but one that ensures the mercy of God equally for Jew and gentile. And the acknowledgement of this blessing, emanating from the house of Israel, requires two very specific responses from gentiles in Christ.

The first is that they recognize that their election in Christ is secure only on the basis of the prior election of Israel<sup>33</sup> and, secondly, that this status brings with it the obligation that gentiles learn what it means to be gentiles in Christ.<sup>34</sup> The only option to counteract the widespread Christian tendency to devalue Judaism is to view Paul as comparing all things with Christ – but recognizing that though the encounter with ultimate values in Christ can possibly devalue all things not in keeping with the gospel, Christ also positively enables the revaluing of all things.<sup>35</sup> When Paul speaks of his relation to Christ as knowing him or being found in him, these are expressions of Paul’s highest values, among which the glory of God is supreme. The emphasis is not so much on surpassing the old as on emphasising the extent of the glory of the new life in Christ.

<sup>31</sup> K. Carter: *Race: A Theological Account*, Oxford/New York 2008, also W.J. Jennings: *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race*, Oxford 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Carter: *Race* (n. 31), 4.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. L. Gaston: *Retrospect*, in: S.G. Wilson (ed.): *Separation and Polemic. Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, vol. 2, Waterloo (ONT) 1986, 163-74.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. S. Fowl: *Learning to Be a Gentile*, in: A.T. Lincoln and A. Pattison (eds.): *Christology and Scripture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, London/New York 2007, 22-40.

<sup>35</sup> I have argued this point in some detail in my essay: «I Rate All Things as Loss». *Paul’s Puzzling Accounting System: Judaism as Loss, or the Re-evaluation of All Things in Christ*, in: *Celebrating Paul. Festschrift in Honor of Jerome Murphy-O’Connor and Joseph A. Fitzmyer*, ed. P. Spitaler (CBQ.MS 48), Washington D.C. 2011, 39-61.

Even in 2 Corinthians 3, one of the few places in the New Testament where scholars find an element of comparison between the Testaments, the manner in which Paul expresses this is in terms of greater and lesser degrees of glory.<sup>36</sup> So what Paul asks of his converts is a willingness to give up all things for the sake of Christ. However, Paul's Christology is not a world-denying vision but a world-affirming one. Thus when Paul says he counts all things as loss, he does not say this as a universal assertion, but says so only in a limited and defined context of comparison with Christ.<sup>37</sup> The things that Paul seems to devalue are not, in and by themselves, «rubbish» or «nothing» – they are this only in comparison with Christ.

Thus Paul is not rejecting Judaism *per se*, nor the whole of the gentile world; he is rather saying that the whole world must face the re-evaluation that Christ compels. But does this still mean that Paul regards knowledge of Christ Jesus as greater than Judaism? We note that Paul speaks here of Christ Jesus. If this is Jesus the Christ, then Paul is not devaluing Judaism by extraneous values from the gentile world, but still operating within a Jewish frame.<sup>38</sup> Nor is knowledge of Jesus the Messiah as the ultimate value and goal to be set in antithesis to the divine revelation to Israel. This knowledge of Christ Jesus must be consistent with the prior revelation in the scriptures if it is to *affirm* the promises to the fathers (Rom 15:8).

What is new is that the gentiles through Christ have received access to the promises on the same basis as Jews, a mystery only now revealed in Christ (Rom 11:25, Eph 1:9-10). The promises must be affirmed to Israel before gentiles can share in them. The good news, which is the outcome of God's affirming his promises to Israel, is that gentiles, as gentiles in Christ, may rejoice

<sup>36</sup> As E.P. Sanders has noted, «the black and white contrast between the dispensation of death and the dispensation of life is also formulated as a contrast between degrees of whiteness: what was glorious and what was more glorious», in: Paul, the Law and the Jewish People, Philadelphia 1985, 138. I prefer to use «comparison» rather than «contrast» in relation to «degrees of whiteness», see my Creation, Covenant and Transformation in Paul, in: R. Bieringer and D. Pollefeyt (eds.): Paul and Judaism: Cross-Currents in Pauline Exegesis and the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, London/New York 2011, 41-60.

<sup>37</sup> This is the same issue that we have discussed in relation to Rom 10:12, «For there is no distinction». Paul's statements cannot and must not be removed from the limited and clearly defined context in which they are located, and turned into universalising slogans.

<sup>38</sup> The result of severing Christianity from its Jewish roots, is that this encourages the judging of Judaism from an etic perspective as if it bore no relation to Christian identity.



together with Israel. This knowledge is a deepening or widening, an extension of the revelation to Israel – it is more of the *same* revelation but not different in kind from that to Israel. Viewed in this perspective the knowledge of God in Christ Jesus affirms and accords with the knowledge of God as revealed to the fathers. It is only the use of fulfilment terminology, not found in Paul, which suggests that due to a superior revelation, Christ-followers can choose which aspects of Judaism can be retained.

### *Conclusion*

What Paul demands is that this full knowledge of God in Christ Jesus should be the focus of all endeavours, and the measure of all our value systems. Then, having faced this re-evaluation, those things that were challenged by the call of God can nevertheless be taken up again within the new perspective afforded by Christ, and positively used in the service of humanity for the glory of God. So too with ethnicity – he who draws distinctions in the sense of discriminating against those who are different must be told that, in this sense, there can be no distinction – all must be treated impartially as God judges all humans. This does not mean that God and human beings cannot or ought not to distinguish difference, since it is not the distinguishing that is against the gospel but the discrimination against the other on account of his/her difference. It is indeed ironic that the heritage of Paul in Judaism that stresses the impartiality of God should somehow become misconstrued to mean that Christ-followers should discriminate against the very people whose heritage gave Paul the convictions to oppose all discrimination.<sup>39</sup>

So my proposal is that since the LXX offers «discrimination» as one possible meaning of the term διαστολή, the phrase in which it stands should not be read as «for there is no distinction», but rather as «for there is no discrimination». This fits in with the previous emphasis upon the impartiality of God in face of human diversity, and does not lead to a false emphasis upon the remo-

<sup>39</sup> This results from universalising particular statements of Paul in such a way as to indicate the superiority of Christianity over Judaism, or using aspects of Paul's teaching in a de-contextualised form to produce a secularised image of «Paul» in keeping with the tenets of contemporary life. More than one image of Paul may have circulated even from the beginning of the gentile mission, see my essay: *Divergent Images of Paul and his Mission, Unity and Diversity in Christ: Interpreting Paul in Context*, Eugene (OR) 2013 (Chapter 4).

val of ethnic differences.<sup>40</sup>

This essay is offered in grateful appreciation of the contribution of Ekkehard Stegemann to New Testament Studies and to Jewish-Christian relations. Since we first met in Basel at the home of Marcus Barth during the SNTS 1984 Annual Meeting, our common interests in Pauline Theology, Paul and Judaism, and Romans, especially chapters 9-11, have provided the basis for a valued friendship.

*Abstract*

The phrase οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή is generally translated in English as «there is no distinction» implying that Paul opposes all ethnic distinctions between Jew and Greek. But there is no agreed meaning for διαστολή in the New Testament. Fitzmyer translates Rom 10:12 as «for no distinction is made between Jew and Greek», implying that despite recognized ethnic difference, no distinction is made on this account. Paul's claim is based on the biblical assertion of the impartiality of God who treats all justly despite actual differences. In response to diverse ethnic or other differences, the God of Israel still refuses to discriminate against peoples because of their differences. This is the background of Paul's assertion οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή. Paul's statements are not universal claims for sameness before God for Jew and Greek, instead he is saying that as regards the Scriptures and in relation to sin, there is no discrimination against peoples because of their acknowledged differences.

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<sup>40</sup> The translation of Fitzmyer, «no distinction is made», is also a possibility provided that it is heard as God refusing to make distinctions between peoples whom he still regards as different. But because of the nuances «no discrimination» has acquired in relation to Pauline interpretation, the emphasis on «no discrimination» may not be heard so clearly through this rendering.