

REVIEW ARTICLE

Paul and Christianity as a new ethnic identity in which previous identities may continue?

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All of you are one: the social vision of Galatians 3.28, 1 Corinthians 12.13 and Colossians 3.11, by Bruce Hansen, London/New York, T&T Clark, Library of New Testament Studies 409, 2010, xiii + 229 pp., £60 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-567-13604-6

Bruce Hansen argues that the baptismal unity formula seen in Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13, and Col 3.11 is Paul's apprehension of a tradition that allows him to present his vision for social unity among his addressees, a unity in which their new identity in Christ may be described as a new ethnic identity formed around Israel redefined in Christ, and their participation in Christ. The way in which previous identities continue is described as an amalgamation of previous identities, rather than an assimilation of those identities into an undifferentiated whole. Thus, previous identities may continue, but in a relativised way, described as something new, that does not dismiss previous identities as irrelevant, but nonetheless new. So, the baptismal unity formula, far from rejecting difference and obliterating existing identities, encapsulates Paul's vision of social reconciliation for previously alienated social groups. In that way, the baptismal unity formula is a shorthand way to describe a central component in Paul's understanding of Christian identity. Thus, Gal 3.28, 1 Cor 12.13, and Col 3.11 express Paul's mythic context of ethnic identity formation, building on Daniel Boyarin's 'diaspora identity'. This new identity is patterned on the reconfigured story of Israel and the story of Christ. It encourages identification with Christ and the typology of Israel in order to produce a community of siblings whose familial bonds are to transcend certain cultural traits, such as immorality, idolatry or other cultural indices not central to the mythic framework. Thus, they will become an inclusive community of Christ-followers who embrace those who would otherwise be alienated. Furthermore, Hansen recognises that Paul nuances his use of power as he navigates conflicts around socio-cultural practices in each of these epistles. He appears disproportionately to call the parties that have the greater social capital to relinquish that influence for the sake of solidarity with their weaker siblings.

Chapter 1 argues that the baptismal unity formula should not be understood with the Hellenistic context with regard to anthropological universalism. Hansen, however, does think that Paul's engagement with Judaism holds significant promise for understanding Paul's appropriation of this tradition. The focus is not on individual soteriology; rather, it is concerned with communal identity formation. Hansen's thesis for this study is that the presence of the baptismal unity formula in Gal 3.28, 1 Cor

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2.13, and Col 3.11 'supports Paul's construal of the believers as a new ethnic group patterned on the identity of Israel as re-envisioned through Christ' (31).

Chapter 2 provides an understanding of ethnicity that creates a framework for uncovering the discursive functions of the baptismal unity formula in each letter. Hansen's ethnic model relies on a genealogically based understanding of ethnicity that provides the requisite social practices for the formation of a distinct ethnic identity (e.g. cult, meals, and marriage). Paul's discursive formation of ethnic identity invites the members of the Pauline Christ-movement as a family in which the adherents are united under a new, primary corporate identity, but, and importantly for Hansen's approach, previous identities are not necessarily obliterated. This last characteristic is unique to Hansen in comparison to other third race/third ethnicity approaches to the identity of the Christ-movement.

Chapter 3 shows how the baptismal unity formula functions in Galatians. Hansen is convinced that Gal 3.28 coheres closely to his model of ethnicity, and that viewing Paul's rhetoric in ethnic terms explains his purpose in writing this letter, i.e. to re-establish social unity within the Galatian Christ-movement. Hansen understands Paul's ethnic reasoning to be focused on reconfiguring the Christ-movement in Galatia in terms of an Israelite ethnic identity. The challenge is that some in Galatia were teaching that male Christ-followers needed to submit to circumcision in order to participate fully in God's covenant community. However, Paul employs the baptismal unity formula to remind the community that the apocalyptic transformation that has occurred in the cross nullifies all social distinctions and alienation, including, 'the social impact of the law of Moses' (194). This provides a scenario in which previous identities do not continue within the household of faith, i.e. in situations where they are a basis of exclusion and judgement, those identities must go.

Chapter 4 contends that in 1 Cor 12.13 Paul employs the baptismal unity formula to counter the divisions within the community by bringing to the fore the Christ-followers' new ethnic identity as a fictive kinship group in Christ that expresses itself in an ethos of sacrificial love for one another (152). This chapter contends that the corporate identity of the Christ-followers in Corinth is clearly described in a redefined identity, as Israel. This is based on Paul's claim that they are 'former Gentiles' (1 Cor 12.2), placed into the ancestry of Israel by the use of 'our fathers' (1 Cor 10.1), and the existence of a group called 'Israel according to the flesh' (1 Cor 10.18), which implies an 'Israel according to the Spirit'. Hansen is aware that pre-Christian identities were causing problems in Corinth; thus he recognises that on the one hand, Paul relativises these identities within the Christ-movement (1 Cor 7.29-33). However, he also recognises that other pre-Christian identities may be dynamically incorporated into the body of Christ (1 Cor 7.17-24), except in circumstances where these identities contribute to 'exclusion and status differential' within the Christ-movement.

Chapter 5 claims that Col 3.11 is central to the rhetorical focus of the entire letter. Paul employs the baptismal unity formula to show the way various ethnic groups are reconciled in Christ. This occurs through participation in Christ and a new ethnic identity that has its basis in the reconfigured story of Israel around Christ. Like the previous uses of the formula, Colossians reveals the amalgamation model of ethnogenesis that allows for some previous identities to continue though in a relativised way, as long as they do not contribute to divisions within the new cosmic body of Christ. The primary textual evidence for the way extant identities may continue within the Christ-movement is seen in the *Haustafel* (Col 3.22-4.1).

Chapter 6 provides a review of the aims and methods for this study. Then it summarises the findings of each chapter in which the baptismal unity formula was investigated. Finally, it provides a synthesis of these passages that describe Paul's purpose in using this formula, i.e. he 'denies the social exclusion expressed by the dichotomous pairs and insists on one new community comprised of members of many social backgrounds and statuses' who are now one in Christ (203).

In a review this size, two brief evaluative comments are in order. First, what exactly is the status of historic Israel in Hansen's approach? He develops a tenuous dialectic between the church as Israel and the church similar to Israel. For example, he views the church's boundaries as a modification of Israel's identity (201), thinks 'Jewish identity is attenuated' (198), and that 'his churches preserve continuity with historic and ethnic Israel' (196). Alternately, he notes that Christian identity may be described as the 'apocalyptically reconfigured story of Israel' (196), and church is seen as the 'Israel of God' (195), but then he states that 'Paul never directly calls the church "Israel"' (116), and he finally concludes that 'this approach does not obscure the role of Israel and Christ in Paul's configuration of the church' (192). It seems like Hansen comes close to saying the church takes over the identity of Israel, but then he notes, e.g. that Galatians does not really resolve the issue of the ongoing status of Israel's identity (196). So, would it be that individual Jews may continue to be Torah observant as a matter of cultural sensitivity, but that as a broader cultural matter Israel's identity is somewhat diffused, or taken over by the church?

This ambiguity exists primarily because Hansen follows David Horrell's general approach to Christian identity, which begs the question: Can the universalistic approach to Christian identity, so closely associated with David Horrell and even Philip Esler actually support the continuation of previous identities in Christ? Horrell and Esler both argue that the in Christ identity transcends other identities, and if it is a transcendent identity, does this not imply the relegation of the other identities? The problem is more acute for Jewish identity, which is really the difficult case. Hansen seems to indicate that key indices of Jewish identity are relativised, but would it not be more accurate to suggest that they simply continue unabated for Jewish Christ-followers? This seems to be an implication of the phrase 'keeping the commandments' in 1 Cor 7.17-24 and the continuing significance of the circumcision calling. This is the main contention between the universalistic approach (Horrell 2002; Esler 1998) and the particularistic approach (Campbell 2006; Tucker 2010) to Christ-movement identity. Thus my query is: How does one get from Horrell to the continuation of previous identities (rather than the one Christian identity)? Hansen's solution is that the mythic context is what is missing from these other universalistic approaches, and is that which ultimately allows for this third ethnicity approach to Christian identity allowing previous identities to continue in Christ. However, describing Christian identity as a new ethnicity confuses the categories with regard to Israel, and though Paul may draw on ethnic discourse to describe aspects of the trans-formation of identity in Christ, it does not follow that a new ethnic identity is formed thereby.

These assessments aside, Hansen provides an improvement on traditional third race readings of Paul's view of Christian identity, and he makes a persuasive case that the baptismal unity formula was central to Paul's vision for social unity within the one body of Christ. His work deserves further critical engagement and represents a significant step forward in understanding the way that Paul sought to form the identity of the earliest Christ-followers.

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REVIEW ARTICLE

Locating Paul on the racial map of antiquity?

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A former Jew: Paul and the dialectics of race, by Love L. Sechrest, London and New York, T&T Clark, Library of New Testament Studies 410, 2009, xiii + 262 pp., £65 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-567-46274-9

This is a published PhD, completed at Duke University, which seeks to integrate some of the insights of the New Perspective on Paul with a radical reassessment of racial and ethnic categories in New Testament times. The author questions whether 'race' or ethnicity may not have meant something different to ancient Jews than to white male-dominated modern scholarship. The suggestion is that modern conceptions of race and ethnicity have been anachronistically read back into Paul.

What is new in this volume is the literature offered on race and ethnicity in current scholarship, especially in sociology and cultural anthropology. Sechrest uses this material to maintain that obsolete ideas based on biological characteristics such as skin colour, and various types of essentialism are now rejected. Following the insights of scholars such as Stephen Cornell, Howard Winant, Anthony D. Smith and especially Donald Horowitz, and in conjunction with a lexical study of the terms *genos* and *ethnos*, Sechrest seeks to reconceive the concepts of race/ethnicity so as to enable her to interpret Paul as viewing all Christ-followers whether of Jewish or gentile origin as a *new racial entity*, 'both Paul and his Jewish-born and gentile-born Christian family had become members of a new racial family' (15).

Whilst there is much that is useful and informative in this study by a scholar with a particular interest in modern as well as ancient concepts of race and ethnicity, my own view is that the study is over-ambitious in several key respects. Whatever the origin of a term in the ancient or modern world, one cannot easily reconceive well known and much discussed terms such as race or ethnicity. In a recent lecture at the SBL Atlanta conference, Anders Runesson of McMaster University dealt with terminological and conceptual issues in relation to the theme of 'Paul and Jewish Christianity' in which he highlighted the difficulties surrounding the introduction of new understandings into our research vocabulary. Runesson claims we need to refuse to allow our familiar, al-ready in-use concepts to control and categorise what we encounter (much the same as Sechrest advocates). But as Runesson is aware, we cannot simply take well worn terms and re-use them as a vehicle for new content without considerable effort. This I think is the problem particularly with a word such as 'race' with its value-laden overlay especially in the last two centuries. This term cannot be

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