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'United Nations' under Rome or in Christ ? Paul's Challenge of Cultural Translation

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Introduction

Unity in Christ was a core concern for Paul. Where he saw it endangered he raised his voice. He was concerned with factions in Corinth, possible threats to table-fellowship in Rome, a so-called different gospel which is not different in Galatia etc. Although it seems evident that joining an ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ meant joining a community, the implications of communal life do not seem to have been evident to all members of these ἐκκλησίαι. The parameters of unity, its conditions and implications were obviously a matter of debates, possibly even hot debates for that matter. The threats to this unity Paul identified are numerous and have been discussed widely, the most prominent being the issue of fellowship between Jews and non-Jews in Christ. Whether this is considered to be at the centre of his mission as Krister Stendahl has argued, or one considers another aspect of Paul's theologizing to be its core, the relationship between Jews and non-Jews takes up significant space in the Pauline letters. This should not come as a surprise given that Paul was a go-between. He lived mostly on the road and his role as an apostle of Christ rendered him a mediator between peoples, traditions and cultures. It has long been noticed and acknowledged that in the processes that lead to the emergence of Judaism and Christianity as two separate religions, the interaction of people of different linguistic, cultural and ethnic traditions played a significant role. The Christ-movement was part of, and emerged from within a specific cultural and religious tradition, the tradition of the Jewish people, and developed into a movement, which encompassed people of different linguistic, cultural, and ethnic traditions. Intercultural interaction and communication lies at the core of this movement and contributed significantly to the formation of its self-understanding. I am aware that I am not the first to notice this and that this states the seemingly obvious. Whilst traditionally it has been argued that the blended milieu of Hellenism facilitated such interaction I propose to read this process informed by recent research in sociolinguistics, the sociology of languages and cultural studies focussing on phenomena and function of bilingualism and biculturalism in cultural translation processes. In

this paper I will focus on the notion of ‘United Nations’ as transmitted by Paul in a process of cultural translation in the context of the cultural and ethnic diversity of the Roman Empire.

I will do this in four sections:

1. I will first outline briefly what I mean by Cultural Translation.
2. Notions of the unity of nations prevalent in Roman imperial ideology mainly of the first century (I will not compare the Pauline discourse with philosophical discourses on the topic but confine this section to evidence for the political ideology of Rome more or less contemporary with Paul)
3. In the third section I will outline Paul’s notion of ‘united nations in Christ’
4. And in the fourth section present some conclusions.

1. Cultural Translation

There is a long tradition of analysing the interplay of Greek, Roman, Jewish, and other cultural and ethnic traditions in Pauline studies in particular, with various emphases proposed as having had the decisive impact in the development of ‘Christian’ identity. Mostly the interplay of the diverse traditions relevant here has been analysed through paradigms of fusion or blending, with Hellenism as the most accepted of these paradigms, recently complemented by concepts of hybridization and creolization mainly in postcolonial approaches. Such blending it is considered to have facilitated understanding in that it created a cultural milieu shared by all players who interacted with each other in this context.

Although I do not deny that cultures and languages influence each other, and are thus all hybrid in that sense, in my recently completed monograph, I propose an alternative concept for analysing intercultural processes in the first century and for the Pauline discourse in particular. I consider research into bilingualism and biculturalism to have illuminating potential for understanding Paul as a mediator between peoples and cultures. It has been demonstrated that people who are rooted in, and familiar with, more than one language and culture, rather than blending these different traditions, have an enhanced sense for the differences between them. This draws attention to the fact that where people of different cultural, ethnic, and linguistic contexts come into contact with each other, even when they are familiar with more than one tradition, the question of mutual understanding rather than being self-evident is recognized as constituting a challenge. Bilingual and bicultural studies

emphasize that ‘understanding (even in the same language) is a kind of translation, turning other people’s concepts and practices into their equivalents in their own vocabulary.’¹ Understanding involves a process of negotiation – and translation is thus a shift not only between languages but also between cultures. If we take into account that we are not dealing with the level of words or grammar here but with the level of meaning which involves the entire symbolic and social universe of a community, the relevance of the context of any communication becomes evident. Words as well as discourse are embedded in and express particular cultural encyclopaedias. This may also be the case where a language is shared.

The significant evidence for bilingualism and biculturalism for the period in question is clear indication for the linguistic and cultural diversity in the Roman Empire despite the use of Greek and Latin as dominating lingua franca. This means that translations between different traditions must have been a matter of everyday life, common shared practice, at linguistic, and to some extent also at the level of cultural and ethnic traditions. Whether this facilitated mutual understanding is another question. Particularly where the encounter of different traditions is involved, even when communicated through a shared language, this is not automatically the case.

There are examples of the difficulties this involved as e.g. 2nd century self-declared Syrian Pseudo-Lucian in his *De Dea Syria* tries to ‘translate’ the world of the Syrian town Hierapolis and its cult centre in cultural codes which would be meaningful to a Greek audience. Thus the deities are described as being like members of the Greek pantheon, but not quite.² When the author attempts to describe a particular place between two statues in the inner space of the temple, he struggles in finding an adequate Greek word for what is there. (Between the two there stands another image of gold, no part of it resembling the others. This possesses no special form of its own, but recalls the characteristics of other gods *DDS* 33) Not only the Greek language but the categories of perception, the Greek cultural codes are inadequate to express ‘the sacred identity of an entirely different world.’³ The narrative clearly expresses the difficulties in ‘mapping’ the world of the Syrian Hierapolis onto the Greek symbolic universe, and thus indicates an awareness of the differences between these worlds, despite Lucian attempting to describe the former in the terms of the latter.

This example from the 2nd century provides a distant parallel to what possibly Paul and his colleagues were involved in. Although familiar with aspects of the ‘world of the nations (or ἔθνη Paul in my view was and remained primarily and firmly embedded in his Jewish social and symbolic universe as was the message he felt called to transmit into the world of the nations. This transmission was a process of cultural translation, loss and gain in translation

can easily be envisaged, new understandings in new contexts as well as misunderstanding and non-anticipated effects be expected. Paul's call as apostle to the nations implied a role as translator and mediator, that is, as a go-between between cultures, traditions, peoples, and languages, including all the challenges this involved. As someone who was embedded in one and familiar with most likely other traditions, he seems to be well equipped for the task to transmit a message from within the Jewish social and symbolic universe into the world of the nations/ ἔθνη. In order for the message to be intelligible for the audience it must have resonated with aspects of their cultural codes and encyclopaedias. But the challenge of the task should not be underestimated. Paul's letters precisely witness to the challenge inherent in this endeavour: they communicate both, his and his colleagues' concerns and struggles in their attempts to succeed in the translation process, and to get the Christ-followers from the nations to understand what the gospel implies in their lives.

I will outline implications of such this cultural translation process through an analysis of aspects of Paul's discourse of the unity of Israel and the nations in light of the Roman imperial ideology of the unity of nations or as my title formulates the question of nations united under Rome or in Christ.

2. United of Nations - On Roman Terms

Paul appears on the scene of history at a time when the Roman Principate was firmly established and so was the claim of justified Roman domination around the entire Mediterranean basin. Rome claimed to have united the conquered nations under its dominion, thus securing *pax et iustitia* for all under its rule. The Julio-Claudian dynasty had firmly established its power. Although ending the murderous civil war, which had dragged in allies from all sides into battle against the different Roman parties and thus against each other, must have had a somewhat positive impact on the economy and living conditions around the Mediterranean, the peace mainly benefitted Roman and some local elites. Being achieved by violence, it was additionally secured by ideological claims and notions of assimilation to the Roman way of life for those who sought respect and acceptance by the Roman ruling elite. C.A. Barton is of the view that after a century of intermittent civil war, Roman citizens most likely understood that 'the *pax Augusta* was not simply a state of tranquillity....The Romans' celebration of the *pax Augusta* indicated their willingness to accept submission – to go from being citizens to being subjects – and to live at the indulgence, the mercy of the king. The peace of Augustus, like the peace of the gods, seemed worth the price.' But Barton also

notes that for many ‘beneficiaries of this *pax Romana* that peace was costlier than the ideology would make believe.’⁴ Thus Tacitus notes concerning the elite of conquered Britain that ‘they descended to the seductions to our vices, to porticos, baths and the refinement of dinners. This was called *humanitas*, civilisation amongst the ignorant, although it was an aspect of their enslavement.’ (*Agr.* 4.21).

The Augustan programme of peace and justice (*pax et iustitia*), supported by the introduction of a number of laws (*leges*) was officially hailed as the inauguration of an age of salvation for all peoples, a Golden Age of prosperity. At a formal and military level there were no substantial internal challenges to the system of Roman domination, although in specific contexts and at the boundaries of the empire, of course things would not look as settled as at and from the centre.

This military and political domination, accompanied by the respective ideological underpinnings could not and did not intend to, override or eradicate diversity in cultural, ethnic and linguistic terms.⁵ The Roman empire rather than eradicate difference, operated through accentuating, even stereotyping the difference of conquered peoples and nations. Thus there were the ‘effete Persian’, the ‘educated Greek’, the ‘painted Gaul’, and the ‘circumcised Jew’, marked out as those who were not civilised and thus by nature had to subjugate under Rome. Roman domination and wide-ranging diversity under its rule, and the multi-layered negotiations between these dimensions are the decisive contexts of the early Christ-movement.⁶ But this was not an encounter between equals, but between those who ruled and those who were ruled. Even the encounter between Romans and Greeks despite some recognition and admiration of Greek traditions and practices by the Romans, never was an encounter of equals, certainly not from a Roman perspective. It was the admiration of *Graeca capta* as Andrew Jacobs (in his recent study *Christ Circumcised: A Study in Early Christian History and Difference*) maintains that ‘Greek language and literature became the cultural spoils of Rome, but were never fully internalized – that is, Greek culture had to remain legibly “Greek” in order to retain value within the logic of Rome’s empire.’⁷ All other traditions and peoples under Rome and beyond its borders were beyond the ‘benefits’ of civilization, that is, barbarian. The world of Greece and Rome was divided into two categories: civilized and uncivilized. Although it was not a hermetically sealed world and the boundaries could be crossed, this was only possible if one was willing to become like them, that is, civilised according to Greek and Roman perception.

Paul and his people were not one of 'them'. He was one of those others, ruled, but not really civilized despite speaking Greek. According to the perspective of the civilized, Greece and Rome, Paul, like all other members of peoples who were not part of the latter, was part of a non-civilized nation. He was a member of a barbaric people, as Josephus' reference to his own people in Roman perspective discloses.⁸ He was one of those being circumcised, that is, bearing the mark of Jewish distinction as a mark of cultural difference which as Andrews notes was already an over-determined symbol in Roman elite literature and a mark of general ridicule (Horace considers the superstition of 'clipped Jews' a social nuisance *Hor. Sat.* 1.9.69-70; Martial is jealous about the sexual prowess of foreskinless Jewish men *Epig.* 7.30.5; and Juvenal refers to the weird Jews who 'worship the sky' and 'by and by shed their foreskins' *Sat.* 14.99).

The division of the world in Roman (and Greek) perspective into 'us and them', despite the recognition of diversity, emerged according to criteria which were not negotiated between these peoples but dictated by those in power. There was no negotiating of status for conquered peoples. Although the Romans could grant different status to different conquered peoples, as *colonia*, *amici*, or *confoederati*, they could also enslave them, and none of these turned the conquered nation into an equal partner of Rome.⁹ Any status attribution was granted by the mercy of Rome.

The Greek perspective was dominated by a dichotomy between Greeks and barbarians, barbarians originally being those who did not speak Greek, but eventually this was specified to refer also to those who had no Greek education (*παιδεία*).¹⁰ The Roman perspective focused on a dichotomy between civilized and uncivilized, civilized being defined partly by Greek education (*παιδεία*) and pre-dominantly by Roman *lex* and *humanitas*. The options available to those included under Roman rule by conquest were, if you were part of the provincial elite, to eventually join them in becoming 'civilized' or to submit, the latter being the only option available if you were not a member of the elite. Submission was required in economic and military terms even where partial autonomy in civic and cultic affairs might have been granted. Cultural, military, economic, and cultic domination were intertwined. But whilst cultural domination affected mainly the local elite who aspired to maintain, regain or gain powerful positions through collaboration with Rome, economic, military, and cultic domination affected the people of conquered nations at all levels. The power asymmetry in the relationship between Rome and the provinces should not be underestimated. Rome's territorial expansion and domination was built on military violence even where the mere threat of such violence achieved its goal. To become part of the empire was not a democratic

process but involved ‘intrusion, exploitation, violence, and coercion.’¹¹ The provincial voices we know of are mostly those of the elite ‘who had aligned themselves with Rome and had taken their place in delivering Roman government and justice.’¹² But even those voices would not be able to claim equal standing with the Roman elite during the first century CE, much as they might have aspired to such recognition. They were representatives of conquered peoples, accepted as useful tools of Roman power.¹³ To be recognised by the Roman elite rulers in the first century CE, if not as equal, then at least as ‘civilized’ and ‘human’, was only possible on the condition that the conquered nations accepted this ‘civilising’ force and turned ‘human’ according to the Roman concept of *humanitas*, that is, became the same by copying the Roman way of life.

If difference (alterity) was noted, then mostly as a curiosity, or, when it came to the courage of defeated nations, in order to enhance the bravery and grandeur of Roman conquest; but it had no value in itself; it was not always eradicated (as in the case of the Dacians by Trajan) but ways of life which differed from the Greek and Roman way of life were certainly not respected or accepted.

These nations were united under Roman control, they were united in their defeat, and in their status as enslaved, marginalized others.¹⁴ This is the case even when peoples had themselves taken the initiative to enter a formal link with Rome, and the relationship was not hostile throughout, as in the case of the Jews.¹⁵ Significantly the visual representations at Aphrodisias and elsewhere, as well as literary evidence, are careful to emphasize the difference between the conquered peoples through specific attributes such as dress code, hair style, and artefacts. Thus Dio refers to Augustus’ funeral procession that it included ‘images of all the *nations* that he had acquired, each represented individually with some local characteristic.’ (τά τε ἔθνη πάνθ’ ὅσα προσκετήσατο ἐπιχωρῶς σφίσιν ὡς ἕκαστα ἀπηκασμένα ἐμέμφθη).¹⁶

Whilst this clearly indicates awareness of ethnic and cultural diversity on the part of the Romans,¹⁷ the reasons behind depicting and emphasizing such diversity hardly implied a recognition or even appreciation of these peoples in their particularity, but rather served to emphasize their difference from the ‘civilized’ people of Rome (and to a lesser extent of Greece). They were precisely depicted as diverse in their inferiority thus legitimizing Roman conquest as a civilizing mission according to Roman ideology. Unity between these peoples could only consist in unity under Rome, in submission to Roman law and order. Recognition as truly human could only be attained through *humanitas*, that is, by becoming Roman, accepting the *pater patriae* as their Father, and embracing Roman ideology.¹⁸ Any unity between these ἔθνη/*gentes* which would have emerged from their own initiative and based on

their self-perception as peoples distinct from Rome, was considered to mean trouble for Rome and must thus be prevented,¹⁹ as Tacitus' comment illustrates 'May the nations retain and perpetuate, if not an affection for us, at least an animosity against each other! since, while the fate of the empire is thus urgent, fortune can bestow no higher benefit upon us, than the discord of our enemies' (Maneat, quaeso, duretque gentibus, si non amor nostri, at certe odium sui, quando urgentibus imperii fatibus nihil iam praestare fortuna maius potest quam hostium discordiam [*Germ.* 33.2]). Paul's letters are predominantly addressing people from these ἔθνη, and he himself refers to his calling experience as a commissioning to proclaim good news among the nations (Gal 1.16) This includes the call for unity and solidarity in Christ among conquered peoples in clear contradistinction to the discord between them advocated by Rome.

3. United Nations - In Christ

The implications of the Christ-event for the relationship between different peoples are not emerging in a vacuum. The Roman ideology of united nations under its domination was one among numerous traditions which depicted actual or fictitious scenarios of the relationship between 'us and them' in Antiquity as Erich Gruen in *Rethinking the Other in Antiquity* has recently demonstrated.²⁰ Paul's vision of Israel and the nations united in Christ should be considered in this wider context, with Roman ideology resonating with it significantly in my view.

However, the relationship between Israel and the nations is perceived by Paul through a Jewish perception of the world. The association of people from the nations/ ἔθνη with the God of Israel in and through Christ is understood from within this particular tradition. This aspect of the gospel does not emerge out of nowhere with the advent of Christ. The association of the nations/ ἔθνη to the God of Israel is interpreted from within existing Jewish traditions. It is not novel to, or inconsistent with Jewish tradition. Their narrative of belonging begins with God's creation and humankind as a whole as part of it. In this narrative all peoples, rather than only a few, are seen as related to each other, through their common descent from Noah. Thus, it is feasible in this tradition, to see the election and particularity of one people, Israel, in conjunction with openness to other nations. The particular relationship of God with this people, through election, covenant, and guidance through the Torah, and the perception of 'the other' as nevertheless part of God's creation and divine economy, are not seen as being in contradiction with each other in significant trajectories of this tradition. Terry Donaldson has

affirmed ‘Jews could not tell their own national story without reference to the other nations, and if perhaps it was possible to narrate the story in such a way that the nations functioned simply as a foil for Israel, the story itself contained at least latent questions about the relationship between these other nations and the God who created them.’²¹ There are numerous trajectories which envision non-Jews, rather than joining Israel, that is, a socio-ethnic group, through conversion, as joining themselves to the Lord as ‘others’.

Thus e.g. in Isa 56.6 we read ‘and the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants’, (foreigners = ἀλλογενέσι= נכר – one from a foreign land) and in Zech 2.11-12 ‘Many nations (גוים - ״εθνη) shall join themselves to the LORD on that day, and shall be my people; and I will dwell in your midst. And you shall know that the LORD of hosts has sent me to you. The LORD will inherit Judah as his portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem’ (similar traditions of a clear distinction between Israel and the nations can be found in Isa 2.3 (״εθνη as distinguished from the house of Jacob), Mica 4.2 ((גוים - ״εθνη), Ez 47.22-23 (גוים – προσελύτοι) , Ezra 6.21 (It was eaten by the people of Israel who had returned from exile, also by all who had joined them and separated themselves from the pollutions of the nations of the land to worship (דרש) the Lord, the God of Israel).²²

These people are not seen as becoming part of Israel, but they worship God as foreigners because God’s house is now a house of prayer for all peoples (Isa 56.7).²³ There are traditions in these narratives which envision non-Jewish peoples joining in the praise of the God of Israel without becoming members of the people Israel, that is, without becoming like them. Their alterity is preserved.²⁴ The distinctions between, and diversity of, nations/ ἔθνη is maintained and so is their specific way of life, and of relating to God.

It cannot be discerned precisely which specific traditions of this narrative were influential for Paul’s understanding of his call to the nations. But it can hardly be envisaged that such traditions were not of some importance for his understanding of his call to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations (Rom 1.5). His understanding of the Christ-event, including the implications this had for the relationship between Israel and the nations, was embedded in, and infused with the cultural encyclopaedia of such traditions.

These traditions of a unification of nations to jointly worship the God of Israel in itself present an alternative scenario to the scenarios of united nations under a dominating force.²⁵ Admittedly not all of these Jewish traditions envisage a peaceful relationship between Israel and the nations. There are those traditions which, rather than presenting an alternative merely

present inversions of the domination-subjugation scheme with the non-Jewish nations being subjugated now under the rule of the God of Israel.²⁶

Paul's arguments concerning the relationship of Israel and the nations, however, resonate rather with those other traditions; those which envisage the unification of the nations not by force but by them responding to the call to serve the God of Israel, in the vein seen by Tobit in his blessings before his death 'And all the nations will turn to the Lord God in truth and will turn away from their idols and all the nations will praise/bless the Lord' (7 καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιστρέψουσιν ἀληθίνοϛ φοβεῖσθαι κύριον τὸν θεὸν καὶ κατορύξουσιν τὰ εἰδῶλα αὐτῶν, καὶ εὐλογήσουσιν πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τὸν κύριον) [Tob.14.6]). The earliest Christ-followers saw this call actualized in and through the Christ-event, that is, the implications of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the first century CE, to envisage a non-violent unification of the nations actually presents a powerful alternative to the notion of their unification under the dominating, 'civilising' force of Rome.

Unlike the Roman perception, where a degree of equality could only be achieved by assimilation, that is by the adoption of the Roman way of life, the scriptural traditions of the nations joining Israel in glorifying their God do not presuppose such assimilation; in these visions the nations are not required to become the same, that is Jews, nor does Israel become like the nations in this process of united glorification of God.

For Paul, the already of 'the world to come', seen as revealed in the Christ-event, actualizes such visions, rather than initiating them. Based on these, the envisaged unity presupposes and actually supports the diversity and particularity of these nations, and of Israel. The nations/ἔθνη are precisely not to become the same as Jews, they are not to convert to Judaism, nor is Israel to become like the nations.

This is evident in passages such as Gal 5.2 (Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit for you - Ἴδε ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει) where Paul sums up his passionate plea to the Galatians to maintain their identity as Galatians and not become Jews. He defends the necessity for these Galatian Christ-followers to be just that – Galatian Christ-followers. Through Christ they are now heirs to the promises of Abraham and as such called to glorify the God of Israel as the God of all Creation, without becoming Jews, that is, without becoming part of the people Israel. They become God's people, a diverse people not a uniform people of sameness. No one shall compel these Christ-followers from a conquered nation to assimilate and become the same as Jews. Thus Galatians concludes with a blessing

for all, for those from the nations and for Israel, rather than with a blessing for a new Israel or a new humanity (Gal 6.16).²⁷

In 1 Cor 7.18-24 we find a strong affirmation of the identity of both, Jews and people from the nations in Christ. They are both confirmed in what they are, their transformation in Christ does not lead to a mutual assimilation – those who are circumcised, that is, Jews, remain Jews when called in Christ, those who are not circumcised, that is people from the nations too will retain their identities. The main issue is to remain with God (1 Cor 7.24 ‘In whatever (condition) you were called, brothers and sisters, there remain with God’).

On the other hand in Romans there seem to be issues concerning the identity of Jews and attitudes which denigrate their particular way of life which Paul addresses. As passionately as Paul defends the identity of the Galatians in Christ, he here defends the identity of the Jews, and their on-going bond with their God, whether they are in Christ or not (it is worth noting that no such defence is made for people from the nations who are not in Christ). In Romans 9-11 clearly clarifies Paul’s position in this respect. If as it has been argued, Jewish issues concerning food are involved in some of the problems in the Roman ἐκκλησίαι then Paul in Rom 14. 1-15.14 does not argue for an assimilation towards each other, but rather for the accommodation to the needs of the weaker partners in the debate.²⁸ To accommodate is not the same as to become the same. Accommodation recognises the abiding difference, here the difference between those who eat meat and those who eat vegetables remain (for whatever reasons – I am less convinced than I was a few years ago that the problems arise because of concerns of Jews in the communities) and no argument is made that this should change over the course of a development. Paul merely admonishes the ‘strong’ to accommodate to the needs of the weak on occasions where the unity of the community is at stake. No requirement is made that they should change their practice entirely, but only in particular circumstances.

The key issue again is, that in their diversity Christ-followers glorify the God of Israel together with Israel (Rom 15. 9-10)

The paradigm of sameness, promoted by the imperial power is precisely *not* what these people from the nations and Israel were to follow as followers of Christ. The nations do not become the same as Israel nor are they integrated into Israel or become a new Israel. If they were to become part of Israel their identity as those from the nations would be assimilated to, and thus lost in Israel. If Israel were to cease to be Israel Jewish identity would be assimilated to, and thus lost in the identity of the nations. Either way the particularity of those in Christ is lost in a paradigm of assimilation or sameness, even if this were a so-called ‘hybrid’ sameness. The nations are to join Israel in the praise of God as the nations/ ἔθνη; the distinction between

circumcision and uncircumcision is not obliterated in Christ but maintained. Unity is not achieved by the eradication of cultural and ethnic distinctions, but by affirming their validity and value in Christ.²⁹ This is of highly theological significance, as Nanos has demonstrated, in that the understanding of God as Creator, and thus as God of Israel and the nations is at stake here.³⁰ And it has implications not only in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity, but e.g. for contemporary gender discourses in its various dimensions as well. Hardly anybody would argue today as the Gospel of Thomas assumes, that in order for Mary Magdalene enter the kingdom of God she would have to become male (*Gos. Thom.* 114).

Paul's strong arguments for the respect for people in their difference in the exemplary passages mentioned above, sets out an alternative discourse to the Roman imperial ideology of sameness. Recognition and respect as equals by Romans, even for members of the provincial elite presupposed the assimilation to the formers' perception of *humanitas*. There was no equality between those who were and remained different on Roman terms, even among the elite. Gal 3.26-28 is a call to unity and equality, not to sameness, as William S. Campbell has convincingly demonstrated,³¹ and as such it is, if not an explicit, then certainly an implicit challenge to the prevalent Roman paradigm.

4. 'United Nations in Christ' - Problems of Cultural Translation

It is evident from Paul's way of arguing that this was not easy to understand. To translate this alternative understanding of unity among the nations, and between Israel and the nations, into a social and symbolic world permeated by the diversity politics in the service of domination and by the universalising unification ideology of the empire implied a steep learning curve by Christ-followers from the nations, and possibly also for some Jews.

Traditionally those Paul is arguing with have been identified as 'Judaizing' opponents, and in the main they were considered to be Jewish Christ-followers who 'preached circumcision'. Although there may have been Christ-followers who understood the implications of the Christ-event in this vein, the issue of 'opponents' is more complex than a dual dichotomy of Paul and 'Judaizers', as has been convincingly demonstrated by Jerry Sumney.³² Mark Nanos has proposed scenarios which include the possibility that non-Christ-following Jews would have advocated that 'gentiles' who wished to worship God as equals with Jews must convert to Judaism, as they did not see the messianic visions of their inclusions as gentiles actualized in Christ. This may have been actually Paul's stance before his call.³³ On the other hand, there may have been non-Jewish Christ-followers who may have understood unity and equality in

Roman terms as only being possible through full assimilation, that is, conversion to Judaism as the paradigm they were accustomed to. The struggle with the former would have arisen because of different perceptions and interpretations of what had happened in Christ, that is, in the context of an inner-Jewish debate, the struggle with the latter on the other hand had more to do with issues of cultural translation. Paul has to try to explain that the imperial paradigm of unity in diversity was very different from the envisaged unity of life in Christ.

Rather than presupposing either the overcoming of difference, or devaluing those who remained different as barbaric, slavish or sub-human, this unity was based on equality and respect for those who were and remained different. The ethos of living together required recognition and respect for the other, for whom Christ also died. No Christ-follower was ever 'to put a stumbling block in the way of another.' (Rom 14.13). Paul's request of the strong to accommodate and respect (not tolerate) the needs of the weak reverses the imperial pattern of assimilation. His call to imitate him in as much as he imitates Christ implies the recognition of responsibility towards the other in his/her difference (Phil 2.1-11).³⁴

Paul advocates the necessity of the retention of Jewish identity in Christ in as much as he advocates the retention of the diverse identities of the nations (1 Cor 7.17-24).³⁵ Unity and equality of the nations in their diversity, with all its implications, is one of the key identity markers which distinguishes the *ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ* from the imperial unity of the nations. This unity is not enforced by violence, but those joining have responded in trust to the call of God through one who was a victim of imperial terror and yet vindicated by God.

Although those called from the nations may have shared with Jews experiences of conquest, violence and humiliation, for them to relate to this alternative tradition must have been challenging. We do not know of alternative discourses to imperial ideology from other conquered nations in any similar detail as we know of the Jewish tradition. Hence it is not possible to discern whether there would have been a possibility that they may have been able to relate some of Paul's message and guidance to their own diverse traditions, which might have differed from the dominating imperial ideology of Rome.³⁶ The only detailed tradition with which to compare the Pauline discourse, is the Greek and Roman elite literature and some epigraphic evidence. Thus, whilst it cannot be excluded that similarities between traditions of the conquered nations and Jewish tradition existed as far as inherent resistance to imperial ideology and practice is concerned, the Greek and Roman literary, epigraphic and visual material of the period displayed the image of a different, imperial unity of nations which leads to the conclusion that this message of the gospel, embedded in Jewish traditions

of resistance, and of ‘playing and not playing the game’, must have been difficult to grasp for people from the nations. To come to an understanding of a unity of the nations and of Israel, which differed so fundamentally from the imperially enforced unity in diversity would have been a major challenge for both, the apostle and the addressees, although its actualization had liberating and empowering potential.

When considered through the paradigm of biculturalism, Paul as someone who was familiar with more than one tradition and cultural setting would have had an enhanced awareness of the difference of terms, notions and discourses even where terminology etc may have sounded similar. As a bi-cultural apostle, I envisage that he would have been aware that what might sound the same may actually be rather different. It cannot be assumed that by his use of terms which resonated with imperial discourses and ideology he inherently or deliberately replicated such discourses. If we take seriously that he was embedded in the Greek Jewish tradition which had already over centuries developed an alternative to the prevalent discourses of Greek and Roman elite culture, he would have had a clear awareness of different traditions and perceptions of the world. What sounded familiar, might be rather different. And the unity of nations in Christ he advocates in my view is a clear example for the difference inherent in a discourse which most likely sounded familiar to his non-Jewish audience, but for him and his fellow Jews, resonated with a message loaded with a cultural encyclopaedia which was not Rome’s. In order to transmit this message Paul needed to be able to negotiate the meaning of the message of the gospel in a language comprehensible to the audience, but at the same time to convey to them that there were differences to what they might be used to understand. Thus his advice not to accommodate to ‘this world’ but to ‘discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect’ (Rom 12.2), indicates the distancing from the ideology and perception of the world they were used to required by being in Christ, and at the same time this indicates that he was confident that there were aspects of life with which they were familiar which were in accordance with being in Christ, aspects from the world of the nations. The rich and diverse inheritance of Israel and of all the diverse nations in Paul’s vision of unity in Christ are combined (not assimilated) to form the symphony of the praise and glorification of God.

In the symbolic universe in which the message of the gospel of Christ was embedded the diversity of peoples was cherished, their integrity as human beings respected in mutual respect for each other in difference. The unity of conquered nations, so feared by Rome, was celebrated in Christ, not by coercive force nor assimilation to sameness but by trust, that is, by the liberation from the crippling power of sin, which prevented people and nations from

seeing each other as part of the human family, created by God in their diversity. Jews and the nations were united and reconciled not by assimilation to sameness, but by Christ who is encountered in the integrity and difference of the brother and sister

¹ Burke, P. 'Cultures of Translation in Early Modern Europe', in *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*. Burke, Hsia R.P. (eds.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, 8.

² DDS 31-32 'In this shrine are placed the statues, one of which is Hera, the other Zeus, though they call him by another name. Both of these are golden, both are sitting; Hera is supported by lions, Zeus is sitting on bulls. The effigy of Zeus recalls Zeus in all its details—his head, his robes, his throne; nor even if you wished it could you take him for another deity. Hera, however, as you look at her will recall to you a variety of forms. Speaking generally she is undoubtedly Hera, but she has something of the attributes of Athene, and of Aphrodite, and of Selene, and of Rhea, and of Artemis, and of Nemesis, and of The Fates.'

³ Elsner, 'Describing Self in the Language of the Other: Pseudo(?)Lucian at the Temple of Hierapolis', in *Speaking Greek under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*. Goldhill, S. (ed.), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001, 137.

⁴ Barton, C.A., 'The Price of Peace in Ancient Rome', in *War and Peace in the Ancient World*. Raaflaub, K. (ed.), Oxford: Blackwell 2007, 245-52 (252).

⁵ Cf. my *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space-Between*. London, New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2013, 72-97.

⁶ For the impact of imperial ideology and domination see e.g. Elliott, N. *The Arrogance of Nations: Reading Romans in the Shadow of Empire*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress 2008, Rock, I.E. *Paul's Letter to the Romans and Roman Imperialism: An Ideological Analysis of the Exordium (Romans 1:1-17)*. Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock 2012.

⁷ Jacobs, A. *Christ Circumcised: A Study in Early Christian History and Difference*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 2012, 9

⁸ Josephus *Bell.* 1.3. Evidence for this perception can still be found in the third century writings of Clement of Alexandria who refers to part of the Christian tradition as the 'barbaric philosophy', see Osborn, E. *Clement of Alexandria*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2005, 92-93.

⁹ Dmitriev, S. *The Greek Slogan of Freedom and Early Roman Politics in Greece*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011, 260; also Strecker, C. 'Fides-Pistis-Glaube. Kontexte und Kontueneiner Theologie der "Annahme" bei Paulus', in Bachmann, (ed.), *Lutherische und Neue Paulusperspektive*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2005, 223-50, (236-39), also my *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures*, 167-72.

¹⁰ Cf my *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures*, 77-83.

¹¹ Mattingly, D.J. *Imperialism, Power, and Identity: Experiencing the Roman Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press 2011, 94. This is the case even when the initiative for a treaty came from the non-Roman side as in the case of the Jews. Cf. also my *Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement*. London, New York: T&T Clark 2007/09, 9, and Baltrusch, E. *Die Juden und das Römische Reich: Geschichte einer konfliktreichen Beziehung*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 2002, 137-41.

¹² Mattingly, *Imperialism, Power, and Identity*, 26.

¹³ Cf. Tacitus description of the adoption of Roman practices by elite Britons referred to above.

¹⁴ Lopez, D.C., *Apostle to the Conquered: Reimagining Paul's Mission*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 2008, 172.

¹⁵ Cf note 11.

¹⁶ Dio Cass. 56. 34.3

¹⁷ Satlow, M. 'Beyond Influence: Toward a New Historiographic Paradigm', in *Jewish Literatures and Cultures: Context and Intertext*. Norich, A. Eliav, Y.Z. (eds.), Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies 2008, 37-53 (47).

¹⁸ Pace e.g. Thorsteinsson who maintains that 'The sources reveal clearly how basic the tenet of universal humanity was to the Stoic moral teaching, and how strongly the Stoics emphasised impartiality in human relations. (Cf Seneca, *Clem.* 1.11.2)..... With this teaching, Seneca and his fellow Stoics sought to point out to people something that was inherent in human life itself, something that already existed as part of the creation of the world. According to the Stoics, then, if properly informed and motivated, people will (re)discover their true nature as human beings and act accordingly.' (Thorsteinsson, R.M. *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study of Ancient Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010, 191). Thorsteinsson seems to overlook the significance of one detail here, that human beings had to be 'properly informed and motivated' in order to 'discover their true nature'. This information and motivation consisted in nothing other than the Roman perception of *humanitas*. Rather than being evidence for the recognition of a common human nature of all, the concept of *humanitas* attributes to all peoples the potential of being able to conform to the Roman elite way of

life. This is far from any recognition of other peoples as human in their particularity and difference. It universalises an imperialist concept, which is actually very particular.

¹⁹ Cf also Lopez, *Apostle to the Conquered*, 110.

²⁰ Princeton: Princeton University Press 2011.

²¹ Donaldson, T.L. *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism (to 135CE)*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press 2007, 2.

²² Donaldson also refers to the narratives of Ruth and Jonah, Solomons prayer 1 Kgs 8.23-53, Psalm 96 and a as a peculiar example Naaman 2 Kgs 8.15 (*Judaism and the Gentiles*, 478). Cf also Crüsemann, F. *Das Alte Testament als Wahrheitsraum des Neuen: Die neue Sicht der christlichen Bibel*. Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus 2011, 201-04, also id. "Ihnen gehören... die Bundesschlüsse" (Röm 9.4). *Die alttestamentliche Bundestheologie*, *Kul* 9.1994, 21-38.

²³ Cf. Kaminsky is of the view that even a text like Lev 24.22 which refers to 'one law for natives and resident aliens' implies 'that the group boundaries remain intact.' (Kaminsky, J. 'Israel's Election and the Other in Biblical, Second Temple and Rabbinic Thought', in Harlow, D.C. et.al., (eds.), *The 'Other' in Second Temple Judaism: Essays in Honor of John J. Collins*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 2011, 17-30 (20).

²⁴ On alterity see Levinas, E., *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press 1969, 194-219, 1995:24-55, also my discussion of Levinas and Paul in 'Levinas, the Jewish Philosopher meets Paul, the Jewish Apostle: Reading Romans in the Face of the Other', in *Reading Romans with Philosophers and Theologians*. Odell-Scott, D.(ed.), London, New York: T&T Clark 2007, 115-54.

²⁵ Harrison J., *Paul and Imperial Authorities at Thessaloniki and Rome*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011, 36, Kahl, B. *Galatians Re-imagined: Reading with the Eyes of the Vanquished*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 2010, 242-43.

²⁶ As e.g. Isa 14.2-9; 29.5-8; 34.1-4; 60:11-16; Jer 10.25; 25.31-38.

²⁷ Cf. also Campbell, W.S., *Unity and Diversity in Christ: Interpreting Paul in Context*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Publishing 2013, 209-12.

²⁸ Cf also Engberg-Pedersen T. "Everything is Clean" and "Everything that is not of Faith is Sin": The Logic of Pauline Casuistry in Romans 14.1-15.13', in *Paul, Grace, and Freedom: Essays in Honour of John K. Riches*. London, New York: T&T Clark 2008, 22-38.

²⁹ Cf also my *Paul and the Dynamics of Power*, 22-24.

³⁰ Nanos, M.D., 'The Churches within the Synagogues of Rome', in *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*, Sumney, J.L. (ed.), Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature 2012, 11-28, also Schottroff, L., *Der Erste Brief an die Gemeinde in Korinth*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2013, 10.

³¹ Campbell, W.S. *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*. London, New York: T&T Clark 2006/08:149.

³² Sumney, J.L. 'Servants of Satan', 'False Brothers', and Other Opponents of Paul. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 1999.

³³ Nanos, M.D., *The Mystery of Romans: the Jewish Context of Paul's Letter*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press 1996, 179-201.

³⁴ Cf. R.L.Brawley's excellent article 'From Reflex to Reflection?' Identity in Philippians 2.6-11 and its context', in Ehrensperger, K., Tucker, J.B. (eds.) *Reading Paul in Context: Explorations in Identity Formation: Essays in Honour of William S. Campbell* 2010, 128-46.

³⁵ Campbell, *Paul and the Creation of Christian Identity*, 86-103, Tucker, J.B., *Remain in your Calling: Paul and the Continuation of Social Identities in 1 Corinthians*. Eugene, OR: Wipf&Stock 2011, 115-35.

³⁶ Brigitte Kahl draws attention to the prominence of the Gauls/Galatians as the enemies par excellence of Rome, but most of the information about them, as about other conquered nations and their traditions is mediated through Roman literature (*Galatians Re-imagined*, 42-51). Harrison has drawn attention to the gap in scholarship about 'anti-imperial propaganda during the Julio-Claudian period' (*Paul and Imperial Authorities*, 42n.188), but such anti-imperial stances hardly challenged the system of empire as such, but rather the respective Caesars and their ways of handling power and domination. It remained a mainly elitist discourse.