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What's in a Name?: Ideologies of *Volk*, *Rasse*, and *Reich* in German New Testament Interpretation Past and Present

Kathy Ehrensperger

Ammianus, a polytheistic historian of the late fourth century CE, noted that it was unclear how one was to denote the strange groups that followed Christ (Χριστιανοί) and thereby indicated that according to a certain established system of categorization these people did not fit. There could be a number of reasons for this, not least the system of categorization known to, and favoured by, Ammianus, which for him was *the* system of categorization innate to the world (although in his context this was already contested).¹ That Ammianus captured the phenomenon of these Christ-centred groups in the categories of his world is of course what one would expect: 'Categories structure and order the world for us. We use categories to parse the flow of experience into discriminable and interpretable objects, attributes and events.'²

Ammianus' question is highly contemporary when we look at the flow of publications which try to understand, define, describe, or analyse the groups which assemble as those ἐν Χριστῷ (Rom. 8.1; 1 Cor. 1.2), are referred to as οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ (1 Cor. 15.23; Gal. 5.24), are addressed by Paul as ἄγιοι, or ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ (e.g. Rom. 1.7; 1 Cor. 1.2; 6.2; 10.32; 11.16, 22; 15.9; 2 Cor. 1.1; Gal. 1.13), and in 1 Peter are referred to as λαός, ἔθνος, and γένος (1 Pet. 2.9-10). The question of categorization seems intertwined with the question of identity; and the categories of ethnicity and race are only a few of those proposed recently, along or combined with associations

¹ For example, Ammianus Marcellinus, *Rerum Gestarum* 21.16.18. Cf. Edwin A. Judge's assessment of Ammianus' various comments on behaviour and practices of Christians in, 'On this Rock I will build my *Ekklesia*: Counter-cultic Springs of Multiculturalism', in *idem*, *The First Christians in the Roman World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 619–68. He notes that although Ammianus attempts to describe these groups, he cannot find any one category known to him into which they would fit: 'They indicate his broad sense of a practice he cannot define and for which he has no word' (661). Ammianus' attitude towards Christianity is debated, wavering between positive openness and aggressive repudiation. The fact that he describes them and their practices as not fitting the 'normal' system may be a deliberate attempt at presenting them as odd outsiders. See also David Woods, 'Ammianus 22.4.6: An Unnoticed Anti-Christian Jibe', *JTS* 49 (1998): 145–48.

² Roger Brubaker, *Ethnicity without Groups* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 71.

(*collegiae*, θίασοι),³ subgroups of synagogues,⁴ or πολιτεύματα⁵ as possibly having provided the template for the groups beginning to assemble in the name of someone referred to as the Christ.

Current events and events of the recent past have triggered questions of categorization, self-understanding, and identity in religious terms (in Western Europe religious affiliation/identities are being substantially questioned). It is particularly interesting that social-categorization terminology and respective concepts of ethnicity and race have emerged or re-emerged in current New Testament scholarship, given that such terminology was prominent in certain strands of biblical interpretation during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, providing building blocks for biblical interpreters who had embraced the ideology of the Third Reich.⁶ The use of such categories is not self-evident since Christian self-understanding was not always formulated as a question of 'identity' and to an even lesser extent as a question which involved issues concerning 'ethnicity'. In the nineteenth century the question was predominantly formulated as a question concerning the *essence* or the *core* of Christianity rather than one concerning Christian identity.⁷ And although Judaism or the image of Judaism always played a role in the self-perception of Christianity, this relation was not necessarily formulated as a question of ethnicity but rather in terms of the question for truth, faith,⁸ the concept of religion, and notions of universalism and particularism.⁹ In current discussions, however, core questions are discussed in relation to identity and ethnicity which is due primarily to respective contemporary sociological and political debates. This is not to deny that there are trajectories in the sources which would render themselves open to interpretations which are informed by such contemporary concerns. In this discourse, an enduring question is the relation between universalism and particularity. Did the Christ-movement set out to overcome all distinctions between peoples and individuals as Pauline statements such as 'there is no distinction' (οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή, Rom. 3.22; 10.12) or 'no longer Jew or Greek' (Gal. 3.28; cf. 5.6) seem to imply? And did it thus intend to create a universal identity above or beyond ethnic distinctions by overcoming or transcending them as a 'new creation' (cf. 2 Cor. 5.17; Gal. 6.15)? Or is the movement itself actually an ethnic entity, embarking on separating out a 'new race'?

³ Cf., for example, Richard Ascough, *Paul's Macedonian Associations: The Social Context of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians* (WUNT 2.161; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003).

⁴ See, for example, Mark Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996); *idem*, 'To the Churches within the Synagogues of Rome', in *Reading Paul's Letter to the Romans*, ed. Jerry L. Sumney (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2012), 11–28.

⁵ Cf., for example, Dirk Schinkel, *Die himmlische Bürgerschaft: Untersuchungen zu einem urchristlichen Sprachmotiv im Spannungsfeld von religiöser Integration und Abgrenzung im 1. und 2. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

⁶ Cf. Anders Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Antisemitism: German Biblical Interpretation and the Jews, from Herder and Semler to Kittel and Bultmann* (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

⁷ Adolf von Harnack, *Das Wesen des Christentums: Sechzehn Vorlesungen vor Studierenden aller Fakultäten im Wintersemester 1899/1900 am der Universität Berlin gehalten* (Leipzig: Hinrich, 1901).

⁸ Cf. Walter Homolka, 'Adolf von Harnack und Leo Baeck: Zwei liberale Theologen, ein fiktiver Dialog', in *Wende-Zeit im Verhältnis von Juden und Christen*, ed. Siegfried von Kortzfleisch (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2009), 189–217.

⁹ Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

This recent discussion focuses almost entirely on the relation between Jewish and non-Jewish identities, with other differentiations, such as Greek and Roman, or Greek and Barbarian, or Galatian and Scythian, playing a marginal role, if any at all.¹⁰ Hence the discussion concerning the categorization is not about ethnicity, race, or nation, *Volk*, *Rasse*, or *Ethnizität* as such but about ethnic, or racial aspects as far as Jews and non-Jews – in Pauline terminology ἔθνη/Ἕλληνες – are concerned. It is – in the terminology of the nineteenth century – the *Jewish Question*, which lies behind the contemporary discussions (not the Roman or Italian, nor the Muslim question for that matter).¹¹

The use of the term ‘race’ – or the compound adjective ethno-racial – as a designation for the identity of the Christ-following groups¹² owes its current interest to concerns to move away from abstract theological terminology and perceptions. The hermeneutical presuppositions of my response to these attempts at tackling the issue of Christian identity in its earliest days are rooted in the tradition of German and Swiss scholarship; that is, they are contextual in terms of time and place. In light of these traditions, the use of the term and concepts of race in relation to first-century Christ-groups, and also more generally for antiquity, seems rather surprising. However, race/*Rasse* is not the only term and concept which comes under scrutiny from this perspective, but other terms such as *Volk*, *völkisch*, and *Nation* are considered with caution as well, given their recent history.

In January 1961 a group of German historians, lawyers, and journalists met in Bad Soden near Frankfurt a.M. for the sole purpose of answering the question, ‘Was bedeuten uns heute Volk, Nation, Reich?’¹³ The meeting was guided by the conviction that it was time that ‘the Germans began to rehabilitate terms that had been polluted or abused by Hitler and thus rendered suspect or unusable.’¹⁴ The term that was remarkably absent in their list is the term *Rasse* (race). Of course, the Bad Soden meeting was conducted in the shadow of particular events and discourses in Germany, and hence the terms and concepts were discussed specifically in relation to their respective historical and conceptual context. The mere translation of these terms into other languages and contexts does not render them identical either in terms of linguistics or in terms of cultural encyclopaedias. The English terminology which translates these German terms is infused with, and carries the connotations of, its specific cultural and historical context.¹⁵ Thus a critical analysis of the terminology of one language should not be

¹⁰ Cf. Christopher D. Stanley, ‘The Ethnic Context of Paul’s Letters’, in *Christian Origins and Hellenistic Judaism: Social and Literary Contexts of the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 177–202.

¹¹ In the nineteenth century it surfaced with a new dimension in the context of the integration of Jews into nation states, which introduced into their legal systems the notion of the legal equality of all those living under its respective jurisdiction.

¹² See Denise K. Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Love Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2009); David G. Horrell, ‘“Race”, “Nation”, “People”: Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9’, *NTS* 58, no. 1 (2012): 123–43.

¹³ ‘What is the meaning of people, nation, and empire for us today?’

¹⁴ Walter Erbe, ‘Einleitung’, in *Was bedeuten uns heute Volk, Nation, Reich?*, ed. Walter Erbe, et al. (Schriftenreihe der Friedrich Naumann-Stiftung zur Politik und Zeitgeschichte 3; Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1961), 3–11, at 3.

¹⁵ Hanna Arendt has brilliantly written about this in her *Elemente und Ursprünge totaler Herrschaft: Antisemitismus, Imperialismus, totale Herrschaft* (Munich: Piper, 1986 (German Translation of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*; New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1951)), 292–300.

directly applied to the terminology of another. The specific cultural encyclopaedias need to be taken into account in any comparative endeavour. Nevertheless, it is legitimate to draw analogies between the English and German terminology because there have been interactions, interchanges between, and mutual influences of English and German speaking scholars in intellectual as well as popular discourses on issues concerning collective identities since the early modern period. I thus wish to focus here on two terms: firstly, *Volk* (usually translated 'people'), which has a particular German history and connotation; and secondly, *Rasse*, the term omitted from the discussion at Bad Soden, and again one with a particular German history, although not confined to it. This leaves open the question of how far these discussions are also relevant in relation to British and American biblical scholarship. The terms are particularly relevant of course as translations of the Greek terms ἔθνος and γένος in New Testament interpretation.

In light of these preliminary observations, I will focus on some specific and necessarily eclectic aspects of ideological and terminological issues particularly in past and present German-language scholarship. In the first main section I will discuss Herder's use of the terms *Volk* and *völkisch*, and the racist interpretations of these in the period of the Third Reich. Next I will turn to Adolf von Harnack's discussion of the *Christianoi* as 'a third kind' in the context of late-nineteenth/early-twentieth-century debates in Germany. Finally, I will consider discussions of *kollektive Identität* and ethnicity in some current German-language New Testament interpretation.

1 Herder and the 'Volk'

The term and concept of 'Volk' was decisively shaped by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803).¹⁶ It did not initially emerge as a nationalistic concept in the modern sense. Based on its etymological roots, which referred to 'Volk' in the vein of those who follow ('Gefolgschaft'), Volk was the term used to refer to people of the lower classes as distinct from the aristocracy. 'Volk' were those who followed and obeyed those who were born to be leaders. With Herder a conceptualization of the term was initiated, which – inspired by Enlightenment enthusiasm for education in the sense of holistic formation (in German, 'Bildung') – attributed the potential and capability of acquiring knowledge to all, including especially the lower classes, the 'Volk'. Thus, Herder was of the view that the 'Volk' also had culture, that is, expressions and traditions worthy of being called culture in the sense of higher civilization. These traditions were seen as tied to the particular language of a 'Volk', and the specific characteristics of a 'Volk' – its 'Volksgeist' (spirit of the people) – were expressed most prominently through song (*Volkslied*), narratives (*Märchen*), and poetry (*Volksdichtung*). Through its language a 'Volk' expressed its essential characteristics (*Wesen*), its way of thinking and feeling. The diversity and distinctive characteristics of peoples/*Völker* were viewed as strongly intertwined with their respective language and, in Herder's perception, considered to be part of God's order of creation. Each and every 'Volk' had its location and task in the course of the world.

¹⁶ Herder was not the first to give significance to the term but had predecessors, such as Friedrich Carl von Moser who in 1765 published a pamphlet entitled *Vom deutschen Nationalgeist*.

Significantly in Herder, there is as yet only the emphasis on a distinction between 'Völkern' but no hierarchical order as such nor a sequence of tasks assigned to them. With religion being part of the essence of a 'Volk' and intrinsically intertwined with it, the postulated equality between 'Völkern' in their diversity was nevertheless somewhat hampered. Herder considered Christianity to be the ideal religion, the goal of divine providence, thereby establishing an inherent hierarchy between 'christlichen Völkern' and all the others.¹⁷ It needs to be noted that Herder wrote his ideas and concepts as aspirations; they were republican and egalitarian and as such implicitly directed against the rule of German principalities. The idea of the 'Volk' served primarily an anti-aristocratic purpose and Herder sympathized with the revolutionary movement in France up until 1793.¹⁸

There was, however, no reality behind these ideas as yet. Lessing could state in 1768 that 'wir Deutschen noch keine Nation sind'¹⁹ which meant the concept of the German 'Volk' had not (yet) been translated into the political form of a state encompassing the German 'Volk'. The 'Volks-' idea was a discourse shared only by a small minority of intellectuals during Herder's lifetime, but it was politicized by Schleiermacher in the context of the German resistance against the Napoleonic invasion.

Herder's idea only really became relevant after the *Heilige Römische Reich Deutscher Nation* (Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation) collapsed under Napoleon in 1806. Before that, throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (particularly after the disastrous Thirty Years' War), the loose federation of principalities in its confessional and organizational diversity was an effective umbrella for otherwise disparate units under their princes. The *Reich* thus served a purpose and there was no need or urge to search for origins or a *Volk*, less still a race, to provide a unifying concept for this federation which had feudal ties to Savoy, Burgundy, the Lorraine, and Bohemia. The *Reich* was less a state than a loose commonwealth of princely states. The label 'Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation' did not refer to nationality or peoplehood in the modern sense. 'Nation' at the time meant the aristocratic groups, in this case, those who elected the emperor, the prince electors of certain principalities (*Kurfürsten*).²⁰

Eventually, Herder's ideas of a German 'Volk' as essentially constituted by a common language through which its spirit was expressed could easily be harnessed by the Prussian government in the campaign against Napoleon after 1813. Although what the unification aspired to was not achieved at that time, the goal was set and Herder's ideas were built upon by others (Hegel, Baur, et al.).

In parallel but distinct from these 'völkisch' ideas, we also see the emergence and rise of racist theories, initially in the wake of the scientific drive towards classification. It is noteworthy that Herder – against later dominating developments – clearly

¹⁷ Cf. also Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Antisemitism*, 53.

¹⁸ From 1793 Herder became disgusted at the turn the revolution took with the execution of Louis XVI and his wife. Cf. Anne Löchte, *Johann Gottfried Herder, Kulturtheorie und Humanitätsidee der Ideen, Humanitätsbriefe und Adrastea* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 94–5; Joachim Whaley, 'Reich, Nation, Volk. Early Modern Perspectives', *The Modern Language Review* 101, no. 2 (2006): 442–55, at 453.

¹⁹ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, 'Hamburger Dramaturgie', in *Werke*, Vol. 4 (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1973), 698.

²⁰ Cf. Whaley, 'Reich, Nation, Volk', 447.

distinguished his idea of 'Volk' from any notion of 'Rasse'. He even stated that the category of race/*Rasse* was not suitable to be applied to humans. Concerning emerging racial concepts he argued:

Some, for instance, have thought fit to employ the term *races* for four or five divisions, according to regions of origin or complexion. I see no reason for employing this term. Race refers to a difference of origin, which in this case either does not exist or which comprises in each of these regions or complexions the most diverse 'races'.²¹

Similarly Goethe refused to apply his classification of colours to humans. And the first cultural historian, Gustav Klemm, who classified humans to some extent into categories (in his *Allgemeine Kulturgeschichte der Menschheit*, published 1843–52), assumes and respects a unified humanity, rather than one categorized into different races.²²

But for the idea of one nation state, the notion of one 'Volk' was of course an important underpinning in the unification under Prussian military domination in 1870 and was harnessed ideologically in the build-up and consolidation of the Second German Reich.

As noted, the notion that 'Volk' and religion were intertwined constituted an inherent inconsistency in an ideology which intended to be egalitarian. It converged with claims that the German language was the highest possible development of any linguistic expression; hence, the German 'Volksgeist' – in conjunction with the highest form of religion, Christianity – was seen as the highest form of human civilization. This 'perfect' civilization obviously inherently created a problem for all those who were not or did not want to be part of this 'German Christian Volk', such as the Jews. It becomes evident that the concept and idea of 'Volk', although devised under different circumstances and for different purposes, served as the basis for the ideology of the Third Reich and biblical interpretation which associated itself with it.²³

1.1 Racializing biblical interpretation

The idea of the intertwined aspect of 'Volk' and religion was taken up and further developed by theologians such as Ernst Moritz Arndt and Paul LaGarde, who maintained that Christendom developed to its highest form as Germanic religion, in

²¹ Johann Gottfried Herder, 'Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind', in *Herder on Social and Political Culture*, trans. and ed. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 255–326, at 284. Herder particularly rejected Kant's *On the Different Races of Man* (*Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen*, published 1775). Cf. also Arendt, *Elemente und Ursprünge*, 295; and Gerdmar, *Roots of Theological Antisemitism*, 58, who notes that 'Herder did not support national chauvinism or racial ideology in the same vein as later racial nationalism but his thoughts could be used as an important building block in such ideology'.

²² Arendt notes that the situation is different in Britain and the United States where the question concerns issues of practical life after the abolition of slavery rather than theories (*Elemente und Ursprünge*, 296–306).

²³ Cf. Cornelia Weber, *Altes Testament und völkische Frage: Der biblische Volksbegriff in der alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft der nationalsozialistischen Zeit, dargestellt am Beispiel von Johannes Hempel* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

that only here was it finally purified of its distortion through Judaism and through Paul in particular. LaGarde advocated a 'völkisch gefärbte' religion as inherently necessary for the unified German Reich. He maintained that 'Germany is the totality of all German-feeling/sensing, German-thinking, German-willing Germans: each one of us is a traitor to the fatherland (*Landesverräter*), if he does not consider himself personally responsible for the existence, the wellbeing, and the future of the fatherland at each moment of his life, and each one is a hero and liberator if he acts accordingly.'²⁴ This implied that Jews either had to totally assimilate – that is cease being Jewish – or emigrate. There was no space for others in this political programme of the German Reich. It has been argued that LaGarde was not particularly influential during his lifetime. However, he was a protégé of the Prussian king (before the unification), was endowed with a chair in Göttingen, and was an important source for Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who has been described as the Kaiser's 'Evangelist of Racism'.²⁵ Of course, LaGarde's writings could be harnessed by the racism of National-Socialist ideology, even though this use and subsequent effect cannot be directly attributed to him.²⁶ He nevertheless provided further ideological underpinnings for the racialization of Christian theological discourses, which did not emerge with the National Socialists' rise to power but clearly came to flourish in the nineteenth century. Through so-called scientific and popular perceptions the concept of race was intertwined with theological notions. Aspects of Christian beliefs, from both Protestant and Roman Catholic traditions, were accommodated to racist convictions. The most important concept was a variation of Herder's idea of different 'Völker' in that, as Stanley Stowers in a recent analysis notes, it was postulated that

the God of Jesus Christ had created the world with distinct human races that each had its own God-given and essential species characteristics; and that the destiny of world history centred on the struggle of one superior race to protect itself from the depredations of another race and that this struggle had been dramatically enacted and prefigured by Jesus Christ's struggle against the Jews recorded in the New Testament.²⁷

²⁴ Paul LaGarde, 'Über die gegenwärtige Lage des Deutschen Reiches', in *idem, Deutsche Schriften* (Göttingen: Dietrichsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1878), 98–167, at 167. When searching LaGarde on the internet I came across some hugely problematic internet sites – actively promoting racism, anti-Semitism, etc., in unbroken continuation of the ideology of the Third Reich.

²⁵ See Wolfram Kinzig, ed., 'Der Kaiser und der „Evangelist des Rassismus.“ Houston Stewart Chamberlains Brief an Anne Guthrie über seine erste Begegnung mit Wilhelm II, mit einer Einleitung, *ZNThG/JHMTh* 11 (2004): 79–125; see also *idem*, 'Harnack, Houston-Chamberlain and the First World War', *JHMTh/ZNThG* 22, no. 2 (2015): 190–230.

²⁶ Although, there are formulations which could be integrated into racist Nazi-terminology without further adaption: 'Es gehört ein Herz von der Härte der Krokodilhaut dazu, um mit den armen ausgesogenen Deutschen nicht Mitleid zu empfinden und ... um die Juden nicht zu hassen, um diejenigen nicht zu hassen und zu verachten, ... die zu feige sind, dies Ungeziefer zu zertreten.' Paul LaGarde, *Juden und Indogermanen. Eine Studie nach dem Leben* (Göttingen: Dietrichsche Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1887), 330.

²⁷ Stanley Stowers, 'The Concepts of "Religion", "Political Religion" and the Study of Nazism', *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 1 (2007): 9–24, at 24.

Thus, Gustav Adolf Wislicenus argued in 1864 (similar to Ernest Renan) that Galilee had a mixed population – hence Jesus could not have been a Jew. Wislicenus' thesis about Jesus' origin, and the fundamental antithesis he postulated between Jesus and Judaism, neatly intertwined and eventually led to a Jesus specifically compatible with the concept of an Aryan race.²⁸ The non-Jewish Jesus and the anti-Jewish gospel went hand in hand in the Wilhemine period, that is, quite some decades before National Socialism's rise to power. The term *Deutschchristentum* (German Christianity) was coined by Adolf Bartels in 1913, advocating that there should be 'More *Deutschchristentum*; less Jewish Christianity'.²⁹ Bartels adhered to the *völkisch* movement, which eventually became closely intertwined with Nazi ideology. Prevalent was the conviction concerning the inseparability of religion and race, hence the precondition of the 'Germanization' of Christianity was its *Entjudung* (de-Judaizing). Anti-Semitism was thus inherent to this perception of the interrelation of religion and race. The *Deutsche Christen* (German Christians) declared Jesus an Aryan, and original Christianity an Aryan religion. As such, it was *the* appropriate religion for all Germans. These concepts had formed before the First World War and provided the crucible for the ideology and propaganda of the National Socialists.³⁰ The racialization of theology and biblical interpretation in particular thus combined with the idea of the 'Volk' developed by Herder, but they were not identical with it. Herder's notion of Volk was not inherently racist but could easily be assimilated to ideologies of racism.³¹ And this assimilation of ideologies of race and theology (in New Testament interpretation in particular) was not due to National Socialism; this assimilation happened before and was not limited to any particular ideologies of the conservative right.³² It was in this context that *Deutsche Christen* eventually formed an academic society (*Bund für deutsches Christentum*) in 1938, in the immediate aftermath of the *Reichskristallnacht*, and subsequently established the *Institut für die Erforschung und Beseitigung des jüdischen Lebens auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben* (1939). The racial argumentation by scholars like Gerhard Kittel and Walter Grundmann did not emerge in a vacuum, but rather should be seen as the tip of an iceberg which had formed over more than a century. Kittel and Grundmann had racialized New Testament scholarship in different ways. Kittel did not argue for an Aryan Jesus but, by setting up a sharp

²⁸ Martin Leutzsch, 'Karrieren des arischen Jesus zwischen 1918 und 1945', in *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte*, ed. Uwe Puschner and Clemens Vollnhals, 2nd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 195–218, at 199. (On Renan, see Halvor Moxnes' chapter – Eds.)

²⁹ Adolf Bartels, *Der deutsche Verfall*, 3rd edn ((1913) Zeitz: Sis-Verlag, 1919), 37.

³⁰ Cf. Uwe Puschner, "'One People, One Reich, One God'", *The Völkische Weltanschauung and Movement*, *German Historical Institute Bulletin* 24, no. 1 (2002): 5–25.

³¹ The leading theologian of the *Deutsche Christen*, Reinhold Krause, considered the OT to be the expression of the inappropriate morals of a people of cattle traders and pimps, and Paul to be a Jewish Theologian, which obviously was not meant as an expression of appreciation and respect. Cf. Susannah Heschel, 'Rassismus und Christentum. Das Institut zur Beseitigung des jüdischen Einflusses auf das deutsche kirchliche Leben', in *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus: Eine Beziehungs- und Konfliktgeschichte*, ed. Uwe Puschner and Clemens Vollnhals, 2nd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 249–64.

³² As is evident in the Berliner Antisemitismus-Streit triggered by Heinrich von Treitschke's publication 'Unsere Aussichten', *Preussische Jahrbücher* 44 (Berlin: Reimer Verlag, 1879): 560–76, in which the Jews were identified as constituting an obstacle, even a threat, to the inner consolidation of the unified German Reich.

dichotomy between true Israelite (Old Testament) religion – of which Jesus was the true representative – and post-biblical degenerate Judaism, he nevertheless argued on a racial basis for true Christianity which could not have anything to do with the degenerate Jewish tradition and race. Grundmann, in his early work, had attempted to ‘rescue’ Jesus from his Jewishness by arguing that he was not racially bound since as the son of God he is above and beyond any racial connotation, a truly new creation.³³ However, in his later publications Grundmann embraced the dejudaized Jesus, who fitted the needs of a Christianity compatible with Nazi ideology. This Galilean Jesus was by no means a purely theological construct. Jesus’ Jewishness was questioned on the basis of racist arguments.³⁴ But not all German New Testament scholarship of the period prior and up to 1945 embraced racist ideologies and terminology. Significantly, one of the most prominent scholars of the early twentieth century did not.

2 Harnack and ‘the Third Kind’

In a context where racism and the idea of the ‘Volk’ were advocated by a significant number of biblical scholars as being inherently intertwined with the true understanding of Christianity and its role in the German Reich, it is quite significant that a highly regarded scholar, Adolf von Harnack, who had very close connections to Kaiser Wilhelm II (who was certainly open to anti-Semitism and cherished Houston Stewart Chamberlain’s *Die Grundlagen des 19. Jahrhunderts*, published in 1899), did not integrate racist arguments into his writings. Although, unlike his contemporaries, he did not engage in serious debate with Jewish academics at all (he did not take seriously Leo Baeck’s *Das Wesen des Judentums*, which constituted a response to von Harnack’s *Das Wesen des Christentums*),³⁵ he did oppose the political anti-Semitism of contemporaries like historian Heinrich von Treitschke and Theologian Adolf Stöcker in their request to exclude Jews from serving as civil servants of the German Reich (and other anti-Semitic political requests such as the expulsion of Jews who did not have German nationality).³⁶ Nevertheless, he famously argued that Marcion had been correct to consider the Old Testament as not part of the Christian canon and advocated that now was the time to act upon this and cease to view the Old Testament as canonical.³⁷ This is not the place to consider all aspects of his writings concerning the Jewish Question, but I will focus on that which is immediately relevant for our

³³ Walter Grundmann, *Religion und Rasse: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nationaler Aufbruch und lebendiger Christusglaube* (Werdau: Meister, 1933), 16.

³⁴ Walter Grundmann, *Totale Kirche im totalen Staat: Kirche im Dritten Reich* (Dresden: O. Günther, 1934), 29.

³⁵ See note 8.

³⁶ Cf. Karsten Krieger, ed., *Der „Berliner Antisemitismusstreit“ 1879-1881: Eine Kontroverse über die Zugehörigkeit der deutschen Juden zur Nation. Kommentierte Quellenedition* (München: Saur, 2004); also for example, Jürgen Malitz, “Auch ein Wort über unser Judentum”, Theodor Mommsen und der Berliner Antisemitismusstreit, in *Theodor Mommsen: Gelehrter, Politiker und Literat*, ed. Josef Wiesehöfer (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2005), 137–64.

³⁷ Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Monographie zur Grundlegung der Katholischen Kirche* (Leipzig: Hinrichsche Buchhandlung, 1924).

discussion – the passage in the seventh chapter of his second book, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (first edition 1902), where he deals with the notion of Christianity as a third entity.³⁸

Harnack discusses the different perceptions in the first two centuries from an emic and etic perspective. He notes that pagan writers as well as early church fathers were interested to find a category into which Christ-followers could be classified. In his excursus, 'Die Beurteilung der Christen als drittes Geschlecht seitens ihrer Gegner', Harnack sets out that pagan writers differentiated clearly between Jews who were considered a people (*Volk*) like other peoples (*Völker*), however distinct in their practices, and the 'Christians' (as Harnack calls them). Thus, in the first century, references to Christians as a *superstitio* abound (Suetonius, *Nero* 16; Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96; Tacitus, *Ann.* 15.44).³⁹ In the second and third centuries Christians are considered to be crazy enthusiasts (*halbverrückte Schwärmer*) or a horrendous 'natio' which falls outside the category of humans. Harnack notes that the Latin term 'natio' should not be overrated here, since it does not refer to a 'Volk' in the sense of a nation (state). He indicates in a footnote that 'natio' here refers to a group rather than a nation in the contemporary sense.⁴⁰ Further references include Origen's *Contra Celsum* (8.55) where Christians are referred to as τὸ τοιοῦτον γένος, which Harnack translates 'diese Art' ('this kind').⁴¹ Discussing Tertullian's references in *Ad Nationes* to pagan labelling of the *Christianoi* as a 'tertium genus', Harnack concludes that this label was common in Carthage around 200 CE and that it referred exclusively to a third kind of worshipping and perception of a deity, with Greeks, Romans, and all those who mutually recognized each other's gods being regarded as the 'genus primum', and the Jews as the 'genus alterum'. Harnack is convinced that Tertullian's presentation of the pagans' perception is accurate and he refers to a passage in *Nat.* 1.20 where Tertullian apparently specifies that 'tertium genus (dicimur) de ritu'.⁴²

For Harnack, it is evident beyond doubt that the terminology does not refer to any sequence of peoples (*Völker*) nor any other aspect like the sexual asceticism or libertinism of *Christianoi*. This etic evidence coincides, according to Harnack, with the emic evidence that *Christianoi* considered themselves in the second century as 'tertium genus', as displayed in the earliest written version of this expression from the fragment of the 'Preaching of Peter' (transmitted in Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6.5.41) where the *Christianoi* are warned not to worship God according to the pattern/kind of the Greeks or the Jews but are told instead that ὑμεῖς δὲ οἱ καινῶς αὐτὸν τρίτῳ γένει σεβόμενοι, [οἱ] Χριστιανοί ('but you, who newly worship him in a third manner/way, the Christians'). Harnack consistently translates *genus*/γένος with 'kind/way' (*Art*) and emphasizes that Greek and Roman writers obviously noted the different kinds/ways (*Arten*) of relating to the divine. Thus, Harnack is adamant in identifying the worshipping practices as that which distinguishes the *Christianoi* from pagans and Jews.

³⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, 4th edn ((1902) Leipzig: Hinrichsche Buchhandlung, 1924), 259–89.

³⁹ Harnack, *Mission*, 282.

⁴⁰ Harnack, *Mission*, 283.

⁴¹ Harnack, *Mission*, 284.

⁴² Harnack, *Mission*, 286.

He emphasizes explicitly that the author does not present a categorization of peoples but a classification of worshippers.⁴³ We may or may not agree with his assessment of the second-century literature, but it is evident, in my view, that in his assessment of the attempts at categorizing *Christianoi* in the second century the concept and terminology of *Rasse*/race was not considered, nor was it even remotely an adequate means of translating the ancient classifications. As we have noted above, racist ideology and terminology was certainly available as an acceptable option for Harnack. The fact that he did not use it in any way in relation to categorizations in antiquity can also not be attributed to a positive perception of Judaism, although he was convinced of the inherent link between the *Christianoi* and Judaism in the first century CE. This was a historical insight which did not impact on his perception of the Judaism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which he considered a legalistic, degenerate petrification of the biblical tradition. Nevertheless, he did not argue in his writings in a racist vein, and the translation of the Greek and Latin terminology by a linguist of his stature should not be ignored. Harnack did of course note that the *Christianoi* eventually referred to themselves as a people/*Volk*. Significantly, they claimed the heritage of Israel and as such were both the ancient and new people superseding the Jewish people.⁴⁴ This perception, however, was relevant in the internal debates, and Harnack translates and interprets second-century texts which refer to this aspect of the self-perception of the *Christianoi* only when the Greek λαός evidently expresses the claim to the title *people of God*.⁴⁵ Particularly with reference to Paul, Harnack explicitly states that the Christian church is not a third *Volk*, *Rasse*, or *Geschlecht* alongside or besides the others but the new step in human history at its end point which transcends or rather renders ineffective the distinctions between peoples as well as differences of social status and gender. In this new creation, both Jews and Greeks are 'aufgehoben' – encompassed, not obliterated.⁴⁶ Thus Harnack sees initial aspects of the church as an entity that transcends the dichotomy of Jews and Greeks (or circumcised and uncircumcised) in the writings of Paul, but he does not see this as evidence for the church being identified in terms of peoplehood or race. That the church eventually – from the second century onwards – is considered a third entity (*genus*) and eventually claims in self-references a designation as *Volk*/people as those who encompass in the new creation both Jews and Greeks is not denied but distinguished in careful terminological analysis from any racial connotations. The *Volks-Theologie* which emerges from this argumentation is not without problems, of course, but it cannot in my view be conflated with racial connotations.

The new humanity (not new race!) which Harnack saw emerging in the Christ-movement, however, left no room for people who were not Christian, particularly not for Jews who in Harnack's view had petrified the message of the Old Testament in Rabbinic Judaism. The new humanity could only be Christian and was identified by him with German Protestantism as the form of Christianity which had come closest

⁴³ Harnack, *Mission*, 265.

⁴⁴ Harnack, *Mission*, 268.

⁴⁵ Harnack, *Mission*, 262.

⁴⁶ Harnack, *Mission*, 261. The German term is notoriously difficult to translate. It wavers between 'integrated' or 'merged' and 'suspended' or 'abrogated'.

to the envisaged new humanity or new creation. Although, as a profound philologist, Harnack did not use racial terminology in his translation of γένος and ἔθνος but remained as close as possible to the meaning of these terms as he saw them in the cultural context of their time, his interpretation was inherently problematic for all those who did not fit into this universalizing image of Christianity.

2.1 Racism, stereotyping, and xenophobia

Harnack's solid philological work is being taken seriously by contemporary German colleagues who consider it inconceivable that the concept of *Rasse* could play any role in their research on collective identities in the first century. This is not only because the shadow of the *Shoah* is ever present, but also because there was already, prior to the events between 1933 and 1945, a vigorous debate concerning the terminology and concepts with which to categorize the groups out of which Christianity and Judaism, as they were later known, emerged, as is evident from the examples discussed above.

The omission of the term *Rasse* at the Bad Soden conference is thus not an accident. Certainly when considered in the German context, there can be no rehabilitation of the term *Rasse*/race. It is inherently bound up with racism and its consequences of the worst imaginable kind during the National-Socialist regime. This indicates that the Bad Soden conference differentiated the terminology and concept of *Rasse*/race from the terminologies and concepts of *Volk*, *Nation*, and *Reich*. These are not identical or analogous with the former. The terms and concepts of *Volk*, *Nation*, and *Reich* were open to being harnessed by National-Socialist ideology, but they were not inherently part of an ideology of explicit contempt as such. Although 'Volk' and 'Nation' too acquired specific meaning in the German context, their ideological baggage is of a different kind to that of the terminology and concept of race and racism. Race/*Rasse* is a concept, when applied to human beings, that never existed apart from racism. It is used only in connection with racist ideologies. Hence, I am of the view, as I have argued elsewhere, that it is problematic to postulate a neutral use of the term.⁴⁷ Since 'race' is a construct of the racist theories of early modernity, I consider it inaccurate to speak of race and racism in antiquity – even in a sociocultural sense.⁴⁸ That xenophobia and stereotyping existed is beyond doubt, but, as many theorists emphasize, these categories should not be conflated or confused with each other or with racism. It is noteworthy that in stereotyping in antiquity, although bodily features were discussed, such bodily features were not applied in the stereotyping

⁴⁷ See Kathy Ehrensperger, 'Paulus, sein Volk und die Rasseterminologie. Kritische Anfragen an den "Race"-Diskurs in neuerer englischsprachiger Paulus-Forschung', *Kirche und Israel* 27 (2012): 119–33; ET 'Paul, His People, and Racial Terminology', *Journal of Early Christian History* 3, no. 1 (2013): 17–33. Debates concerning contemporary ethnicity and race-related issues are controversial and complex as is evident, for example, in Andreas Wimmer, 'Race-centrism: A Critique and a Research Agenda', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 38, no. 13 (2015): 2186–205.

⁴⁸ Benjamin Isaac, who has been quoted frequently in discussions concerning such terminology, carefully refers in his study to 'proto-racism' rather than racism per se in antiquity (despite the title of his book). See Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 515.

of Jews at any time.⁴⁹ The physical categorizations distinguished rather three major types: the northerners who were pale, the southerners who were dark, and those in the middle, the 'normal' people of the Mediterranean. These categorizations could be used alongside others and were not merely negative but served descriptive purposes as well. And those categorized as normal did not all belong to the ruling people (Greeks or Romans); hence this categorization was not exclusively hierarchical as later racist categorizations always were. And as mentioned, Jews, in these categorizations, were one of the 'normal' Mediterranean peoples.

There is a date for the emergence of racism, but there is none for the emergence of xenophobia and stereotypes; and as Karin Priester notes, there are no systematized ideologies or doctrines of xenophobia and stereotypes, but there certainly are racist ideologies and doctrines.⁵⁰ The English word 'race' is attested from 1508, but as applied to humans only from 1580. It does not occur in the KJV other than in the sense of racing (as in running a race).⁵¹ Priester also notes that although since its emergence in the fourteenth/fifteenth century there have been numerous forms of racism, with divergent connotations, inherent to all of them was the aim to re-establish hierarchical structures of domination and subordination.⁵² Thus the fact that racial terminology in German-language New Testament interpretation was predominantly used in explicitly racist approaches and is unimaginable in any current interpretations might serve as a voice of caution for the New Testament academic community.

3 Ethnicity and identity in current German-language New Testament interpretation

Compared with English-language publications, the number of publications which focus explicitly on ethnicity in contemporary German-language New Testament approaches is rather limited. There is no widespread discourse concerning ethnicity in contemporary German-language scholarship, although a number of colleagues engage with English-language publications on this topic to some extent.

⁴⁹ Shaye J. D. Cohen has drawn attention to the idea that 'Jews and gentiles were corporeally, visually, linguistically, and socially indistinguishable'; Shaye J. D. Cohen, 'Those Who Say They Are Jews and Are Not: How Do You Know a Jew in Antiquity When You See One?', in *idem, The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 25–68, at 37. See also the highly informative discussion by Jonathan P. Roth, 'Distinguishing Jewishness in Antiquity', in *A Tall Order: Writing the Social History of the Ancient World. Essays in Honor of William V. Harris*, ed. Jean-Jacques Aubert and Zsuzsanna Várhelyi (München and Leipzig: Saur, 2005), 37–58. He particularly notes that 'what is surprising, is that in all the ancient Greek and Roman references to Jews, including anti-Semitic ones, there are no references to the Jews having any distinctive physical features whatsoever with the exception of circumcision. Even here, it is almost always referred to as part of the Jewish *cultus*, not *corpus*, that is, as a ritual feature of Judaism ... and not part of any "Jewish body"' (41).

⁵⁰ Karin Priester, *Rassismus und kulturelle Differenz* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1997), 13–14.

⁵¹ Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology, and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship* (London: Routledge, 2002), 26.

⁵² Priester, *Rassismus*, 14.

This does not mean that research into the emerging identity of the Christ-movement is marginal; rather the discussion is based more on theoretical approaches to collective identity⁵³ or, in more traditional terminology, is formulated as a question of ecclesiology.⁵⁴ In the context of the reception of cultural anthropology in particular, Wolfgang Stegemann has critically interacted with approaches which attempt to avoid the anachronistic concept of religion in their reconstruction of the emerging identity of the Christ-movement.⁵⁵ Building on the recognition that the term and concept of religion are both anachronistic for the period in question, for Stegemann, the concept of ethnicity serves as a more accurate template for the characterization of the early Christ-movement. Significantly, Stegemann follows Stanley Stowers, and others, in their emphasis on the paradigm of ethnicity as a concept which encompasses the intertwined aspects of traditions and ethos, including cult practice and rituals, as well as rules and regulations. In her overview of recent Anglo-American Pauline interpretation Christina Tuor-Kurth notes the focus on the genealogical link with Abraham as a decisive commonality in approaches which emphasize the ethnicizing terminology in Paul.⁵⁶ Although she follows Caroline Johnson Hodge in many respects, it is significant that, alongside acknowledging the relevance of the genealogical aspect in relation to the ethnically perceived Christ-movement, Tuor-Kurth maintains that the dimension of a shared ethos is a decisive factor for the constitution of a group. The genealogical constitution of a new group – the Christ-movement as related to but not replacing the people Israel – is thus constituted not only through the genealogical link but also through a shared habitus, a shared ethos which in turn defines the group through shared practices and values.⁵⁷ The interrelation between ethos and collective identity has been highlighted by Michael Wolter, although without the focus on ethnicity as a category applicable to the Christ-movement. Wolter maintains that the social dimension of a community manifests itself in its practice or activities.⁵⁸ This emphasis on ethos as a decisive aspect of collective identity can be found in other German-language publications as well, whether in positive interaction with English-language publications on ethnicity or differentiating themselves from them.

Markus Öhler, in a recent article, considers a number of aspects of the relevance of ethnic identities in relation to the Christ-movement and, like others, notices the importance of ethnic belonging and its inseparability from the religious dimension.⁵⁹ He draws attention to ethnically defined voluntary associations but, particularly in

⁵³ For example, Sandra Hübenal, *Das Markusevangelium als kollektives Gedächtnis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

⁵⁴ For example, Wolfgang Kraus, *Das Volk Gottes: Grundlagen der Ekklesiologie bei Paulus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996).

⁵⁵ Wolfgang Stegemann, 'The Emergence of God's New People: The Beginnings of Christianity Reconsidered', *HTS* 62, no. 1 (2006): 23–40.

⁵⁶ Christina Tuor-Kurth, 'Abraham, Vater aller Glaubenden? Neuere Zugänge zur Frage der Abstammung der Christus-Gläubigen bei Paulus', *Kirche und Israel* 31 (2016): 33–49.

⁵⁷ Tuor-Kurth, 'Abraham, Vater aller Glaubenden', 44.

⁵⁸ Michael Wolter, 'Ethos und Identität in den paulinischen Gemeinden', *NTS* 43, no. 3 (1997): 430–44.

⁵⁹ Markus Öhler, 'Ethnos und Identität. Landsmannschaftliche Vereinigungen, Synagogen und christliche Gemeinden', in *Kult und Macht: Religion und Herrschaft im syro-palästinensischen Raum*, ed. Anne Lykke and Friedrich Schipper (WUNT 2.319; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 221–48.

his discussion of New Testament passages, he emphasizes traditional perceptions of Paul as arguing for the overcoming or irrelevance of ethnic belonging when it comes to the identity of those in Christ. Although he carefully distinguishes Paul's language from later New Testament texts and notes that it is in 1 Peter that we find the explicit use of terms like *λαός*, *ἔθνος*, and *γένος* in relation to those in Christ, he does not further discuss the implications of this use. He refers to Harnack's insight that the use of these terms becomes relevant for the self-understanding of those in Christ from the second century onwards as the notion of being a third entity (*Geschlecht*) emerges. Significantly, Öhler never uses race-related terminology, but discusses definitions of ethnicity prevalent generally in the discourse in English-language publications (of Frederik Barth, Jonathan Hall, et al.). The use of *γένος*, *λαός*, and *ἔθνος* terminology in the New Testament is not considered as a case of ethnic reasoning by Öhler, nor does he argue that by these terms the Christ-movement considers itself or should be considered an ethnic entity. Thus, although ethnic categorizations are considered and viewed as relevant for New Testament interpretation, Öhler concludes that the characteristic of the Christ-movement is precisely the overcoming or irrelevance of these ethnic distinctions. The collective identity of those in Christ, although considered in the context of ethnic diversity (rather than religious diversity or theological differences), is eventually identified as universal, with analogies to some non-ethnically defined associations, in that ethnic differences are rendered obsolete.

In a recent and very informative article Lukas Bormann emphasizes the significance of 'ethnicity as a helpful analytical category for the understanding of culture, religion, and politics in antiquity'.⁶⁰ But in the references to recent publications about this important analytical category that he considers relevant there is only one German-language publication! He cautions that, in order to arrive at valuable new insights rather than mere terminological innovation, contemporary concepts of ethnicity need to be considered in light of potential analogies to the categorization of concepts in antiquity itself. Bormann draws attention to the tension in constructivist concepts of ethnicity even in relation to its modern use, something which Irad Malkin has formulated as follows: 'Clearly DNA is irrelevant for the formation of historical groupings; however, if ethnic identity persists for some centuries and keeps *functioning historically*, it becomes primordial both in terms of how outsiders see a group ... and when defined as such also from inside.'⁶¹ Bormann argues that this is particularly relevant when we take seriously that in antiquity the concept of religion, like other aspects of collective belonging, could not be separated from what in modern terms is called ethnicity.⁶²

⁶⁰ Lukas Bormann, 'Griechen und Juden – Skythen und Barbaren: Ethnizität, kulturelle Dominanz und Marginalität im Neuen Testament', in *Alternative Voices: A Plurality Approach to Religious Studies: Essays in Honour of Ulrich Berger*, ed. Afe Adogame, Magnus Echter, and Oliver Freiberger (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 116–33, at 116.

⁶¹ Irad Malkin, 'Between Collective and Ethnic Identities', *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne supplément* 10 (2014): 283–92, at 284.

⁶² Bormann, 'Griechen und Juden', 118.

Since the issue under discussion is collective rather than individual identity, or the social aspect of individual identity,⁶³ then we might ask if collective identity as such could not also be labelled ethnic – as the term ἔθνος is a collective term? If with ethnicity this collective aspect of a group of people who relate to each other with a sense of belonging is meant (as is the case in the narrative of belonging to which the New Testament writings witness), then their identity might be called ethnic in this broad sense. However, the question is whether any added insight is thereby gained compared with other options. Bormann notes that, when discussing the issue for the period in question, the frame of reference for the term ἔθνος in its specific context needs to be considered in the first place. He draws particular attention to the fact that inherent to the perception of an ἔθνος is the notion that such a group is constituted by their ἔθος/ῆθος.⁶⁴ An ἔθνος, in Bormann's perception, is a group of people who are used to living together according to identifiable customs and traditions, whether these have been transmitted orally or in written form. The terms which refer to these traditions are most frequently derived from the legal sphere with the groups attributing their application and interpretation often to specific categories of people within the group, such as priests or lawyers. Hence, for Rome, this ἔθος/ῆθος is the *mos maiorum*; for Greek cities it is referred to as the *πάτριοι νόμοι*. In Judaism, this is obviously the Torah associated with Moses. Other aspects of course complement this perception of what constitutes an ἔθνος, but no group without an ἔθος would be considered as such in antiquity, according to Bormann.⁶⁵

An interesting variation of this perception of an ἔθνος is Bormann's reference to Cicero's contemplation concerning Roman identity. With the expansion of the *imperium* and the inclusion of the Italian tribes into Roman citizenship, the option of dual or eventually triple identity became viable. Hence, in Cicero's perception – and later – one could be Roman, Greek, and Messapian all at the same time; the three aspects of one's identity were not mutually exclusive.⁶⁶ The question arises, however, whether this means that such a person would have three identities, or is a confluence of ethnic identities, or an ethnic hybrid? Interestingly, in the perception of

⁶³ Cf. Henri Tajfel, ed., *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (London: Academic Press, 1978), and the reception of Social Identity Theory in Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Petri Luomanen, 'The Sociology of Knowledge, the Social Identity Approach and the Cognitive Science of Religion', in *Explaining Christian Origins and Early Judaism: Contribution to Cognitive and Social Science*, ed. Petri Luomanen, et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 199–229; J. Brian Tucker, *You Belong to Christ: Paul and the Formation of Social Identity in 1 Corinthians 1-4* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

⁶⁴ Benedikt Eckhardt has analysed this aspect in detail in his *Ethnos und Herrschaft. Politische Figurationen Jüdischer Identität von Antiochos III. bis Herodes I* (Berlin: deGruyter, 2013). His focus being on the use of ἔθνος in the period after Alexander the Great, he notes that the term was a categorization term which could include numerous diverse groups in the first place, but then was also used in a more specific way as a term denoting a subjugated status, especially in Seleucid and Ptolemaic usage. It is a 'differentiation' term, labelling 'us' and 'them', in a vein similar to the Roman differentiation of the *populus Romanus* and the *gentes/nationes* as all the 'others', particularly those in the realm of the Roman *imperium*.

⁶⁵ Bormann, 'Griechen und Juden', 119.

⁶⁶ Cicero, *Leg. 2.5* – *patria loci sive natura – patria iuris sive civitatis*. (A local or natural fatherland – a fatherland according to law or citizenship.)

contemporaries, neither of these modern categories would fit as the different aspects of their 'identity' neither mingled nor fused, nor were they cumulative. They could possibly best be described as forms of cultural and political bi- or multiculturalism, or should we say these aspects of identity intersect?

Bormann concludes his important article by emphasizing that the overcoming or transcending of ethnic identities was inconceivable for the period in question. He maintains that Paul's universalism is a particular universalism, that is, a universalism from within the Jewish symbolic and social universe. As such, it is an ethnically specific universalism. I consider Bormann's approach quite convincing as it comes close to a perception of the Pauline vision of a diversity of peoples forming a unity in Christ without giving up their particularity, as I have argued elsewhere.⁶⁷ The traditions which nurture the Pauline vision(s) were Jewish in their relation to the scriptures, and their diverse interpretations, as expressions of the relationship to the one God. Of course, all of these were not culturally enclosed traditions (I nowhere argue a purist stance), but part of the vivid cultural interactions of the period, intersecting with numerous other traditions of the time. And although Paul probably had hopes that his vision might be shared by all his Jewish contemporaries, he refrained from considering those who did not see things the way he did as excluded from being God's beloved. The incoming of the ἔθνη does not replace Israel, but is part of the mysterious ways of God which leads to the saving of πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ (Rom. 11.26).⁶⁸ Her specific place in the purpose of God is never in doubt, as God's 'gifts and calling are irrevocable' (Rom. 11.29).⁶⁹

4 Conclusion

Where does this leave us? The categories of ethnicity are certainly referred to and reflected upon in some recent German-language scholarship, but there seems to be a reluctance to embrace the discourse as fully as it has been embraced in Anglo-American scholarship. The German-language discussion nevertheless engages in the critical debates concerning the concept of religion, which significantly influenced the search for alternative concepts to understand the processes which, at the end of the fourth century, led to identifiable and more or less distinct entities, Christianity and Judaism. The terminology and concepts in which this discussion is phrased, however, differ mostly from the English-language debates in that open terms such as collective

⁶⁷ *Paul at the Crossroads of Cultures: Theologizing in the Space Between* (LNTS 456; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 172–74; 'The Pauline Ἐκκλησία and Images of Community in Enoch Traditions', in *Paul the Jew: Rereading the Apostle as a Figure of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Gabriele Boccacini and Carlos Segovia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 183–216.

⁶⁸ Israel is not equivalent with being in Christ but remains a distinct entity which is neither replaced by, nor 'aufgehoben' in Christ.

⁶⁹ I have dealt with this in two articles, see Kathy Ehrensperger, 'Reading Romans "in the Face of the Other": Levinas, the Jewish Philosopher Meets Paul, the Jewish Apostle', in *Reading Romans with Contemporary Philosophers and Theologians*, ed. David Odell Scott (Romans Through History and Cultures 7; London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 115–54, and also 'The Mystery of Paul's "Mysterion" in Rom 11.25–36', in *Religious Secrecy as Contact: Secrets as Promoters of Religious Dynamics*, ed. A. Akasoy, et al. (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

identity are preferred, thus leaving the precise definition of the nature and essence of these groups more open than specific terms like ethnicity or race would allow. The rather open terminology also takes into account that the terms ἔθνος, γένος, λαός, and so on, were used in a wide variety of ways in antiquity and need to be analysed in their specific sociocultural, linguistic, and literary contexts in order to come to any solid conclusions as to their potential meanings. The fact that, certainly in New Testament texts, they were part of, and embedded in, the symbolic and social world of first-century Judaism indicates that attempts at dealing with their meaning need to take this context into account. The cautious reluctance of German-language scholarship to embrace ethnic or racial language without critical caveats as the solution to the terminological and conceptual categorization of the early Christ-movement should not merely be seen as a reaction to terminology prevalent in the period of 1933–45 but rather indicates that this debate needs to be seen in light of earlier debates concerning the appropriate categorization and terminology applicable to the early Christ-movement, including such earlier questioning of racial terminology. The question of what the ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ precisely is, remains an open question, maybe not unlike Ammianus' question noted at the outset.

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