RESURRECTION IN PAUL AS BOTH AFFIRMATION AND CHALLENGE TO THE ISRAELITE CYCLE OF MEANING[1]

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Abstract

Pieter Craffert correctly insists that scholars must move away from ontological monism, and, inter alia, should interpret the resurrection of Jesus within the Israelite cycle of meaning. In view of 2 Cor 5:16, however, this paper contends that for Paul, the resurrection of Jesus not only affirmed Israelite resurrection beliefs, but through "the acquisition of experiential knowledge" (quoting Craffert) also challenged and expanded on them, resulting in a new and unexpected cycle of meaning. This study will be aided by the insights of ethnicity theory and social identity theory. The result of the study is to hint at the possibility that contemporary notions of the resurrection or afterlife, in whatever cycles of meaning they may be found, should also be seen continuously open to challenge and transformation through "the acquisition of (present day) experiential knowledge".

1. Introduction

Pieter Craffert's (2008) recent contribution on the historical Jesus questioned traditional studies, in that they are all trapped in a (Western ethnocentric) positivistic historiographical framework. For this kind of scholarship, battling to come to grips with the gospel narratives, the "historical" Jesus cannot be like the Jesus portrayed in the gospels. The real Jesus lies somewhere "beneath" the text and must be approached by identifying "authentic" material. Historical reconstructions, of which there are as many as there are scholars who engage in them, are then based on these "authentic" materials.[2] Craffert argues, however, that scholars must move away from their ontological monism and accept that there are pluralities of worldviews, and to appreciate the differences between our cultural context and the first century context of Jesus. In this regard the historical Jesus lies

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2   See Van Eck (2004) how presuppositions of scholars also influence the result of their research.

within (not somewhere beneath) the text.[3] The gospels must be seen as cultural artefacts produced by a particular culture about a specific type of social personage. To avoid ethnocentrism, the gospels need to be interpreted through culturally sensitive engagement utilizing cross-cultural analysis and critique. It is a bit like putting a fish back in water where it properly belongs, although we cannot swim in the same water. The point is, Jesus and the gospels formed part of a worldview and cultural context quite different to that of the Western world and cannot be interpreted from the values and assumptions about reality that form part of that world. In analyzing Jesus according to the shamanic complex, Craffert's study quite successfully brings to our attention the "otherness" of Jesus, his person, and socio-cultural context.

As far as the resurrection of Jesus is concerned, Craffert states "that resurrection is a culture-specific notion about the afterlife and dependent for its reality on a whole range of cultural assumptions. Therefore, it is to be suggested that the documents are in the first place not testimonies about *Jesus's resurrection* as if that can be taken as a homoversal human phenomenon" (2008, 384; emphasis original). Polyphasic cultures would take as real what those in monophasic cultures would not consider as real, so the resurrection does not speak to a common human reality. Israelite afterlife options were cultural realities connected to some kind of body-soul dualism, and "the acquisition of experiential knowledge in a cycle of meaning" (2008, 393). In polyphasic cultures ASC experiences could contribute knowledge about what is real and not real, and the resurrection of Jesus, or rather, the outcome of his resurrection, falls into this category.

This paper is particularly interested in Craffert's insistence that Jesus' resurrection must be placed within the Israelite worldview, experience, knowledge, and cycle of meaning. Paul gives evidence, however, that the resurrection of Jesus – leaving aside for the moment exactly what it means – showed both continuities and discontinuities with the Israelite knowledge system and cycle of meaning. In other words, notions of resurrection were affirmed and, I would suggest that in view of 2 Corinthians 5:16, through "the acquisition of experiential knowledge in a cycle of meaning" also challenged and expanded Paul's understanding. And if we want to take the tradition of Jesus' resurrection seriously, Paul's experience may be relevant to us today even though we do not share all aspects of his cycle of meaning.

This article will proceed as follows. At first (1) we will have a look at Craffert's approach to Jesus' resurrection in more detail, as well as the biblical features of resurrection belief. (2) A brief and selective overview will then be given of ethnicity theory, complimented by the insights of social identity theory. Viewed

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3   Cf. the critique of Van Aarde (2008), who argues that the identification of authentic material through stratification in the Jesus tradition should be seen as complimentary to cultural-sensitive readings.

from this angle, what is the potential ethnic meaning of resurrection? (3) Our focus will then shift to 2 Cor 5:16 and suggest how Paul articulates a challenge to the Israelite (ethnic) understanding of resurrection. Lastly, (4) its relevance for contemporary scholarship and theology will be touched upon.

2. Resurrection in the Israelite Cycle of Meaning

Craffert (2008, 394-95) explains that two sets of knowledge are relevant to a polyphasic culture's cycle of meaning. The first concerned beliefs about the human body and the potentials of human existence. The astronomical complex was connected to beliefs about stars and angels. People could experience heavenly journeys, and many texts illustrate that people could transform into angels or astral beings after death. In any particular case they were dependent on, or at least supported by ASC experiences (sleep, mystical ascent). The second set of knowledge concerns the various afterlife options. This involves a circular and feedback process between "the particular ways of obtaining knowledge and views on both the human being and afterlife options. It was *experienced* souls in *souled* or *spirited* bodies that also encountered afterlife experiences" (2008, 395; emphasis original).

There was, of course, a variety of afterlife notions (immortality of the soul, astral immortality, or resurrection of the body, or any combination of these), and "each notion was created in a particular Israelite cycle of meaning. Put the other way around: none of them described objective reality or how things were after life, but offered particular cultural constructions thereof" (2008, 398). So in the case of Jesus' resurrection the gospels and Paul give evidence of the following (all underlining of text to follow is mine):

> He resumed an Israelite continued existence, described as a *resurrection*, which was based on stories that his tomb was found empty and that he was encountered (seen) by his followers after his death … Jesus's followers were convinced … that he had entered an Israelite afterlife existence. None of these sources claim anything about the event itself. (Craffert 2008, 399; emphasis original)

Craffert also argues that ASC experiences loomed large in understanding Jesus not as dead in the grave, but as alive, where he was either *seen*, or *appeared* to someone (Gal 2:12, 16; 1 Cor 15:5-8). What points to ASC experiences is Jesus is presented as shape shifting and was often not recognized (Matt 28:17; John 20:14; Luke 24:16). Whatever form they take, "the resurrection accounts are filled with a cultural reality based on a culturally approved way of gaining knowledge" (2008, 402). Craffert then explains:

Given the afterlife options available and the cycle of meaning of first-century Israelite people, they were convinced that he was no longer dead, but alive and well in the realm of the ancestors, immortals, or other divine beings. For some, he probably existed as a star somewhere among the other stars (angels, immortals, and divine beings)[4] … For his cultural contemporaries, <u>Jesus's body was resurrected as a real and truly first-century Israelite resurrected body</u> that after Jesus's death, happened as a cultural event and via cultural phenomena. (Craffert 2008, 405, 407)

Craffert (2008, 408) continues that there is ample testimony that in some cultural settings religious leaders, healers or other people of importance were believed to continue their existence as ancestors or as the living dead still having an influence in the life of their followers. And Jesus as son of man/son of God (or Galilean shamanic figure) appears to have been familiar with the heavenly territory and expected to resume a postmortem existence as a resurrected figure. Such expectations would have been conducive to ASC experiences of his followers, and visionary experiences often occur during states of mourning and sadness, especially after a violent or unexpected death (2008, 410-413).

The study of Craffert is rich, expands our reference framework, and gives us more tools by which to approach the resurrection of Jesus. Yet it leaves us with a problem that appears on the surface to be insurmountable. Jesus' resurrection becomes so culture-specific, it runs the danger of becoming irrelevant for those who did not sit down and eat at the first-century Mediterranean Israelite table. Is there a way that it can be made relevant, especially for those who because of reasons of faith or scholarly inquiry want to take the resurrection tradition seriously? Perhaps there is, but more about this later.

Before we proceed we will also look at the work of Bauckham (1998, 86-89) who refers to four biblical features that is found in the belief in life after death around our period, especially as it pertains to resurrection. First, Israelite tradition takes death very seriously. Death is an evil that will ultimately be destroyed by God (Isa 25:7-8; *L.A.B.* 3:10; 4 Ezra 8:53). Second, the human being is viewed as a psychosomatic whole. Although features of a person can survive death, the *true* life hoped for beyond death was conceived as a fully embodied life. Third, it concerns God's righteous judgement. The righteous and sinners will face God's judgement and may expect different destinies (Dan 12:2): vindication for the righteous and

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4   This is a somewhat strange description, for the New Testament is basically univocal in stating that Jesus was "seated at the right hand of God". Ps 110:1 is the text that appears most often in direct quotations or indirect allusions in the New Testament (cf. Hengel 1995, 133). Craffert mentions in passing (on p. 418) that Jesus was at right hand of God but also that he was in the company of other Israelite ancestors. This is not supported by the evidence.

condemnation for the wicked. Fourth, individual eschatology is interconnected with corporate eschatology. Bauckham (1998, 88) explains:

> The fate of the individual after death is placed within the context of the final future of God's people in the world. This is a consequence of the way Jewish eschatology developed. It was first and foremost a hope for God's action, in salvation and judgment, in the world, for the coming of his kingdom over Israel and the nations. When hope for the future of individuals entered the picture, it was hoped that they would rise to share in the fulfilment of God's promises for the redemption and restoration of Israel.

In various ways Jesus' resurrection was understood according to the four elements noted by Bauckham. Jesus experienced a reversal of death and returned to embodied life. As a righteous martyr he was vindicated and rewarded with life. He stands somewhat apart, however, in that he is the "firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20). Nevertheless, Paul still manages to bring Jesus' resurrection within the context of a collective eschatology.

The last point of Bauckham is quite important, for in the end *resurrection, in whatever variation it may be found, was about Israel and for Israel*, as most Israelite conceptions of resurrection as well as rewards and punishments place emphasis or appear in contexts of collective eschatology (cf. Puech 2006). This should not surprise us as Israelites were collectivists (as opposed to individualists), where the concerns, loyalties and demands of the group, not of the individual, take priority (cf. Malina 1993). Collective eschatology illustrates a concern, apart from the issue of justice, for the continuation of Israel as a people and Israelite culture. We can bring this into connection with Craffert's observation that resurrection was about an Israelite afterlife existence. We are dealing with Israelite souls/spirits being reunited with Israelite bodies (see underlined text above), continuing the Judean way of life, the customs of the fathers. In other words, collective eschatology illustrates a concern not so much for "theology" as for the collective honour and continued existence of *Israelite ethnic identity*.

3. Israel as an Ethnic Identity

The fact is that more and more scholars are appreciating Israel as an ethnic identity, and rightly so (e.g. Duling 2005; 2008a; 2008b; 2010; Esler 1996; 1998; 2003a; 2003b; 2003c; 2006; Stegemann 2006; Mason 2009). In view of this the following needs to be emphasised: We are dealing with a people, an *ethnos*, who lived out a cultural way of life, and not with a people who practiced a "religion" or "theology". In antiquity, religion was embedded in the social realms of politics and kinship, and it is suggested here, all of these institutions were embedded in the

more encompassing realm of ethnic identity. In other words, "religion" never stood apart on its own as a separate sphere of life (cf. Malina 1994).

Here two aspects of Israelite ethnic identity will be highlighted, namely the dynamics of group membership and the cultural content of their symbolic universe (= Israelite cycle of meaning). The brief description to follow is extracted from work published elsewhere (cf. Cromhout 2007; 2010).

Firstly, one can define Israelite ethnicity as a form of social identity and relation, referring to a group of people ("Israel") who ascribe to themselves and/or by others, a sense of belonging and a shared cultural tradition. It is a form of extended kinship, which according to larger parameters serve the same needs as kinship (familiarity, protection and support). We are speaking here of a people who perceive that they belong together, have a sense of "us" as opposed to "them", and have a sense of solidarity.

Here the insights of social identity theory also come into play. People perceive themselves as belonging to a group, and hence, categorise themselves and others accordingly (= *social categorisation*). Where there is interaction between two groups, especially within a context of collectivism and competition, there is a general tendency to favour the ingroup, something that normally goes hand in hand with intergroup comparison. The ingroup is positively stereotyped while outgroups are negatively stereotyped, serving the need of people to distinguish themselves as well as the need to create a positive self-value as compared to other groups (Tajfel 1978; 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Brown 1995; 2000; 2001). This process is also reductionist, since members of your own or outsider groups are seen as more similar than what they are (Turner 1987). So part and parcel of attachment to an ethnic group is that group members desire a positive valuation of their own group which can be compared favourably with others (Esler 1996; 1998, 42-48; Horowitz 1985, 143-147).

This is also applicable to Israelites and their interaction with Gentiles in the ancient Mediterranean world. They were collectivists, and found themselves in an agonistic (competitive) context where one of the primary contests between groups was for honour. They also compared themselves favourably, as "righteous", having honour, being objects of divine favour as God's chosen people, as recipients of the covenant, having a distinguished ancestry, and being the privileged recipients of God's eternal law (Sir 24:9; 33; Bar 4:1; Wis 18:4; *T. Naph.* 3:1-2). The law was also the basis on which the Israelites claimed moral superiority, a kind of social differentiation or comparison that normally exacerbates the denigration and contempt for outgroups (Brewer 1999, 435).[5] Gentiles were generally stereotyped

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5 Brewer (1999:435-38) lists moral superiority, along with the perceived threat of outgroups, the sharing of common goals, the sharing of common values which result in competitive social comparison, as well as power politics as some of the ways in which "the conditions of maintaining ingroup integrity and loyalty pave the way to outgroup hate and hostility."

as "sinners" (e.g. *Jub.* 23:24). Of course, the law also served as the reference point for those whom God will raise from the dead and enjoy an embodied Israelite afterlife existence.

Second, Israelite ethnic identity also concerns culture, or shared meaning. To participate in an ethnic identity presupposes a shared amount of "knowledge", or alternatively, a shared symbolic universe (cf. Berger and Luckmann 1967; Berger 1973). The Israelite symbolic universe, for analytical purposes, can be divided as follows:

Main Cultural Features of the Israelite Symbolic Universe: [6]
(= Israelite cycle of meaning)

Sacred Canopy (= "Core Values")	*Habitus/Israel (= "Institutions")*
YHWH (monotheism)	Name
Divine Election	Language
The Covenant / The Torah	Kinship
Millennialism (& The Prophets)	Land
Shared "Historical" Memories	Covenantal Praxis (Customs)
Myths of Common Ancestry	Religion

According to Barth (1969), some cultural features function as emblems of ethnic distinctiveness, while others are played down or even ignored. Those cultural features which do function to serve the purpose of ethnic differentiation are broadly speaking of the following two types. Esler (1998, 80) explains: "First, there are *overt signals or signs*, features which people deliberately adopt to show identity (for example, dress, language, architecture and lifestyle). Second, there are *basic value orientations*, the norms of morality and excellence used to assess performance" (emphasis original). The second one plays an important role in identity: "Since belonging to an ethnic category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity" (Barth 1969, 14). It is proposed here that the features listed under the "Sacred Canopy" correspond to Barth's *basic value orientations*, while the features listed under the "Habitus/Israel" set out the more *overt signals or signs*. Taking our inspiration from Sanders' (1977; 1992) notion of covenantal nomism, the former corresponds to "getting in", and the latter to "staying in" the covenant relationship.

As Pilch and Malina (1993, xiii) explain, the "word 'value' describes some general quality and direction of life that human beings are expected to embody in their behaviour. A value is a general, normative orientation of action in a social

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6   For a more detailed description of the content of the Israelite symbolic universe, see Cromhout (2007, 117-230).

system". It speaks to having the right kind of attitudes and adhering to rules of behaviour or *communicating similarity*, that is, if you as a member of the group want to participate and share in the group's identity. Arguably it is with these core values where we will find the greatest degree of agreement among Israelites, constituting the source of their collective consciousness or a "minimal consensus" (Schmidt 2001, 23).

If values are the focus points for orientation of action, the way that values are realized are through institutions. "Institutions mark the general boundaries within which certain qualities and directions of living must take place" (Pilch and Malina 1993, xv). For our purposes here we can also understand institutions as the means to maintain Israelite ethnic identity, or "staying in" the covenant relationship by responding to God's divine election and so forth, by living out the expectations of your co-ethnics and honouring the customs of the fathers. Here we enter the realm of *kashrut* laws, ritual purity and immersions, circumcision, Sabbath observance and pilgrimage, tithes and offerings, endogamous marriage strategies and the preservation of the patriarchal family on its ancestral land.

That the ingredients of the Israelite symbolic universe, as represented by the model, is more or less on the right track is illustrated by the following passage from Paul. In Romans we find an emic description of what it means to be an Israelite, where Paul speaks of his co-ethnics in the following way:

> ... my kinsmen according to the flesh, who are Israelites [*name*]. Theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory [*YHWH, divine election; kinship*], the *covenants*, the receiving of the *law* [*shared "historical" memories* implied], the service/worship of God [*covenantal praxis; religion*] and the promises [*millennialism*]. Theirs are the fathers [*myths of common ancestry, kinship*], and from whom came the Messiah according to the flesh ... (Rom 9:4-5).

Now let us return to the last point of Bauckham, namely that of collective eschatology and the concern for the restoration of Israel. The concept of resurrection in its socio-historical context certainly had more of an *ethnic*, and not so much "theological" or purely "religious" meaning. It is where various elements of their ethnic identity intersect. When viewed from the perspective of ethnicity theory, and to reiterate, *resurrection in the Israelite cycle of meaning was ultimately about Israel and for Israel*, about Israelite souls/spirits being reunited with Israelite bodies. It was about God's restoration of Israelite honour, as well as their values and way of life. It is where the "righteous", that is, those who have Israelite ethnic identity and adhere to the Judean way of life, are vindicated by God. It was about Israelites enjoying an embodied life on earth on their sacred piece of land centred on the "mother city" Jerusalem, the place of the temple from where the order of the cosmos is regulated through the sacrificial cult. It was about being the same person, continuing in the previous matrix of relationships and

kinship patterns with the added advantages of being freed from foreign political, economic, and socio-cultural domination and oppression. Naturally, this new found freedom and experience of God's justice will include the presence of Israel's glorious ancestors, taking into consideration that the ancestors were the source of their ascribed honour and covenant relationship with God. Overall, resurrection was about the continuity of the Israelite *ethnos* and culture. Israel will be restored, and their symbolic universe will not only exist in theory, but will be experienced in day-to-day social realities.

This brings us to another important consideration, namely, understanding Israelites as seeing themselves as a *privileged ethnos*. Israelite identity encoded "righteousness" and divine favour. Resurrection can now be appreciated as a means by which Israelites compared themselves favourably with Gentiles, the "sinners" and the "lawless". Perhaps Gentiles will participate in the eschaton, perhaps they will not.[7] But *resurrection was about Israel and for Israel*. Resurrection will bring honour to Israel in full view of the nations. Resurrection was about the divine patron vindicating his faithful clients. Honourable Israelite souls/spirits will live in glorious and honourable Israelite bodies.

4. Paul and Jesus' Resurrection as both affirmation and challenge to the Israelite cycle of meaning

For Paul Jesus' life, death and resurrection was grounded in Israelite tradition (Gal 4:4; Rom 1:2-3; 15:8, 12; 1 Cor 5:7; 19:1-4). Paul specifically says that Jesus, the Messiah of Israel died for our sins/was buried/was raised "according to the scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3). Even his own calling as apostle (Gal 1:15-16 with Jer 1:5 LXX and Isa 49:1, 6 LXX) and the present life of the congregations (Gal 4:21-31) were interpreted from the vantage point of Israelite tradition. Viewed from this perspective we can say it made sense within the Israelite cycle of meaning. At the same time, however, Paul's understanding of the gospel also posed a challenge to the Israelite cycle of meaning on several fronts (cf. Cromhout 2009; 2010, 73-106). To this I would add Paul's understanding of the resurrection of Jesus. In other words, Paul *did not* understand Jesus to be an *Israelite* soul/spirit reunited with an

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7   There were conflicting views on the participation of Gentiles in the future age. First, there was the view that they can become proselytes in the present (*2 Bar.* 41:1-6; 1 QS 6:13-15; CD 14:4-6), but there is no possibility for conversion or even the presence of Gentiles in the future age (Sir 36:1-9; *Jub.* 24:29f; *1 En.* 90:19; *Ps. Sol.* 17:24; *Sib. Or.* 3:670-2; *4 Ezra* 8:56-58; CD 4:7-12; *t. Sanh.* 13.2; *b. Abod .Zar.* 3b; *Pesiq. Rab.* 161a). Second, the Gentiles will be converted, saved or gather to Zion as a consequence of Israel being saved (*Sib. Or.* 3:616f.; 3:710-20; 3:772f; *1 En.* 10:21; *T. Sim.* 7:2; *T. Levi* 8:14; *T. Naph.* 8:2-4; *T. Ash.* 7:3; *T. Benj.* 9:2; 11:1-3; *T. Gad* 7:2).

Israelite body who entered an *Israelite* afterlife existence. This comes to expression in 2 Cor 5:16, a matter to which we will focus on next.

4.1 The Approach to 2 Corinthians

The second letter to the Corinthians is complicated by historical and literary problems, and if there are three features that stand out, it is Paul's struggle with Israelite opponents, the apologetic nature of the letter where Paul is writing in defence of himself and his co-workers, and lastly, what appears to be the composite nature of the letter, although a minority argue for seeing it as a literary unity (cf. Johnson 1986; Keener 2005). Six letter fragments have been identified by historical criticism based on content shifts and grammatical breaks (Duling 2008, 820-21):

(1) 1:1-2:13 & 7:5-16 (13:11-13)	Paul attempts reconciliation
(2) 2:14-6:13 & 7:2-4	developing conflict
(3) 6:14-7:1	*non-Pauline-sounding dualism*
(4) 8	the collection
(5) 9	the collection again
(6) 10-13	high conflict

These fragments have been rearranged as follows (when 6:14-7:1 is regarded as inauthentic):

(1) 2:14-6:13 & 7:2-4	developing conflict
(2) 10-13	high conflict
(3) 1:1-2:13 & 7:5-16 (13:11-13)	Paul attempts reconciliation
(4) 8	the collection
(5) 9	the collection again

Overall the Corinthians appear to have been attracted to other apostles (cf. 1 Cor 1:12), the overall relationship with the Corinthians appear to be strained, and Paul is attempting (chaps 10-13) and/or was successful to reconcile with them (2 Cor 7:5-16). In the process, Paul is defining the nature of his apostleship, especially in view of the rivalry he is experiencing with the "super/false-apostles". I understand the letter(s) to give evidence of the following major themes:

First, Paul defines the nature of the ministry of the new covenant. God is leading a triumphal procession, and Paul follows as a captive. This implies both his death (suffering for the Gospel), but also his future eternal life. This is why Paul also speaks of the "fragrance/aroma" that he gives off (2:16), pointing to his life of sacrifice (cf. 11:23-29), but more so to the fact that God uses his suffering to spread the knowledge of Jesus' suffering and sacrifice on the cross. It is therefore a

life of suffering (1:3-11) where the apostles as weak vessels (4:7-18) are placed there by God to be of service to believers (2:14-16; 6:3-10; 7:4-5; 11:23-32; 12:7-10; 13:4). It is to be a minister of the new covenant/the Spirit (3:6) which is far more glorious than the ministry of Moses (3:6-11). It is a ministry that preaches Messiah (4:1-6) and is the ministry of reconciliation (5:18-21).

Second, there is the conflict with rival teachers/apostles (11:19). Paul speaks in defence of his sincerity (1:12-14; 7:2) although he had to change his travel plans (1:15-2:2). This is in contrast to those "super/false apostles" (11:5, 13; 12:11), who commend themselves and have letters of recommendation (3:1). They belittle Paul's body and speech (10:10; 11:6) and make comparisons and commend themselves (10:12, 18). They make claims about being rhetorically gifted and have knowledge (10:10; 11:6). They perhaps performed miracles (12:12), "boasted" a lot (10:13, 15, 16; 11:12), had visions (12:1-6), "boasted" according to the flesh (11:16-22), as well as in their ministering and toils (11:23). They are more than happy to accept the patronage of the Corinthians (11:7; 12:13). For Paul, however, these rivals are encroaching on his territory (10:13-16). They are peddling the word (2:17), handle themselves with craftiness and deceit (4:2; 11:3), and preach themselves (4:5). They focus on the visible (4:18), boast in appearance (5:12; 10:7), walk according to the flesh (10:2-3), and preach another Jesus (11:4).

Third, Paul attempts reconciliation and wants to restore a broken relationship with the Corinthians, and it appears that he was successful. He initially changed his travel plans to avoid another painful visit (1:15-2:2). Paul made a plea to the congregation to be open to him (6:11-12; 7:2). He instructed that a man be punished (6:11-12) – the punishment was seemingly carried out (7:8-12). We read of the zeal they had for Paul (7:7), and their obedience as they received Titus (7:13-16).

What is important for our present purposes, is that I identify a fourth theme in the letter. If we have a look at 2:14-6:13 and 7:2-4 we find references to the (old) Judean way of life and the (new) life in the Spirit, that is, to issues that relate to ethnic identity. What we do not encounter here is a contrast between "religions" or "theologies" as such, but rather a contrast between political and kinship patterns, communal ways of living, or contrasts between ethnic identities and their related values and honour claims. In 3:3, 6 we find a contrast between the old and new covenants, where writing on tablets of stone is set in opposition with the Spirit writing on human hearts. "The letter kills", Paul says, but the "Spirit gives life". To paraphrase, what kills is the Judean way of life and identity and the values of Israelite culture. And in a *midrash* of Exod 34:29-35 Paul compares the glory of the new covenant and of his own ministry with the ministry of death, that of Moses, the law-giver, which only had a temporary glory (3:7-18). He refers to the minds of the Israelites being blinded, a veil being in place when old covenant/Moses is read (3:14-15), as opposed to those who are being transformed

into the Lord's glorious image (3:18). Paul contrasts the flesh and waging war according to the flesh with the new creation and the spiritual warfare of believers (5:16-17; 10:2-4).

As already mentioned, Israelite identity encoded righteousness and divine favour. It was to belong to a privileged or "better" *ethnos*. They are the elected, the people of the covenant, and descendents of the glorious ancestors. They are the fortunate ones who have received God's law, being the source of an honourable way of life (Sir 10:19-24; cf. Jewett 2003; DeSilva 1996). Certainly any advantages that attached itself to notions of "resurrection" fell within this orbit of privilege. But Paul is questioning the "advantages" of Israelite ethnic identity (cf. Rom 3:1; Phil 3:7), and generally speaking, is dishing out serious insults to traditional Israelite honour!

Ethnic identity issues also appear explicitly in 2 Cor 11:21-22. Duling (2008) sees chapters 10-13 as where Paul's competition with the rival teachers reaches a climax. 2 Cor 11:21-22 in particular is Paul's statement about his ethnicity in his own self-defence against the "super-apostles" (11:5; 12:11) who challenge his authority and "boast in the flesh" (11:18 cf. 10:2-3). Chapters 10-13 articulate carefully formulated rhetorical responses to defend his honour, using irony, self-praise (boasting), and comparison as rhetorical strategies (Duling 2008). Duling explains that in his ethnic self-defence Paul is claiming *equivalence*. Being a Hebrew, Israelite, and Abraham's descendent, he is *like* the super-apostles, those very ones who "boast" in their Israelite ethnic identity. "Are they Hebrews? *So am I*. Are they Israelites? *So am I*. Are they Abrahams seed? *So am I*", Paul can similarly "boast" (v. 22). It is these rivals, or "false apostles" (11:13), who take away the simplicity that is in Messiah and who preach another Jesus (11:3-4), and who commend themselves and travel with letters of recommendation (3:1; 10:12).

When we look at the above there is a very strong correlation between the first, second, and fourth themes and the fragments of developing conflict (2:14-6:13 and 7:2-4) and high conflict (10-13). I therefore suggest that Paul's description of the ministry of the new covenant and his rivalry with the "super apostles" are closely connected to the matter of ethnic identity. In this regard it is noticeable how often "boasting" appears in the letter(s) (18 times), and a plausible reason behind it are the claims made by the "super apostles".[8] Not merely their social status and rhetorical impressiveness are in view here (Keener 2005, 183), but the primary ingredient in the whole mix it is suggested here is their honourable status as ethnic Israelites.[9] This is an ethnic status, however, that is even further enhanced by them

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8   Most of the incidents appear in chaps. 10-13 where Paul defends himself against the "super apostles". It appears once in 1:1-2:13 and 7:5-16 (1:14), twice in 2:14-6:13 and 7:2-4 (5:12), and once in ch. 9 (9:2).

9   Paul also challenges Israelite "boasting" and claims of identity in other places (Rom 3:17, 27; Gal 6:13-14). Jewett (2003), commenting on Romans, points out that "boasting" should be

being Torah-obedient apostles. No wonder they "boast". No wonder Paul refers to them as the "super apostles".

4.2 Jesus' Resurrection as Challenge to the Israelite Cycle of Meaning

In contrast to the "other Jesus" (11:4) who the "super apostles" preach, Paul brings his own Jesus to the Corinthians in aid of his rivalry with them. "Boast" on our behalf, Paul asks, to answer those who "boast" in outward show (5:12). The death of Messiah means that all died, and his followers should lead a life in his service (5:14-15). And because all have died, from now on "we do not know anyone according to the flesh".

> Though we once regarded Messiah according to the flesh, we know him as such no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor 5:16-17).

So what does Paul mean by the "flesh"? According to Jewett's exhaustive study, whom I use here because it is also representative of a typical "theological" approach, "flesh" is mostly used against the "nomists" (21 times), alternatively it is used against "gnostics" (9 times), libertines (6 times), and the "Divine-Man-Missionaries" (7 times) (Jewett 1971, 453). Of interest here is his view on the "Judaizers" (or "nomists") and the "Divine-Man-Missionaries". Jewett proposes Paul created the flesh-spirit categories in response to the threat posed by the "Judaizer" movement. To summarize: Paul correlates "flesh" with virtuous obedience, "religious Jews", human accomplishments, religious rebellion and self-righteousness (1971, 114).

In 2 Cor 5:16 Paul uses "flesh" for the first time against the "divine man" theology (Jewett 1971, 125-127). According to Jewett, Paul's opponents believed in Christ as the "divine man", which

> shifted the accent radically from his death and weakness to his divine authority and miraculous powers; the belief that the apostolic existence corresponded to

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understood within the parameters of the ancient honour discourse. Being an ethnic minority, the Judeans would have been under constant pressure to give up their Judeanness and adopt behaviour that was regarded as honourable by the larger Greco-Roman world. Judean authors wrote to encourage fellow Judeans to resist this attraction of the Gentile world. Sirach advises that genuine honour is to be found by following the values of Judean culture, in particular devotion to God and obedience to the Torah (Sir 10:19, 24). Judeans are encouraged to emulate the example of their honourable ancestors, who are worthy of praise and who were afforded much glory (Sir 44-45) (2003, 556-57). "The competitive center of the ancient systems of shame and honor is what Paul called 'boasting,' which poisoned relations … between individuals and ethnic groups in the ancient world …" (2003, 561).

Christ's in its demonstration of the divine life provided the basis of the attack on Paul's apostolicity because Paul made a weak physical appearance and never pointed to himself as the prototype of the divine power on life. (Jewett 1971, 126).

Paul, however, so Jewett maintains, rejects the notion of Jesus being judged by fleshly human standards belonging to the old fleshly aeon.[10]

One can agree we are dealing here with eschatological categories, but Jewett's "theological" approach misses the main thrust of what Paul is countering. In agreement with Dunn (2008, 129, 182, 321), "flesh" is at times used by Paul to refer to Israelite ethnic identity (Rom 2:28; 4:1; 9:3; 11:14; 1 Cor 10:18; Gal 3:3; 4:23, 29; 5:19, 24; 6:8, 12-13; Phil 3:3-5; cf. Col 2:11, 13; Eph 2:11-12), and it is argued here that 2 Cor 5:16 is one such instance. So it is proposed that Paul is not countering "Divine-Man-Missionaries", but rather rival teachers who boast in their Israelite ethnic identity, their social status, something made even more impressive by their status as (law-obedient) apostles. They identify with Jesus in this way as a fellow kinsman.[11] (Paul, by contrast, is of questionable status, both as Israelite and as apostle.) They identify with Jesus as an Israelite soul/spirit reunited to an Israelite body, and as someone who entered an Israelite afterlife existence. Their matrix of privilege would include something like the following: Our God. Our Messiah. Our resurrection. Our honour. Our righteousness as Israelites. Our Judean way of life based on the law. Our right – as authentic Israelite apostles – to preach Messiah. It is this Israelite sense of privilege and superiority, and the rival apostles' identification with that agonistic paradigm (i.e. competition for honour) that Paul counters throughout the letter(s), including 2 Cor 5:16.

So against Jewett, it is not so much about divine power or authority as it is about ethnic status. Paul has no problem to identify Jesus as the "divine man" – he transcends all ethnic categories, something that works in Paul's favour. That we are dealing here with ethnic categories is also illustrated by the language of "newness". Ethnic and collectivist groups look to the past for present meaning. Present generations were socialised to embody the traditions of their ancestors (cf. De Vos 1975, 17-19; Malina & Neyrey 1996, 166). To change things, or seeking novelty, is usually disapproved of in the *Tanak*. What is valued is the exact opposite, stability

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10 Jewett writes: "To judge according to the flesh is thus to be impressed by existence characterized by 'life' rather than by 'death' [2 Cor 5:14]. It is to be favorably impressed by public exhibitions of pneumatic ecstacy [2 Cor 5:13] and by persons who make a brilliant appearance [2 Cor 5:12] and who are capable of living self-sufficiently to their own glory [2 Cor 5:15]. The polemical 'flesh' category places the divine-man adherents under the same indictment as was laid against the Gnostics … reversion to the standards of the old aeon through the rejection of the crucified Christ" (Jewett 1971:127).

11 In the Tanak the word flesh (basar) was used as a metaphor for kinship (Gen 2:23-24; 29:14; 37:27).

and constancy, and change or novelty is usually met with hostility. It brings into question the value of tradition by demonstrating disloyalty towards it.[12] At the heart of resistance to change is conformity to God's changeless law. So what is valued is compliance, the willingness to conform one's actions to cultural standards. Adherence to the law, custom and tradition is a matter of honour (McVann 1993a; 1993b). For Paul, however, a follower of Jesus is a "*new* creation", everything has become *new*. These are strong statements against identifying with ancestral traditions and ethnic/kinship loyalties when appreciated within the context of the ancient Mediterranean world. The element of newness is also present in Paul's statement that Messiah was the means by which God was reconciling the world – not only Israel – to himself (2 Cor 5:19-21). Elsewhere Paul speaks of this "mystery" that now has been revealed to all nations in reference to God's universal intent for salvation (Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 2:7; cf.. Eph 1:9-10; 3:3-9; 6:19; Col 1:27-28).

Paul's response in answer to the rival apostles is that yes, we once knew Jesus as an Israelite, but not any more. Paul's vision or ASC experience of the resurrected Jesus was arguably of such a nature that he did not "see" an Israelite man having the need to wear tassels (*tsitsit*) or phylacteries (*tefillin*), or as someone having the need of a circumcised foreskin.[13] What Paul saw was the image of God, the new Adam, a Jesus who is glorious (2 Cor 4:4, 6; cf. 1 Cor 15:20-22, 45-49; Phil 2:6; Col 1:15). The body of Jesus was not "flesh". Here Paul also stands within the mystical tradition of Israel where Jesus can either be seen as an exalted and glorified human being or as the principal angelic manifestation or human form of God (*kavod*) as evidenced in various Israelite texts (see collected evidence in Segal 1992; 2008; Collins 1997).

It is universally agreed that Paul's vision of the resurrected Jesus was the very occasion when he was called to be an apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13; Gal

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12 Societies where very little change occurs over time are also known as "high context" societies (cf. Rohrbaugh 2007:8-10). Contextual knowledge was assumed, widely shared and known, and no need existed to explain it in written or oral communication.

13 "Flesh" is also used in the Tanak as a euphemism for "penis" (Ezek 16:26; 23:20; 44:7; Lev 15:2-3; 17:13). Circumcision was associated with the notions of procreation and fertility (Philo, QG 3.48; cf. Gen 17:2-6; Gen. Rab. 25.6; 46.4). It is a symbol that God will make Abraham fruitful and multiply. Not being circumcised probably had the connotation of infertility, and the improper functioning of the male organ. This also extends to symbolic usage of "uncircumcised hearts" (Jer 9:25; Deut 10:16; Ezek 44:7; Lev 26:41), "ears" (Jer 6:10), and Moses' speech impediment is described as a problem of having "uncircumcised lips" (Exod 6:12, 30). "Uncircumcised hearts, ears, and lips are organs that cannot do what God intended them to do" (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990, 149). Circumcision also makes visible and solidifies kinship bonds between males, forming a "blood brotherhood" of sorts, and also creates intergenerational continuity or patrilineal descent (Eilberg-Schwartz 1990, 162, 171), important ingredients in ethnic identity.

1:16). The ethnic implications of this should be appreciated since Paul, the Israelite, the zealous Pharisee dedicated to upholding the separation between Israelite and Gentile (Phil 3:6; Gal 1:13-14), somehow came to realise that resurrection or the afterlife was *not just about Israel and for Israel*. In other words, the Jesus he saw was not an Israelite soul enjoying an Israelite continued existence in an Israelite body. This explains why he so readily made use of an Adam Christology – God is the divine patron of *all* human beings. The Messiah of Israel is now the "the last *Adam* … the second *man*, the Lord from heaven … the heavenly *man*" (1 Cor 15:45-48).

To be "in Messiah" and to be a "new creation" is therefore to be embedded in alternative institutions of politics, kinship, economics, and religion. Specifically, we are dealing with alternative forms of political religion (e.g. Jesus is Lord, not Ceasar) and domestic (kinship) religion (e.g. the "household of faith", Gal 6:10; God is "Abba"; Gal 4:6) (cf. Malina 1994 on relationship between social institutions). Differently put, followers of Jesus are now embedded in an alternative *ethnos*, because Jesus himself, as the new Adam, transcends the traditional ethnic categories. This alternative *ethnos* is indeed most honourable, for it is to participate in the life of the Spirit, in the new divine (dis)order instituted by God (cf. Neyrey 1990).

What we find here is a serious challenge to the traditional Israelite cycle of meaning when it comes to understandings of the afterlife, resurrection, and God's dealings with human beings. Yes, on the one hand Paul's experience of the resurrected Jesus was rooted in the Israelite cycle of meaning, but it also went beyond anything that was strictly "culturally specific". Paul came into contact with something new and unexpected and as a result acquired new experiential knowledge that transformed *his* cycle of meaning. After all, Paul the zealous Pharisee and Israelite became Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

5. Resurrection as Present-Day Challenge

Hagner notes that in the synoptic gospels, we have mixed reactions to the appearances of Jesus. What we find is "the mention of terror, amazement, and fear (Mark 16:8); great distress and doubt (Matt 17:23; 28:16); and fear and confusion (Luke 9:45; 18:34; 24:37) … Resuscitation, let alone resurrection, is not familiar territory" (Hagner 1998, 120). Perhaps we have evidence here that the disciples of Jesus made somewhat similar experiences to that of the Apostle Paul. Afterlife notions, "packaged" as resurrection, were on the one hand confirmed, but also challenged.

If Jesus' resurrection and afterlife existence was a challenge to Paul's cycle of meaning, we can also make this relevant to us today. Yes, we did not sit down and eat at Paul's Mediterranean table, but if we want to take the tradition of Jesus'

resurrection seriously and give it contemporary meaning, be it as scholars, theologians or believers, Paul's experience may not be lost to cultural subjectivity. Jesus' resurrection can become a *transcultural* and ongoing *theological* challenge to notions of the afterlife. In other words, in the Christian tradition specifically, contemporary notions of the resurrection (or afterlife), in whatever cycles of meaning they may be found, can be seen as continuously open to challenge and transformation through "the acquisition of (present day) experiential knowledge". In this way resurrection is not a static dogma formulated by incontestable "truths", or bound by the chains of cultural subjectivism, but it becomes a dynamic element in our spiritual and cognitive evolution (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). Seen from this perspective, what we "package" as resurrection points not only to a specific "event" of the past, but becomes a malleable container in our human journey of discovery.

I am leaving the implications of this open ended, but an example can be research done on the existence of human consciousness. What is it? Where does it come from? Where does it go after death, if it continues to exist? How can this change our understanding of "resurrection"? Human consciousness, a product of the physical brain (and something more?), and which has been described as the embodied "image of God" (cf. Van Huyssteen 2006), is itself a form of intense scientific investigation. Future research can perhaps reveal a lot about its existence, be it past, present, or future. The question is, will we be willing to exchange dogmatic certainty, here, specifically, on how the resurrection must be understood, for an openness to discover the mysteries of God and the extent of human existence?

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