

# 2

## **A Socio-Cultural Model of Judean Ethnicity: A Proposal**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Dennis Duling (2003a) recently developed a Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity (see pp. 80-81 below). This model serves as a guide in two ways: 1) it lists what cultural features to look out for and 2) defines the processes that are behind ethnic identity formation. Both aspects illuminate our understanding of what a particular ethnic identity may involve. This chapter is dedicated to adapting Duling's generic model in order for it to serve as a guide when assigning content to *Judean* ethnic identity. In other words, the model must help us answer: What did it mean, broadly speaking, to be Judean? This model, we suggest, will help in some way as to what "common Judeanism" involved. This "common Judeanism" serves as a point of centre so to speak, to which any form of deviance or differentiation can be compared (e.g. the Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees; cf Ant 18.11-25; War 2.119-166). In particular, the model can also help us understand Messianist Judean identity, as it developed, was lived out and expressed by the early followers of Jesus. Later on, we will specifically concentrate on the community presupposed by Q. So as already intimated, a model of Judean ethnicity can be helpful on various levels. It can be

used as a guide for understanding mainstream or common Judean ethnic identity, while it may also be used to investigate or compare the ethnic identity of various forms sectarian Judeanism.

Attempts have already been made to help define what was essential to Judeanism. At first we will have a look at Sanders' "covenantal nomism", and then at Dunn's "four pillars of Second Temple Judaism/Judeanism". As we shall attempt to demonstrate, although both these approaches tell us a lot about Judeanism, they do not tell us everything about what it meant to be a Judean. They in particular lack the insights of ethnicity theory (which will be discussed later) and generally focus more on the "religious" aspects, while other aspects of ethnic identity – such as *land, kinship, myths of common ancestry* and *shared "historical" memories* – are not given the same prominence it deserves.

## 2.2 COVENANTAL NOMISM

Admittedly, Sanders' notion of covenantal nomism has revolutionised our understanding of Palestinian Judeanism. For a first century Judean, Israel's covenant relationship with God was basic, basic that is to the Judean's sense of national identity and the understanding of his/her religion. Sanders (1992:262) explains that "covenant" stands for God's grace in election ("getting in"), and "nomism" stands for the requirement of obedience to the law ("staying in"). Otherwise, Sanders explains covenantal nomism as follows: "(1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved." He adds: "An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be God's mercy rather than human achievement" (Sanders 1977:422). Importantly, the emphasis is on *maintaining* your covenant relationship with God – obedience to the law was not thought of as a means to *enter* or *attain* a special relationship with God. Dunn (1990:186) quotes Sanders' work in the following convenient manner in that covenantal nomism

is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant and that the covenant requires as the proper response of man his obedience to its commandments, while providing means of atonement for transgression ... *Obedience maintains one's position in the covenant, but it does not earn God's grace as such* ... Righteousness in Judaism is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect.

(Sanders 1977:75, 420, 544)

Viewed from the perspective of ethnic identity, we can paraphrase/modify the above quote as follows: Covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant, a covenant which in itself establishes/prescribes Judean (or Israelite) ethnicity (= status of divine election). The covenant requires as the proper response from a Judean his/her obedience to the commandments, which will maintain his/her position as a (righteous) Judean within the covenant. Alternatively, the covenant provides also for means of atonement for transgression to maintain his/her status as a (righteous) Judean within the covenant. Righteousness in Judeanism is a term which implies the maintenance of status as a Judean among fellow Judeans who are the elect people of God.

So in broad terms, we suggest, it can be seen that covenantal nomism properly explains who is an ethnic Judean and who is not, and how it came to be that way. Here it is understood primarily in *religious* terms, however, since covenantal nomism is equivalent to divine election or "righteousness", or the maintenance of status in the sight of Yahweh. At the same time, Sanders admits that covenantal nomism does not cover the entirety of Judean theology or the entirety of Judeanism.

It deals with the theological understanding of the constitution of God's people: how they get that way, how they stay that way. In terms of [Judeanism] as a religion, this leaves out a lot of details of what people did, though it requires analysis of why they thought that they *should* do what they did ... What it covers ... is crucial for understanding [Judeanism], which is a national religion and way of life, focused on the God of Israel and the people of Israel: God called them; being [Judean] consists of responding to that call.

(Sanders 1992:262-63; emphasis original)

From the above we can infer that covenantal nomism involves the existence of a two-way relationship. God called a particular people and in that process established a constitution or charter (= covenant as expressed through the Torah) of Judean ethnic identity. The people elected must respond to that call, and so give expression to that ethnic identity through obedience to the constitution. Put in another way, God established/prescribed Judean ethnic identity. A group of people responded by being Judean. For our purposes therefore we deem it appropriate to redefine covenantal nomism as an *ethnic descriptor*. Seen from this view, we can speak of covenantal nomism as defining a “common Judeanism”, where its religious or theological aspects become part of a greater whole. This also avoids the pitfall of the various “Judeanisms” emphasised by scholars, which in our opinion is nevertheless exaggerating the evidence. So covenantal nomism, when redefined as an ethnic descriptor, can be understood as encapsulating the Judean “symbolic universe”, containing more or less everything that typified Judean ethnic identity. Covenantal nomism was the Judean social construction of reality, a reality that took shape over several centuries of development. What will concern us in the chapters to follow is how covenantal nomism *as an ethnic identity* was interpreted and understood and what the “popular opinion” dictated in terms of how it should be given expression in every day life. The point is this: our redefined covenantal nomism called into being, contained, shaped and defined Judean ethnicity. Also, on an anthropological and more concrete level, covenantal nomism *is* Judean ethnic identity – certain people translated that symbolic universe into everyday living. For our purposes covenantal nomism and Judean ethnicity are virtually synonymous in meaning.

### **2.3 COVENANTAL NOMISM AS A “SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE”**

Our notion of the “symbolic universe” is drawing on the insights of Berger & Luckmann (1967). To begin with, human beings exist within a social order, but it is a result of human production in the course of ongoing human externalisation. This process occurs within the context of social interaction. All human activity is subject to habitualisation. Habitualised actions produce institutions, which typify both individual actors and individual actions. As such, it forms “knowledge”. As these institutions or knowledge are passed on from generation to generation, it acquires an objective quality: “This is the way that things are done”, or, put in another way, it becomes the social construction of reality. This objective reality confronts the individual and into which a child is socialised into. As such it is perceived an external reality that exists outside of the individual.

An institutional world, then, is experienced as an objective reality. It has a history that antedates the individual's birth and is not accessible to his biographical recollection. It was there before he was born, and it will be there after his death.

(Berger & Luckmann 1967:60)

The important thing, however, is “that the relationship between man, the producer, and the social world, his product, is and remains a dialectical one ... The product acts back upon the producer” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:61). Thus externalisation and objectification is followed by internalisation. “*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:61; emphasis original). In this manner “objective truths”, which were established based on historical processes, are passed on from generation to generation in the course of socialisation and so becomes internalised as subjective reality.

Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectification is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectification that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that a man is a product of society.

(Berger 1973:14)

The institutional order requires legitimation if it is to be transmitted to a new generation. “Legitimation not only tells the individual why he *should* perform one action and not another; it also tells him why things *are* what they are. In other words, ‘knowledge’ precedes ‘values’ in the legitimation of institutions” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:94; emphasis original). One means of legitimation is where the entire institutional order is placed within a “symbolic universe”. A symbolic universe is where

*all* the sectors of the institutional order are integrated in an all-embracing frame of reference, which now constitutes a universe in the literal sense of the word, because *all* human experience can now be conceived of as taking place *within* it. The symbolic universe is conceived of as the matrix of *all* socially objectivated and subjectively real meanings; the entire historic society and the entire biography of the individual are seen as events taking place *within* this universe.

(Berger & Luckmann 1967:96; emphasis original)

This universe is constructed by the means of social objectivations, “yet its meaning bestowing capacity far exceeds the domain of social life, so that the individual may ‘locate’ himself within it even in his most solitary experiences” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:96).

One can immediately perceive the commonalities between our redefined notion of covenantal nomism as *an ethic identity* and the idea behind the symbolic universe. Judeanism was quite distinct in its world-view. As Sanders (1992:50) explains: “It attempted to bring the entirety of life under the heading, ‘Divine Law’ [for our purposes read: it attempted to bring all human experience into a Judean symbolic universe or covenantal nomism]. As a religion, it was not strange because it included sacrifices, but because it included ethical, family and civil law as well.” Having been spared the modern reality of secularisation, all aspects of Judean life were permeated with the divine and had a deeper significance. All aspects of life were under God and should be lived in accordance with God’s will (cf Apion 2.170-3). For Judeans, there was no differentiation between “ritual” and “ethics”, between religious, social and economic dynamics of life, as God gave all the commandments and obedience to his will required equal obedience to all. For example, the treatment of one’s neighbour<sup>1</sup> was just as important as eating food accidentally that should have gone to the priest or altar (cf Sanders 1992:194-95). When seen within the context of covenantal nomism as a symbolic universe, for some Roman rule (and control of the Temple hierarchy) was intolerable; others accepted it as long as the Temple rites were not interfered with beyond a reasonable point.

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<sup>1</sup> One can mention here the importance that alms-giving was supposed to have had in our period (Ps 112:9 cited in 2 Cor 9:9; Dn 4:27; Sir 29:12; 40:24; Tob 4:10; 12:9; 14:10-11 (cf Dunn 1991:129).

Importantly, symbolic universes are social products with a history. “If one is to understand their meaning, one has to understand the history of their production” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:98). For first-century Palestinian Judeanism, the character of its symbolic universe was primarily shaped by Israel’s relationship with the *land*. They lost the land through the Babylonian exile. They regained it, but only partially, as they remained under foreign domination for most of their history. But it was the Babylonian exile that provided the background for the shaping of the Torah, the primary reference for the Judean symbolic universe. The land was theirs as a perpetual inheritance, but it was the sins of Israel that caused them to lose control of it. Obedience and holiness was required, and along with hopes of restoration, as given through the prophets, it existed as important parts of that universe. The Judean symbolic universe could only become complete by Israel’s obedience, restoration and ownership of the land.

The symbolic universe is also nomic, or ordering in character. Everything is placed into its proper place, which also facilitates the formation of individual identity. This identity is dependant on the person’s relationship with significant others, and the identity “is ultimately legitimated by placing it within the context of a symbolic universe” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:100). The latter is a “sheltering canopy” wherein both the institutional order and individual biography can be placed. It also provides the delimitation of social reality. It sets the limits to what is relevant in terms of social interaction. “The symbolic universe assigns ranks to various phenomena in a hierarchy of being, defining the range of the social within this hierarchy” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:102). Now in Judean society, this hierarchy of being is objectified in the purity order. The priests who function in the temple have the highest degree of purity. Then comes the laity, proselytes and at the bottom are the “impure” (e.g. sinners and lepers), and entirely outside of this order are the Gentiles. Berger & Luckmann (1967:103) also explain that the

symbolic universe also orders history. It locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future. With regard to the past, it establishes a “memory” that is shared by all the individuals socialized within the collectivity. With regard to the future, it establishes a common frame of reference for the projection of individual actions. Thus the symbolic universe links men with their predecessors and their successors in a meaningful totality ... All the members of a society can now conceive of themselves as *belonging*

to a meaningful universe, which was there before they were born and will be there after they die (emphasis original).

Naturally, once symbolic universes come into being, they require to be maintained. Various universe-maintenance procedures can be used. This is especially necessary when a society is confronted with another society with its own history. Here an alternative symbolic universe comes into focus, with its own official traditions, which may judge your own universe as ignorant, mad or the like. “The alternative universe presented by the other society must be met with the best possible reasons for the superiority of one’s own” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:108). As we shall see in the next chapter, this is especially true of Judeanism in its confrontation with Hellenism. Universe-maintenance can employ mythology, or more developed mythologies develop into more systematic theologies – Judeanism case in point!

Universe-maintenance also employs therapy and nihilation.

Therapy entails the application of conceptual machinery to ensure that actual or potential deviants stay within the institutionalized definitions of reality, or, in other words, to prevent the ‘inhabitants’ of a given universe from ‘emigrating’ ... This requires a body of knowledge that includes a theory of deviance, a diagnostic apparatus, and a conceptual system for the ‘cure of souls’.

(Berger & Luckmann 1967:113)

One is reminded here of the Judean sacrificial cult and the practice of ritual immersion, where any form of deviance (sin or impurity) can be rectified. “Nihilation, in its turn,” is to “liquidate conceptually everything outside the same universe ... nihilation denies the reality of whatever phenomena or interpretations of phenomena [that] do not fit into that universe” (Berger & Luckmann 1967:114). There are two ways in which this can be done. First, the phenomena are afforded a negative ontological status. It is regarded as inferior and should not be taken seriously. Second, deviant phenomena are grappled with theoretically in terms of concepts belonging to your own universe. Both these examples of nihilation are evident in Judeanism and are mutually complimentary. Gentile ways are regarded as inferior. They are guilty of idolatry and sexual immorality, in short, of “lawlessness”. They are

not part of the Judean symbolic universe, not divinely elected, ignorant of God's law, impure,<sup>2</sup> and bereft of the truth.

The last element of the symbolic universe we will discuss here is its maintenance by "experts". As more complex forms of knowledge appear, "they claim ultimate jurisdiction over that stock of knowledge in its totality". These universal experts "claim to know the ultimate significance of what everybody knows and does" (Berger & Luckmann 1967:117). Now one of the consequences "is a strengthening of traditionalism in the institutionalized actions thus legitimated, that is, a strengthening of the inherent tendency of institutionalization toward inertia" (Berger & Luckmann 1967:117). The Judean parallel is obvious in the existence of the priesthood and their control of the Temple and scribal training in the law. Other "expert groups" also appeared, such as the Pharisees and Essenes for example.

The above was to illustrate how easily our redefined understanding of covenantal nomism can be understood as the Judean symbolic universe. It was the Judean social construction of reality that had to be maintained in the face of historical developments and Hellenistic and Roman ideology. Covenantal nomism was therefore also the legitimation of Judean ethnic identity, where all Judean institutions, practices and beliefs were placed within the context of an all-embracing frame of reference. It bestowed meaning onto its "inhabitants", ordered reality into its proper place, and connected the "inhabitants" with its history, ancestors, and future generations and events.

#### **2.4 THE FOUR PILLARS OF SECOND TEMPLE JUDEANISM**

Another attempt at establishing a "common Judeanism", or to identify what was essential to Judeanism, was formulated by Dunn. Dunn (2003:281) takes into account the factionalism that existed in first-century Judeanism, but he also says "there was a common foundation of practice and belief which constituted the ... common factors unifying all the different particular forms of first-century [Judeanism] and on which they were built". Dunn (1991:18-36; 2003:287-292) in particular speaks, using our own terminology, of the "four pillars of Second Temple Judeanism". These include the Temple, God, Election, and Torah, although Dunn

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<sup>2</sup> Gentiles originally were not rated according to the degrees of purity, but as things developed, they were afforded an "impure status" due to their presence within the ancestral land of Israel. For more on this, see chapter 3.

admits that this is not a complete characterisation of Judeanism. Here follows Dunn's proposal in abbreviated form.

#### **2.4.1 Temple**

The land of Israel was focused in the Temple. Dunn (2003:287) maintains that there "can be no doubt that the Temple was the central focus of Israel's national and religious life prior to its destruction in 70 CE. Judea was a temple state". The Temple was 1) a *political* centre, the basis for the High Priest and high priestly families; 2) an *economic* centre, where the daily sacrifices and offerings were made and which required the payment of the annual temple tax. It was also the focal point of the three main pilgrimage festivals; and 3) a *religious* centre, the place where God had chosen to put his name, the focal point for an encounter between the divine and the human, as well as the sacrificial cult on which human well-being and salvation depended (Dunn 1991:31-35). As Dunn (2003:287) observes, it was "a primary identity marker of Israel the covenant people". In the Roman period "Jew", or rather Judean, was as much a religious identifier as an ethnic identifier since it focused identity in Judea, the state that depended on the status of Jerusalem as the location of the Temple. The disputes and renunciations relating to the Temple attest to its importance on how it should function correctly.

#### **2.4.2 God**

"Belief in God", Dunn (2003:288) explains, "as one and in God's un-image-ability was certainly fundamental to the first-century [Judean]". The *Shema* was probably said by most Judeans on a regular basis (Dt 6:4, 7) testifying to the unity of God (Ant 5.1, 27, 112). Little of this is apparent upon the surface of late Second Temple Judeanism simply because it was not a matter for controversy and so could be taken for granted. Judeans were exclusive monotheists and Judean literature gives testimony of strong attacks on pagan, or rather Gentile idolatry (e.g. WisSol 11-15; SibOr 3:8-45). We need to recall Josephus' report of violent reaction from the people when Pilate brought in standards regarded as idolatrous into Jerusalem (Ant 18.55-59) and the attempt of Caligula to have a statue of himself set up within the Temple (Ant 18.261-272).

### 2.4.3 Election

Election points to two features in particular: Israel as a covenant people and the promised land. “Equally fundamental was Israel’s self-understanding of itself as the people of God specially chosen from among all the nations of the world to be his own” (Dunn 2003:289). This selection formed a mutual attachment between God and Israel through the covenant. This conviction was already there in pre-exilic times where the ancient stories recall the choice of Abraham and the promise of the land (Gn 12:1-3; 15:1-6, 17:1-8; Dt 7:6-8; 32:8-9), a promise that was fulfilled by the rescue from Egypt (Dt 6:20-25; 26:5-10).

Election became a central category of self-definition in the post-exilic period onwards (Ezr 9-10). It was the foundational motivation to resist Hellenistic syncretism in the Maccabean crisis, and “it constantly came to expression in the compulsive desire to maintain distinct and separate identity from the other nations” (cf Jub 15:30-32; 22:16) (Dunn 2003:289). So opposed to Hellenism stood “Judeanism” (Ἰουδαϊσμός; 2 Mac 2:21; 8:1; 14:38), a term that made its appearance around the time of the Maccabean revolt, and it “bears a clear overtone from its first usage of a fierce nationalistic assertion of Israel’s election and of divine right to religious (if not national) freedom in the land given it by God” (Dunn 1991:22). This separation from the nations lies behind the everyday preoccupation with purity, which is also attested by the more than 300 ritual baths (*miqva’ot*) dating from the Roman period uncovered by archaeology in Judea, Galilee and the Golan. Related to this are the strict laws of clean and unclean at the meal table (Lv 20:24-26; Ac 10:10-16, 28). Thus election was closely linked to the other pillars, since “it expressed itself in fear of contamination by Gentile idolatry, and in the conviction that the holiness of Israel (land and people) was dependent on the holiness of the Temple (hence the prohibition which prevented Gentiles from passing beyond the court of Gentiles in the Temple area)” (Dunn 2003:290).

### 2.4.4 Torah

The Torah was the focus of the covenant. The Torah (the first five books of Moses) had been given to Israel as a mark of God’s favour and choice of Israel. It was an integral part of God’s covenant with Israel, to show its people how to live as the people of God (Deuteronomy), or to put it in another way, the commandments spell out Israel’s covenant obligations. They were the people of the law/covenant, an

identity that was at stake during the Maccabean crisis (1 Mac 1:57; 2:27, 50; 2 Mac 1:2-4; 2:21-22; 5:15; 13:14). So understandably the watchword for national resistance during that period was “zeal for the law” (1 Mac 2:26-27, 50, 58; 2 Mac 4:2; 7:2, 9, 11, 37; 8:21). So too in the period following the Maccabean crisis, the close relationship between election, covenant and law remained a fundamental theme of Judean self-understanding (Sir 17:11-17; 39:8; Jub 1:4-5; 2:21; 6:4-16; 15; 22:15-16; 23:19; PsSol 10:4; Ps-Philo 9:7-8; 23:10; 30:2; 35:2-3). So generally there was a common pattern of “covenantal nomism” characteristic of Judeanism in our period (Dunn 1991:24-25).

Because of the law, great emphasis was placed on Israel’s *distinctiveness* as a chosen people. It was also the Torah that served as the boundary separating Israel from other nations (Jub 22:16; LetAris 139, 142; Philo, Moses 1.278) by its insistence on the maintenance of the purity code (Lv 20:24-26; cf Dn 1:8-16) – it served as an “identity marker”. The Gentiles were “without the law, outside the law”, and so were equated with being “sinners” (1 Mac 2:44, 48; Tob 13:6 [LXX 8]; Jub 23:23-4; PsSol 1:1; 2:1-2; 17:22-5). With this sense of distinctiveness came a sense of *privilege*; the Judeans were the nation specially chosen by God and were favoured by the gift of the covenant and law. With this came a somewhat exaggerated pride, as Gentiles were attracted to Judean customs (Philo, Moses 2.17-25; Josephus, Apion 2.277-86) and the law was understood to be the embodiment of divine Wisdom. This sense of privilege gave rise to perplexity as 4 Ezra (3:28-36; 4:23-4; 5:23-30; 6:55-9) could not understand how God can spare the sinful nations yet be so harsh with his law-keeping people (Dunn 1991:25-28).

The Torah, the definitive element of the Scriptures, also served as both school textbook and law of the land so “we may assume a substantial level of respect and observance of its principal regulations within common [Judeanism]” (Dunn 2003:291). It is also important not think of the Torah as exclusively religious documents since we have to recognise the interlocking nature of Israel as a religio-national entity. Because of the centrality of the Torah, it would also feature in the divisions within Judeanism, a competitive dispute as to what it meant in practice (i.e. how to calculate feast days, the right maintenance of purity, food laws and Sabbath were the usual flash points). So all would have agreed that they need to live according to the principles of “covenantal nomism”, and any group’s claim that it alone was doing so effectively denied that others did (Dunn 2003:292).

## 2.5 JUDEAN CUSTOMS AS COVENANTAL PRAXIS

In addition to the four pillars discussed above, it is to Dunn's credit that he realised the importance of customs or ritual practices to Judean self-understanding. In his studies on Paul's attitude towards the law in Galatians, Dunn has drawn on Sanders' notion of covenantal nomism and developed what is known now as a "new perspective". Paul, Dunn explains, was not opposing a legalistic works-righteousness (e.g. see Ridderbos 1975:139-40) when some Judean Messianists insisted on Gentiles undergoing circumcision or when they withdrew from having table-fellowship with them (Gl 2). Paul was opposing specific covenant works, or "works of the law", namely circumcision and food laws, and the latter were related to purity laws. Why? Because "*these observances were widely regarded as characteristically and distinctively [Judean]*". Writers like Petronius,<sup>3</sup> Plutarch,<sup>4</sup> Tacitus<sup>5</sup> and Juvenal<sup>6</sup> took it for granted that, in particular, circumcision, abstention from pork, and the Sabbath, were observances which marked out the practitioners as [Judeans], or as people who were very attracted to [Judean] ways" (Dunn 1990:191-192; emphasis original). Dunn continues in that

these observances in particular functioned as identity markers, they served to identify their practitioners as [Judean] in the eyes of the wider public, they were peculiar rites which marked out the [Judeans] as that particular people ... These identity markers identified [Judeanness] because they were seen by the [Judeans] themselves as fundamental observances of the covenant. They functioned as badges of covenant membership.

(Dunn 1990:192)

We can paraphrase that last sentence to say that these observances, or examples of Judean customs, were badges of Judean ethnic identity. That is why Peter and Barnabas withdrew from table-fellowship with Gentiles. They could not resist that strong appeal to national identity and covenant faithfulness. These customs defined

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<sup>3</sup> Cf Petronius, *Satyricon* 102.14; *Fragmenta* 37 on circumcision.

<sup>4</sup> Cf Plutarch, *Quaestiones Conviviales* 4.5; where he has a discussion on why Judeans do not eat pork.

<sup>5</sup> Cf Tacitus (Hist 5.4) on the Sabbath. Tacitus writes on circumcision: "They adopted circumcision to distinguish themselves from other peoples by this difference" (Hist 5.5.2). That Tacitus understands circumcision to be quite characteristic of Judeans should be noted for many other peoples (Samaritans, Arabs and Egyptians) also practiced circumcision.

the boundaries of the covenant people, or Judean ethnic identity, that is why one could hardly claim to be a good Judean without observing these minimal observances. As Dunn explains, for a typical Judean of the first century AD, “*it would be virtually impossible to conceive of participation in God’s covenant [or read Judean ethnic identity], and so in God’s covenant righteousness, apart from these observances, these works of the law*” (1990:193; emphasis original). So what Paul was opposing was something like Sanders’ notion of covenantal nomism, understood as where God’s grace extends only to those who wore those badges that marked out God’s people. For Paul “the covenant is no longer to be identified or characterized by such distinctively [Judean] observances as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath. *Covenant* works had become too closely identified as [*Judean*] observances, *covenant* righteousness as *national* righteousness” (Dunn 1990:197; emphasis original).

Against the background of our redefined understanding of covenantal nomism, Dunn’s explanation of Paul’s polemic becomes even clearer. Paul opposes a rigid attachment to covenantal nomism, an ethnic identity, but in the sense that God’s mercy is no longer restricted to those who perform Judean customs that marked out that identity. But the important thing for our work lies in the highly prominent place that customs had in Judeanism as is evident in the polemics of the early Messianist movement and the Judean literature of the period. Judeanism as a religion was more a matter of *doing* things than theology or faith. Ancient Judeanism had no creeds. Judean customs are important for they were related to covenant membership. We deem it therefore appropriate to from here on, refer to Judean customs as *covenantal praxis*. Covenantal praxis was a way to assert your covenant membership or ethnic identity, a way to affirm your participation in covenantal nomism, the Judean symbolic universe. Cohen explains that for Judeans and Gentiles

the boundary line between [Judeanism] and paganism was determined more by [Judean] observances than by [Judean] theology. Josephus defines an apostate as a [Judean] who “hates the customs of the [Judeans]” or “does not abide by the ancestral customs.” He defines a convert to [Judeanism] as a gentile who through circumcision “adopts the ancestral customs of the

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<sup>6</sup> Cf Juvenal (Sat 6.160; 14.98) on abstention from pork and on the Sabbath (Sat 14.96-106).

[Judeans]”<sup>7</sup> ... For Philo too the essence of conversion is the adoption of the way of life of the [Judeans].<sup>8</sup>

(Cohen 1987:61)

Schmidt expresses a similar viewpoint:

More than beliefs, multiple and debated, it is *rites* that weave the protective web of [Judean] identity. The rites classify and identify. They separate those who practise from those who do not. They trace the dividing line between [Judeans] and Gentiles, between those who join the community and those who are cast out. They form a bond between all the subgroups, all the constituents of the [Judean] community.

(Schmidt 2001:25; emphasis original)

Not surprisingly it is also more practices, not theology, which determined the boundary lines *within* the Judean community (Cohen 1987:61). Judean debates centres in matters of law. Qumranites criticized fellow Judeans’ way of life, their observance of the calendar, purity and administration of the Temple. Although Judeanism “was defined more by its practices than its beliefs” (Cohen 1987:103), Judeanism certainly had a theological element to it, however. Proper action was ultimately grounded in proper belief. Nevertheless, if we want to understand Judean ethnic identity better, we will always have to remember that Judean identity, an ethnic identity which was profoundly religious, yes, was most visibly expressed through covenantal praxis. Covenantal praxis was covenantal nomism in action – it was simply being a Judean.

## 2.6 ETHNICITY THEORY

The insight gained from the work of Sanders, Dunn, Berger and Luckmann, helpful as they are, need to be complimented with the insights of cultural anthropology, particularly ethnicity theory. Ethnicity theory is a relatively new form of science. The term “ethnicity” was not used until 1941, and only from the 1960’s did it become a major social-scientific concept (Duling 2003a:2). The French word for an ethnic

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<sup>7</sup> Cf War 7.3.3.50; Ant 20.5.2.100 (on apostasy); Ant 20.17, 41 (on conversion).

<sup>8</sup> Cf Virtues 102-108.

group, *ethnie*, is also used in English and found mainly in social-scientific literature (Esler 2003:40). As it developed, there are two major theoretical approaches to ethnicity; namely, Primordialism and Constructionism. We will first have a look at the former.

Primordialism, associated with Edward Shils (1957) and Clifford Geertz (1963), stresses that “ethnic groups have intense, passionate, unexplainable emotional bonds based on family, territory, language, custom and religion” (Duling 2003a:2). They are so deeply engrained they are thought to be “natural affections”, so fixed and involuntary. They are said to be so compelling or “coercive” that they are “sacred”, or in a word, they are “primordial” (Duling 2003a:2). Here your ethnic identity “may not be so much a matter of choice, still less rational choice, but of tradition and emotions provoked by a common ancestry” (Esler 2003:45). This approach, much like constructionism, emphasises the view of the participant, or how ethnic groups themselves understand reality (i.e., an insider or emic perspective).<sup>9</sup> From an etic (or outsider) perspective, however, primordialism brings to attention the emotional and psychological strength of ethnic affiliation. It is thought that individuals acquire such primordial bonds “through early processes of socialization” and “such attachments have an overwhelming power because of a universal, human, psychological need for a sense of belongingness and self-esteem” (Jones 1997:66). Without a proper psychological explanation, a primordialist approach on its own can tend to be somewhat vague and deterministic. Ethnicity becomes an abstract natural phenomenon that is explained on the basis of “human nature”, with little attention being given to the social and historical contexts in which ethnic groups are formed (Jones 1997:68-70).

Constructionism or the self-ascriptive approach to ethnicity, associated with Frederik Barth (1969), is the major alternative to primordialism. Constructionism stresses the following three points: “1) ethnic identity is not inherent, fixed, and natural, but freely chosen and continually *constructed* by members of the group; 2) the *act* of social boundary marking is more important than the “*cultural stuff*” marked off by those

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<sup>9</sup> According to Esler, however, primordial attachments is a notion where “we are able to draw the standard anthropological distinction between the emic (insider or indigenous) and the etic (outsider or social-scientific) points of view” (Esler 2003:46). What Esler points to here is the need for an etic apparatus set at a reasonably high level of abstraction, yet the definition of ethnicity is plagued by the nature of ethnicity itself: “Are ethnic groups based on shared ‘objective’ cultural practices and/or socio-structural relations that exist independently of the perceptions of the individuals concerned, or are they constituted primarily by the subjective processes of perception and derived social organization of their members?” (Jones 1997:57).

boundaries; and 3) it is especially important to see *how* and *why* ethnic groups generate and maintain group boundaries” (Duling 2003a:2; emphasis original).

Here ethnic differences exist in a context of lively social interaction between ethnic groups, and the emphasis is not on culture itself, but ethnic differences are aspects of social organisation. Here the boundary between an ethnic group and outsiders is more a process than a barrier, thus “cultural features of the ethnic group are the visible and variable manifestation, but not the cause, of an ethnic boundary and identity .... [C]ultural indicia might change over time and yet the ethnic group could still retain a sense of its own distinctiveness” (Esler 2003:42-43). So in this approach it is important to remember that cultural features do not constitute, but *signal* ethnic identity and boundaries. An ethnic identity is maintained but with no necessary relation to specific cultural content – the ethnic identity is self-ascriptive, continuously renewed and renegotiated through social practice (Esler 2003:42, 47). Constructionists also emphasise that groups define themselves in two ways: firstly “in relation to like-minded, like-practiced peers, a ‘we’ *aggregative* self-definition” and secondly, “in relation to *others*, a ‘we-they’ *oppositional* self-definition” (Duling 2003a:5; emphasis original). The latter is usually ethnocentric.<sup>10</sup> A development based on constructionism is instrumentalism, where an ethnic group’s self-construction is rational and self-interested and deliberately mobilised in an attempt to further its own political-economic agenda (Duling 2003a:2; Esler 2003:46).

Another approach to ethnicity that is also relevant here is ethno-symbolism. This approach analyses how an ethnic group’s nostalgia about its perceived past – expressed through cosmogonic myths, election myths, memories of a golden age, symbols – shapes the group’s ability to endure, but also to change and adapt (Duling 2003a:3). We can see this in Judean literature (e g Jubilees and Pseudo-Philo) where past traditions are used creatively for its struggle against Hellenism and the maintenance of the Judean symbolic universe.

Overall, the constructionist (or self-ascriptive) approach has become the dominant perspective on ethnicity (Duling 2003a:3; Esler 2003:47). Jones (1997:84) explains that

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<sup>10</sup> We would like to add by saying that these two forms of self-definition are equally appropriate in a primordialist context.

from the late 1960s onwards the dominant view within “western” social scientific traditions has been that ethnic groups are “self-defining systems” and consequently particular ethnic groups have been defined on the basis of self-identification and identification by others. Such a definition has largely been set within a theoretical framework focusing on the construction of ethnic boundaries in the context of social interaction and their organizational properties. Ethnicity has been regarded as essentially a consciousness of identity *vis-à-vis* other groups; a “we”/“they” opposition.

Unfortunately, as yet there is no “grand unified theory” with regards to ethnicity. There have been attempts to integrate the various approaches and widespread recognition exists among social scientists that some form of reconciliation is necessary between the constructionist approach and the continuing importance of primordial dimensions of ethnicity (Esler 2003:46). Duling (2003a:3) also explains that most theorists agree that people ascribe ethnicity to themselves (constructionism), but they disagree on whether it is “irrational and ineffable” (primordialist) or “rational and self-interested” (instrumentalist). In this regard Esler (2003:48) argues that “either option [i.e. instrumentalism or primordialism] is possible but that local and individual circumstances will affect which mode is in action at any particular time ... [W]e need to be open to the possible stubbornness of ethnic affiliation, while not underestimating the power of individuals and groups to modify ethnic identity for particular social, political, or religious ends.” It is also suggested that both perspectives are continuously present but to varying degrees (Jones 1997:80). So a constructionist approach is the underlying form with either an instrumentalist or primordialist overlay given as alternatives. Although Esler (2003:46) accepts that generally a constructionist approach to ethnicity is the dominant one amongst social scientists, he also explains, however, that “members of an ethnic group, particularly one under threat, are far more likely to adhere to a primordialist view of ethnicity” than to an interactive and self-ascriptive (constructionist) approach, and even less an instrumentalist one. Here constructionism/instrumentalism and primordialism are basically viewed as alternatives with emphasis placed on primordialism. Perhaps it is better to conclude that the historical context of an ethnic group will dictate how we approach their ethnic identity.

Jones (1997:87-105) has attempted a theoretical approach which she suggests overcomes the primordialist and instrumentalist dichotomy. Her own approach thus

falls in line with the broad consensus where constructionism is the underlying perspective. She at first brings attention to Bourdieu's theory of practice that develops a concept known as the *habitus*:

The structures constitutive of a particular type of environment ... produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without any way being the product of obedience to rules.

(Bourdieu 1977:72; emphasis original)

The *habitus* is therefore "made up of durable dispositions towards certain perceptions and practices" that "become part of an individual's sense of self at an early age, and which can be transposed from one context to another ... As such, the *habitus* involves a process of socialization whereby new experiences are structured in accordance with the structures produced by past experiences, and early experiences retain a particular weight" (Jones 1997:88). But interestingly, the *habitus* are both "structuring structures" and "structured structures", which shape, and are shaped by social practice (Jones 1997:89). Jones then brings attention to the work of Bentley, who draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice to develop a *practice theory of ethnicity*, which for Jones (1997:90) provides an objective grounding for ethnic subjectivity:

According to the practice theory of ethnicity, sensations of ethnic affinity are founded on common life experiences that generate similar habitual dispositions ... It is commonality of experience and of the preconscious *habitus* it generates that gives members of an ethnic cohort their sense of being both familiar and familial to each other.

(Bentley 1987:32-3)

Thus, "it can be argued that the intersubjective construction of ethnic identity is grounded in the shared subliminal dispositions of the *habitus* which shape, and are shaped by, objective commonalities of practice ... The cultural practices and representations that become objectified as symbols of ethnicity are derived from, and resonate with, the habitual practices and experiences of the people involved, as well as reflecting the instrumental contingencies and meaningful cultural idioms of a

particular situation” (Jones 1997:90). So the cultural features employed by an ethnic group are neither purely primordialist (irrational and ineffable) nor purely instrumentalist (rational and self-interested), but a combination of both. Jones then continues by adapting Bentley’s theory, as far as we can identify, in three major ways.

First, a shared *habitus* does not necessarily lead to feelings of ethnic affinity. The opposite is also true. Differences in *habitus* do not exclude identification. What is important here is the role that the “ethnic others” play in the construction of ethnicity – ethnicity is essentially a consciousness of difference vis-à-vis others, not merely a recognition of similarities. Thus loosely affiliated groups of people who nevertheless have commonalities of practice and experience may band together in opposition to outside cultures. European colonialisation of African peoples is a case in point (Jones 1997:93-95). A second, but related issue is that in “some situations there may be a high degree of contiguity between ethnicity and the *habitus*, whereas in other situations characterized by social dislocation and subordination there may appear to be very little” (Jones 1997:97). So ethnic identities also encode relations of power. Ethnicity can form the basis of political mobilization and resistance. Here subordinated minority ethnic groups of diverse origins can for example form a collectivity as a result of large scale urban migration. With time cultural realities and relationships of inequality will lead “to their incorporation as part of the structured dispositions of the *habitus*” (Jones 1997:97; cf Stein 2004). Third, the manifestation of a particular ethnic identity may also vary in different social and historical contexts. “For instance, the institutionalization of ethnicity in the modern nation-state and its representation in national politics, is likely to be qualitatively different from the activation of ethnicity in the processes of interaction between members of a local community or neighbourhood” (Jones 1997:99).

Thus Jones overall broadens the concept of the *habitus*. Bentley’s notion of the *habitus* draws on the theory of Bourdieu, which reflects the situation of a highly integrated and uniform system of dispositions characteristic of a small scale society. Yet, this does not properly explain highly differentiated and complex societies. “Ethnicity is a multidimensional phenomenon constituted in different ways in different social domains. Representations of ethnicity involve the dialectical opposition of situationally relevant cultural practices ... Consequently there is rarely a one-to-one relationship between representations of ethnicity and the entire range of cultural practices and social conditions associated with a particular group”. What we end up

with, from a bird's eye view that is, is "one of overlapping ethnic boundaries constituted by representations of cultural difference, which are at once transient, but also subject to reproduction and transformation in the ongoing processes of social life" (Jones 1997:100). To summarise, Jones' (1997:128-129) approach to ethnicity can be paraphrased as follows:

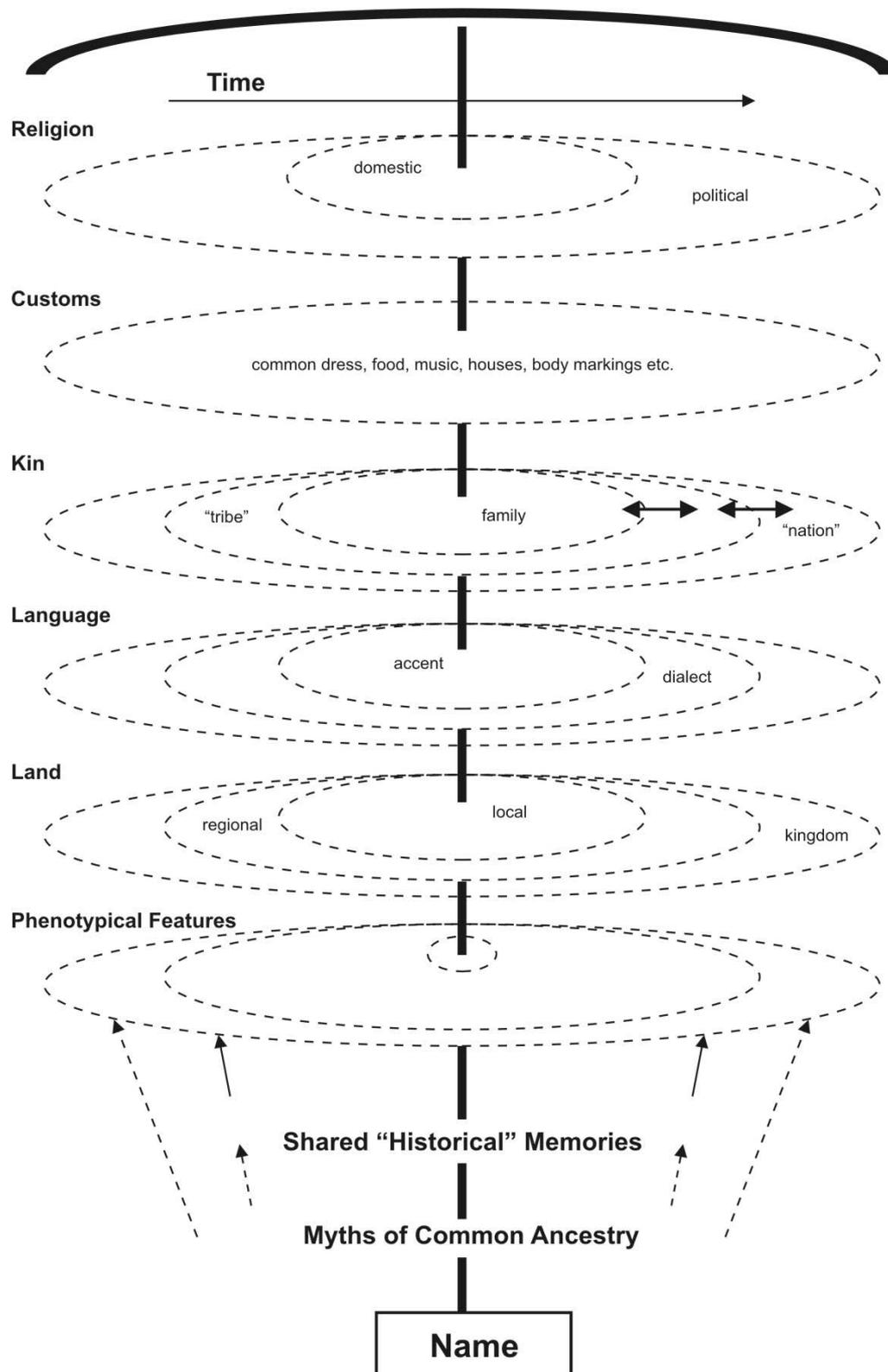
- The construction of ethnicity is grounded in the *habitus* – the shared subliminal dispositions of social agents – which shape, and are shaped by, objective commonalities of practice. The *habitus* provides the basis to recognise common sentiments and interests, and to perceive and communicate cultural affinity and difference.
- As a result, the primordialist and instrumentalist dichotomy can be overcome. The cultural practices that become objectified as symbols of ethnicity both derive from and resonate with habitual practices and experiences of the people in question, but also reflects the instrumental contingencies of a particular situation.
- Ethnicity is not always congruent with the *habitus* or the cultural practices of a group. Very importantly, ethnic identity involves an objectification of cultural practices in the recognition and communication of difference in opposition to others. The extent to which ethnicity is grounded in a pre-existing *habitus* or cultural realities is highly variable and dependent on prevailing social conditions, that is, the nature of interaction and the power relations between groups of people.
- So cultural practices that communicate the "same" identity may vary in different social contexts subject to different social conditions. Rarely will there be a one-to-one relationship between representations of ethnicity and the entire range of cultural practices and social conditions relevant to a particular ethnic group. One finds rather the pattern of overlapping ethnic boundaries, which are produced by context-specific representations of cultural difference. The latter are transient, but also subject to reproduction and transformation in the ongoing processes of social life.

There is a lot of the above that explains first-century Palestinian Judeanism, but not everything. For example, we seriously question whether the broadening of the *habitus* and the idea of "overlapping ethnic boundaries" is *that* applicable. Admittedly, such a distinction is relevant when taking into account that Judeans lived in Judea, Galilee and the Diaspora, in both rural and urban settings, and that a

minority of Judeans belonged to sectarian groups. These diverse social contexts are offset, however, by the nature of Judeanism itself. This is where we need to draw attention to Berger's notion of the "symbolic universe", which nevertheless, shows much affinity with the approach of Jones outlined above. Just as human beings both shape, and is shaped by an objective society (= institutions derived from habitual actions), so the *habitus* (subliminal and habitual dispositions) both shape, and is shaped by objective common cultural practices. But Berger's notion of the symbolic universe adds important dimensions, however. It involves the human search for *meaning*, combined with the theory that the institutional order is *integrated into an all-embracing frame of reference*, first century Judeanism being exemplary of such an approach. The point is this: the overwhelming majority of Judeans, here focussing on those who lived in Palestine in particular, were informed and shaped by the same symbolic universe, indeed similar *habitus*, relevant to every social and historical context due to the all-encompassing and permanent nature of the covenant. Their beliefs and cultural practices, as it related to a shared symbolic universe, were homogenous to a very high degree. The same identity was *communicated by similar beliefs and cultural practices in different social contexts*. Most certainly the dimensions of belongingness and self-esteem also come into play here. The implications are that we understand Judeanism as a highly integrated and uniform system of dispositions, but more on our understanding of Judean ethnicity later when we explain our proposed model.

Naturally, people give expression to their ethnicity through various cultural features. We already introduced them (*name, myths of common ancestry, shared "historical" memories, phenotypical features, land, language, kinship, customs, and religion*) when we analysed two examples of historical Jesus scholarship, although not all of them is required for ethnic formation. Nevertheless, Duling developed a synthetic model that lists all these cultural features that could influence an ethnics values, norms and behaviour. Duling (2003a:3) describes it as a "socio-cultural umbrella" that highlights "cultural stuff" but the broken lines and temporal arrow (see graphic) attempts to allow for the dominant constructionist approach in ethnicity theory. Duling's etic (or outsider) model he admits runs the risk of oversimplifying distinctive historic or local ethnographic information but Duling regards his model as heuristic; it invites criticism and modification or even reconstruction if necessary. But generally, and given due caution, any discussion of ethnicity should be on the lookout for such features in ancient literature. It is also important to note that the most widespread of these features are kinship relations, myths of common ancestry and some

connection with a homeland (Duling 2003a:5; cf Esler 2003:44). Duling’s model looks as follows:



**D C Duling's Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity**

## 2.7 ETHNICITY IN ANTIQUITY

Are these cultural features found in Duling's model evident in ancient literature? The answer is "yes". Duling (2003a:5) refers to examples of ancient literature that mention distinguishing cultural features of ancient peoples (cf Esler 2003:55-56). We will now quote these texts while bringing attention to the relevant cultural features mentioned. First is a quotation from Herodotus:

For there are many great reasons why we [i.e. those in Greece] should not do this [i.e. desert to the Persians], even if we so desired; first and foremost, the burning and destruction of the adornments and temples of our gods, whom we have constrained to avenge to the utmost rather than make pacts with the perpetrator of these things, and next the kinship of all Greeks in blood and speech [*name, kinship, phenotypical features and myths of common ancestry* (?), *language*], and the shrines of gods and the sacrifices that we have in common [*religion, with shared "historical" memories* inferred], and the likeness of our way of life [*customs*], to all of which it would not befit the Athenians [*land* (?)] to be false (Herodotus, *Histories* 8.144.2).

Second is a text from the geographer Strabo:

For the *ethnos* of the Armenians and that of the Syrians and Arabians betray a close affinity, not only in their *language*, but in their mode of life [*customs*], and in their bodily build [*phenotypical features*], and particularly wherever they live as close neighbours [*land*] (Strabo, *Geography* 1.2.34).

Our third text comes from the Tanak:

He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! [*religion*] May Canaan be the slave of Shem ... These are the sons of Shem [*myths of common ancestry*] by their clans [*kinship*] and *languages*, in their territories [*land*] and nations (עַθְוֵעַלֵּוּ) (Gn 9:26; 10:31) (NIV).

Here the various cultural features and *ethnoi* of Shem is contrasted with that of Ham, the father of the Canaanites. It becomes evident that ancient peoples were recognised by their name, language, ancestry, customs and religion to name but a few. So it is by no means inappropriate to apply modern ethnicity theory to ancient peoples (cf Duling 2003a:5; Esler 2003:53).

We can add here that people were often recognised as displaying characteristic features. The ancients observed that Ethiopians were dark-skinned and Germans were pale skinned. The ancient world also had its version of ethnocentrism, where your own people and culture were regarded as superior to others. Different nations were seen to have different moral characteristics as well, whether good or bad. The Egyptians were superstitious, inhospitable and intemperate; Arabs are thieves; Greeks are fast-talkers and tricksters (Cohen 1987:48; Esler 2003:53). Esler (2003:52-53) also explains that

The Romans thought the Greeks<sup>11</sup> were characterized by *levitas*, that is, flightiness, lack of determination and grit. They found the Judeans antisocial, and hence misanthropic, especially because of their refusal to participate in imperial feast days. The Greeks found the Romans vulgar and lacking in taste.

The evidence that a people was identified as an ethnic group analogous to today's understanding is complimented by the ancient usage of ἔθνος in certain instances (already evident in the last two quoted texts above). To begin with, in Greek antiquity, the word ἔθνος had a much broader semantic range than our modern understanding of the term "ethnicity" (Duling 2003a:6; cf Saldarini 1994:59-60). In early writings the singular ἔθνος could refer to any kind of group of almost any size; a flock of birds, a swarm of bees, bands of warriors and young men, or groups of the dead. It could refer to the gender categories of men and women, or alternatively, the inhabitants of a small village, a city, several cities, an entire region, or a number of people living together. Migrants from different geographical regions could be referred to as an ἔθνος, while the term was also made applicable to a guild or trade association. It is also used of an ethnic tribe with its own proper name. Ἔθνος also acquired the meanings of "people" and "nation", referring "to a group of people with cultural, linguistic, geographical, or political unity" (Saldarini 1994:59).

This broad semantic range continued into the Hellenistic period, and a social class of people or a caste can be called an ἔθνος. Orders of priests were referred to as the holy ἔθνη, and ἔθνη can mean rural folk, in contrast to city people. Ἔθνη or ἔθνικός can be used to refer to "others", in contrast to one's own group. But the Greeks were

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<sup>11</sup> The Greeks can of course also be referred to as the "Hellenes" (Ἑλληνες). The word "Greek" is derived from the Roman word for them: the *Graeci*, who came from *Graecia* (Esler 2003:55).

increasingly referring to other peoples as ἔθνος. The plural form τὰ ἔθνη (also γένη) was even more used of other peoples, sometimes having the ring of ethnocentric stereotyping (Duling 2003a:6; Esler 2003:55).

What about ancient Judean literature? Duling draws on the work of Muthuraj, who has argued that in ancient Judean literature, ἔθνος and τὰ ἔθνη (Hebrew *goy* and *goyîm*) refers mostly to “people(s)” or “nation(s)” of the world in a positive or neutral sense (Muthuraj 1997:3-36). English translations (i.e. the use of “Gentiles”, “pagans”, “heathen”), Muthuraj maintains, are too loaded with bias towards outsiders as compared with Judean or Messianic (Christian) monotheists. Duling states this provides an important insight since ἔθνος could still be used to describe one’s own group.<sup>12</sup> He points out, however, that there are clear examples where τὰ ἔθνη in the LXX implies opposition to outsiders, as does the Hebrew it translates (Duling 2003a:6). In the Maccabean literature for example, it says that there were those who had themselves uncircumcised, forsaking the covenant, and they “joined with the ἔθνη”, sold to do evil (1 Mac 1:15; cf 2 Mac 10:4). According to Duling, similar nuances appear with regards to the adjective ἔθνικός and the adverb ἔθνικῶς. So one can conclude that in Judean literature, whether one thinks of Gentiles in a neutral, negative or positive sense will depend on the context.

In summary then and to reaffirm, ancient writers identified different groups of people in a similar way as cultural anthropologists do today by way of reference to cultural features. In some cases, ἔθνος and ἔθνη could refer to a specific *ethnic* group or groups (similar to a modern *ethnie* or *ethnies*), in addition to its various other meanings. The singular could refer to your own or to an outside people. The plural was used even more to refer to other peoples. Both ἔθνος and the plural τὰ ἔθνη could be used in a positive or neutral sense, while the latter could also take on a negative ethnocentric meaning. The literary context will always have to be taken into account.

## 2.8 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL MODEL OF JUDEAN ETHNICITY: A PROPOSAL

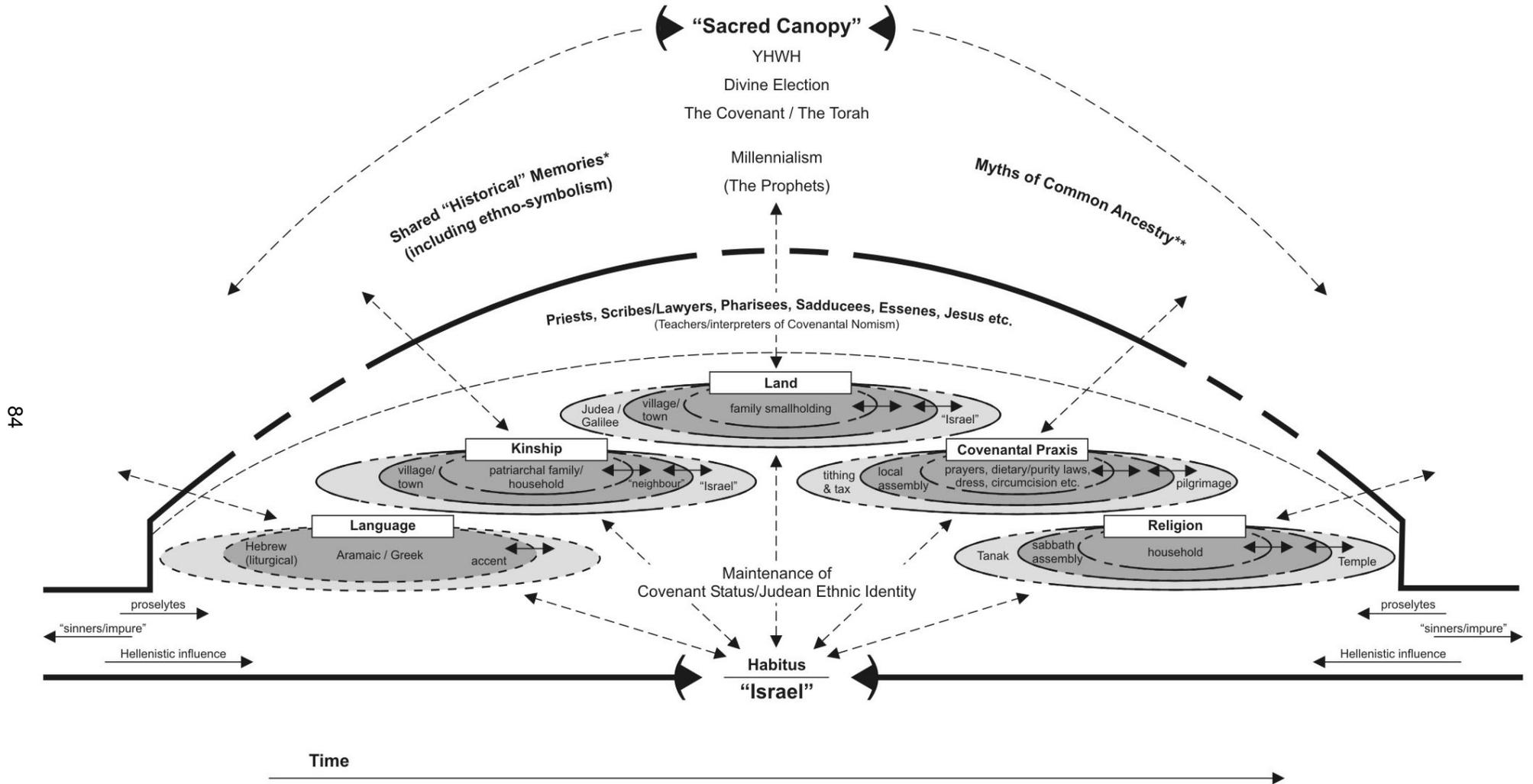
Now it is time to bring all of the above together into our own proposal on how to have a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of Judean ethnic identity. The proposed model below is a synthesis of covenantal nomism when redefined as an

<sup>12</sup> 1 Mac 8:23; 10:25; 11:30; 12:3; 13:36; 14:28; 15:1-2; 2 Mac 11:27; Philo, Decal 96.

ethnic descriptor, Berger & Luckmann's notion of a "symbolic universe", Dunn's "four pillars" and his "new perspective" on Paul, the insights of ethnicity theory, and Duling's socio-cultural model of ethnicity. It must also be understood that our proposed model is attempting at establishing guidelines for a *mainstream* or *common Palestinian* Judeanism. Our proposed model looks as follows:

\* Patriarchs, Moses, Exodus, Covenant, Promise and Conquest of the Land, Davidic Kingdom, Exile, Maccabean Revolt etc.

\*\* Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Twelve Patriarchs, Family Ancestors etc.



84

**Covenantal Nomism:  
An Amendment of D C Duling's Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity**

Our Socio-Cultural Model of Judean ethnicity bears the appropriate name “Covenantal Nomism”. The name describes the entire process of Judean ethnic identity formation in a nutshell. It constitutes the Judean social construction of reality, their “symbolic universe”. This we attempted to represent in the model, which admittedly, is done to a relatively high degree of abstraction. The model consists mainly of two areas, namely, the “Sacred Canopy” and the “Habitus/Israel”. The “Sacred Canopy” is primarily where God established (in the past), and continues to prescribe (in the present), Judean ethnicity through his divine election, the covenant, and gift of the Torah (“getting in”). The “Habitus/Israel” (which extends to more tangible cultural features), is a group of people, Israel, responding to that call by being Judean (“staying in”). We will first discuss the Habitus/Israel in further detail. (It should be noted here that in what is to follow also draws on the insights gained from our next chapter, where we do a more comprehensive investigation into the various aspects of Judean ethnicity.)

### 2.8.1 The Habitus/Israel

Judean ethnicity is grounded in the *habitus*, the shared habitual dispositions of Judean social agents, or in short, “Israel”, which shape and are shaped by objective common cultural practices. The Habitus/Israel, primarily constitutes the dialectical interrelationship between the *habitus* and the more tangible institutions or cultural features of Judean ethnicity, which collectively, is contained within the thick black lines. This interrelationship is dominated by the endeavour to respond to God’s divine election and to maintain covenant status or Judean ethnic identity (“staying in”). Being grounded in the *habitus*, the interrelationship produces Judean ethnic identity, which involves the objectification of cultural practices in the recognition and communication of affinity *and* difference vis-à-vis other peoples. An important element here will also be the identity of the individual, and his/her sense of belongingness and self-esteem, and to find his/her place within the Judean symbolic universe.

As already mentioned, ethnicity theory explains that most widespread of the cultural features are kinship relations and myths of common ancestry and some connection with a homeland. We have given some prominence to the cultural feature of *land* in our model, as it always was a primary feature of Judean ethnicity, and is related to the very strong hopes of restoration that Judeans had (i e “Millennialism”). Land is flanked by *kinship* and *covenantal praxis* (which stands in close association with

*religion*), which in their own way were also primary sources of identity. But overall, the *Habitus/Israel* points to Judeans living on their land, circumcising their sons, eating food according to the laws of *kashrut*, going on pilgrimage, their family ties and communal solidarity, and attending the Sabbath assembly and so on. It points to covenantal nomism in action.

The above explains the dialectic relationship between the *Habitus/Israel*, and the immediate cultural features that gave expression to that ethnic identity. Importantly, it is our argument that the predominant constructionist approach to ethnicity does not properly explain first-century Palestinian Judeanism. Duling's predominantly constructionist approach, represented by the broken lines in his model, is replaced by our predominantly primordialist approach, represented by the more solid lines. It is our contention that when it came to ethnic identity formation, the Judeanism of our period was *essentially* primordialist. Any constructionist elements are secondary, and in fact, are based on or derived from a primordialist approach to ethnicity. Esler (2003:69) has argued, however, that the period from the 530s BCE to 100 CE the Judeans "maintained a strong sense of identity in relation to outsiders in spite of *radical changes* in the cultural features by which that separation was expressed" (emphasis added). Unfortunately, Esler does not explain what the "radical changes" in the cultural features are. Not denying that there were some constructionist elements to Judean ethnicity (see below) we must ask is the argument for radical change not exaggerating the evidence? – or is Esler compelled to be faithful to the predominant approach of ethnicity theory? We have two important reasons why we understand Judean ethnicity as essentially primordialist.

First, Judeanism was primordial, not in the sense that it was deterministic or "natural", but was conditioned, or "determined" by the inherent nature of covenantal nomism itself. The Judean symbolic universe only had one mandate: Perpetually regenerate thyself! As we argued earlier, we understand Judeanism as a highly integrated and uniform system of dispositions. For this reason, Judean ethnicity was highly congruent with the *habitus* and established cultural practices. The reason for this is that its ways were pretty much set according to the requirements of the covenant and Torah. It did not have the "freedom" to construct its culture as other ethnic groups did. Being God's elect people therefore had its restrictions, relevant to all social contexts and opposing interactions. So the constructionist idea that "cultural features of the ethnic group are the visible and variable manifestation, but not the cause, of an ethnic boundary and identity" (Esler 2003:42) is hardly

applicable to Judeanism. Judean cultural features were basically “permanent” and therefore inseparable from Judean ethnic identity. So in themselves, Judean cultural features were the cause of a rigid and tenacious ethnic boundary and identity in addition to the aspect of social organisation.

Second, Judeanism formed part of the Roman empire, hence it was the victim of political and economic oppression and exploitation. Esler (2003:46) himself noted that members of an ethnic group, particularly one under threat, are far more likely to adhere to a primordialist view of ethnicity. A related feature is that Judeanism was under pressure from Hellenism – at a stage it was even persecuted and forced to adopt Hellenistic culture (Maccabean revolt). Judeanism was fighting back to preserve its identity and distinctiveness. In this regard, the literature of the period makes varied use of ethno-symbolism to help the Judean people endure and to help them remember who they are; people of the covenant, and a people who are called to obedience to God’s commandments.

Where a constructionist approach is relevant, three examples will be discussed here. First, the laws on clean and unclean foods do not hold such a central place in the Torah (Lv 11:1-23; Dt 14:3-21). From the time of the Maccabees, however, they took on increasing importance in Judean folklore and Judean self-understanding (Dunn 1990:193). For the devout, one had to avoid the impure food of Gentiles or non-observant Judeans at all cost. Second, in post-exilic Israel Gentiles could also now convert to Judeanism while intermarriage was prohibited. For a Gentile woman, marriage with a Judean man was a de facto equivalent of conversion (Cohen 1987:51, 54). Conversion required the severing of all your previous ethnic and religious roots. These two examples, however, corroborate our suggestion that any constructionist element to Judeanism had its basis in primordialism. We think it self-explanatory that these two developments in various ways were more a result of intense and passionate “emotional bonds based on family, territory, language, custom and religion” (Duling 2003a:2).

The third example is an exception to the above. It concerns the cultural feature of *language*. When viewing our model, it will be seen that it is the only cultural feature that is represented by broken lines, indicating it was a cultural feature in (re)construction. It is commonly accepted that Aramaic was the everyday spoken language of Palestinian Judeans, but based on the available evidence more and more Judeans spoke Greek, as a second, or even as a first language. The use of

Hebrew, the Judean language proper, was surprisingly not that wide spread as the other languages at all. The adoption of the Greek language was in no way a reinforcement of primordialism, but even here, some form of primordialism existed as the Judean scriptures were translated into Greek, and often Judean apologists wrote their works in Greek as well. At the same time it must be said that speaking the Greek language did not seem to undermine your ethnic identity. Thus the cultural feature of language was not an important factor for determining Judean ethnicity.

A convenient way to analyse an ethnic group is also to differentiate between the varying perspectives of those involved with the group. Thus besides looking at the issues of primordialism or constructionism, the processes of ethnic identity formation can also be modelled on three separate though connected levels of abstraction: micro, median and macro (Esler 2003:48-49). Briefly, the micro level is concerned with processes that affect the ordinary members of the group. Its focus is on individual persons and interpersonal interaction. The median level is concerned with the leaders of the group. Here processes create and mobilise groups and intervene to constrain or compel people's expression and action on the micro level. Lastly, the macro level is concerned with outsiders with power over the group. It is the apparatus (ideological, legal, and administrative framework) of the state that allocates rights and obligations. We attempted to model the processes of Judean ethnic identity formation onto the micro and median (darker grey) and macro (lighter grey) level. By representing the micro and median level with the same colour, we attempted to show how closely connected these two levels are in Judean society. The individual, and interpersonal relationships occurred mostly within the family and local community, and the local community leaders mobilised action or enacted decisions applicable on the micro level. The macro level is where the Temple state directly exercised influence and authority. A group such as the Pharisees, floating somewhere in the middle, attempted to gain influence in both the micro-median and the macro level.

Lastly, there were those Judeans, predominantly the priesthood, who along with others acted as teachers or interpreters of covenantal nomism. They were the "experts" whose main task was the maintenance of the Judean symbolic universe. They were the link between the Sacred Canopy and the Habitus/Israel. The historical Jesus operated here as well.

### 2.8.2 The Sacred Canopy

The second main part of our model is the “Sacred Canopy”. For a lack of a better description, it constitutes the Judean “religion” or “theology”. The *habitus* not only shape, and are shaped by common cultural practices, but they also shape and are shaped by Israel’s common beliefs; i.e. the “Sacred Canopy”. This dialectical interrelationship primarily has to do with the belief that Yahweh established/prescribes Judean ethnicity (“getting in”). It therefore also involves the recognition and communication of affinity *and* difference vis-à-vis other peoples. As such the sacred canopy represents the more “intangible” aspects of Judean ethnicity, or the furthest reach of Judean self-externalisation (cf Berger 1973:37).

Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *locating* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference ... Israel legitimated its institutions in terms of the divinely revealed law throughout its existence as an autonomous society ... Religious legitimation purports to relate the humanly defined reality to ultimate, universal and sacred reality. The inherently precarious and transitory constructions of human activity are thus given the semblance of ultimate security and permanence.

(Berger 1973:42, 44; emphasis original)

The sacred canopy is that part of covenantal nomism under which all of that system or identity we call Judeanism took shape. It is under which the entire Judean institutional order is integrated into an all-embracing and sacred frame of reference. It was that externalisation that informed the overall Judean self-concept. And importantly, the “religious enterprise of human history profoundly reveals the pressing urgency and intensity of man’s quest for meaning. The gigantic projections of religious consciousness ... constitute the historically most important effort of man to make reality humanly meaningful, at any price” (Berger 1973:106-7).

Importantly, in pre-modern eras a distinctive religion or vision of a world religion proved to be a very strong force in the persistence of ethnic identity. The sacred canopy points first and foremost to Yahweh, the God of Israel and his election of that people, the covenant and gift of the Torah. Inseparable from this, however, are *shared “historical” memories* and the rich ethno-symbolism contained therein, and the *myths of common ancestry*. All of these together are an example of a communal

*mythomoteur*, or constitutive political myth of an ethnè (see Smith 1994:716). The community is endowed with sacred qualities, “which may generate an almost messianic fervour in times of crisis, particularly when allied to a heightened sense of superiority and a myth of ethnic election” (Smith 1994:716).

The last element of the furthest reach of Judean self-externalisation is Millennialism. As inspired by the prophets, and no doubt contemporary reality, Israel was awaiting God’s intervention on their behalf. The future restoration of Israel primarily referred to Israel’s independent control and ownership of the land. Through divine intervention the Judean symbolic universe was to be made complete.

### 2.8.3 Summary

So the above is our proposed model and a basic explanation of the rationale behind it. The Socio-Cultural Model of Judean Ethnicity is a pictorial and abstract representation of the Judean symbolic universe, which we have termed covenantal nomism. It consists of the *Habitus*/Israel, which stand in a close interrelationship with the more tangible Judean cultural features. The *habitus*, or habitual dispositions of Judean social agents, both shape and are shaped by objective common cultural practices. Here Judeans are responding to Yahweh’s divine election, by being Judean, by maintaining their covenant status or Judean ethnic identity (“staying in”). The Sacred Canopy is the furthest reach of Judean self-externalisation, where all Judean institutions or cultural features are placed within a sacred and all-embracing frame of reference. The *habitus*, also shape and are shaped by common beliefs, including a common history and ancestry. Here is the Judean belief that Yahweh established/prescribes Judean ethnicity (“getting in”). There is also a future element, in that Israel was hoping for future restoration. Collectively, being grounded in the *habitus*, the two dialectic interrelationships produce Judean ethnic identity, which involves the objectification of cultural practices in the recognition and communication of affinity *and* difference vis-à-vis other peoples.

The model as outlined and explained above we do not regard as definitive or final. As with Duling, we regard it as heuristic; it should be changed or reconstructed as needed. It therefore also runs the risk of oversimplifying historic or local ethnographic information. We do suggest, however, that it will serve as a useful guideline to determine mainstream or common Judean ethnicity, and to determine where Judeans are “deviant” from the norm. If this model can be accepted, bearing

in mind that it is still a work in progress, we can return to the issue of the historical Jesus, being left unfinished in the previous chapter.

## **2.9 SO WHAT KIND OF JUDEAN WAS JESUS?**

The question is now how did Jesus operate within and relate to the realm of covenantal nomism as explained above? With the help of our proposed model, we will do an overview of Meier and Crossan's work to see how we understand them to have answered that question. Whether they would endorse our assessment is a matter altogether different, but it is our intention to as objectively as possible take their reconstructions to its logical conclusion. So it must be emphasised that we are not making any claims with regards to the historical Jesus ourselves. Our analysis below is based on *interpretations* of the historical Jesus.

### **2.9.1 John P Meier – Jesus a Marginal “Jew”**

So where does Meier's Jesus fit on the scale mentioned by Holmén from the commonly Judean to the marginally Judean? Meier's Jesus appears to be profoundly Judean in some respects while being a different kind of Judean in others. We must bear in mind that Meier's work is yet to be completed, but here is what we can gather from his work thus far.

#### **2.9.1.1 Jesus and the Habitus/Israel**

A few general remarks can be made first. As will be recalled, the names of Jesus and his family hark back to the patriarchs, the Exodus and conquest of the promised land. This means that his family participated in the reawakening of national and religious feeling. Galilee was conservative in nature, and surrounded by Gentile territories, Galileans clinged to the basics of Israelite religion to reinforce their identity. Jesus himself received some basic training, and had the ability to read Hebrew and expound the Scriptures. All of these combine to suggest that Jesus was socialised from a young age into finding his identity as a Judean, and that his sense of belongingness and self-esteem was dependent on how he operated within the Judean symbolic universe. Overall, Jesus grew up in an environment that would have fostered a strong Judean ethnic identity. To put it differently, the social environment of Jesus was essentially primordialist.

- **Language:**

Apart from Hebrew, Jesus would have spoken Aramaic as his everyday language, but had some knowledge of Greek as well although he never attained scribal literacy. Overall, language did not play that of an important role in establishing Judean identity, as many Judeans living in Palestine would have spoken Greek.

- **Religion:**

*Primordialist tendencies:* Jesus shared with the Pharisees a consuming desire to bring all Judeans to faithful obedience to God's will as set out in the Torah. The Mosaic law is taken for granted as the normative expression of God's will.

Jesus also revered the Temple as the one holy place chosen by God for lawful sacrifice. Jesus followed its festivals, although he regarded the Temple as belonging to the present order of things.

*Constructionist tendencies:* The law and the prophets functioned up to John the Immerser, from which time the kingdom of God had broken onto the scene. What has defined Judean ethnic identity has now on its own become irrelevant, and has appropriated towards or qualified by the demands of the kingdom. In this regard Jesus gives new and startling laws. He also through his own teaching and demands on his followers undermines the law with regards to the family, but also the food and purity laws are undermined through his inclusive table fellowship. In various ways the kingdom of God stands in tension with the traditional Torah.

The actions and sayings of Jesus pointed to its destruction, but it is not clear whether he thought it would be rebuilt some day.

- **Kinship:**

*Primordialist tendencies:* Jesus operated as a prophet within and for sinful Israel. The mission of Jesus was exclusively aimed at Israel and he had but passing contact with Gentiles and Samaritans. By accepting John's immersion, he demonstrated communal solidarity with a sinful Israel.

*Constructionist tendencies:* Jesus might have followed his father's trade as a woodworker, but Jesus broke with his family and made the same demands on some of his followers. Jesus establishes an alternative kinship pattern; those who do the

Father's will is Jesus' real family, his mother, brother and sister. Any notion of biological peoplehood based on family and ancestry collapses and is replaced by a spiritual kinship. The Judean symbolic universe is redefined, where faithful Israel (i.e. those who heed Jesus' message) is opposed to unfaithful Israel.

Jesus has open table fellowship, and this inclusive approach demonstrates no interest to set up boundaries between his own group and other Judeans.

- **Covenantal Praxis:**

*Constructionist tendencies:* Jesus received the immersion of John, and so saw himself as part of a sinful Israel. Jesus must have accepted John's message – it is only through confession of sin and baptism, and a profound change of heart and conduct that Israelites will be saved. This was required even of the devout. This brings into question the sufficiency of the Judean symbolic universe and Judean ethnic identity as it operated at the time. Covenant status, divine election, indeed ethnic identity, has moved beyond traditional Judeanism. Jesus continued with John's baptism in his own ministry, thereby extending the eschatological dimension of John's message.

In enacting the presence of the kingdom of God, Jesus enjoys table fellowship with various Israelites, including tax collectors and sinners. Here Jesus demonstrates little concern for purity laws. The kingdom of God represents an alternative symbolic universe, where the socially marginalised are restored into a correct relationship with God through inclusive fellowship.

- **Land:**

*Primordialist tendencies:* For Jesus, there can be no complete kingdom without a complete Israel. The Twelve disciples symbolised a regathered and reconstituted Israel.

*Constructionist tendencies:* The future kingdom of God envisages the participation of Gentiles. It will not be a political kingdom reserved for Judeans alone, while unfaithful Israel, even the supposed devout, will be thrown out of the kingdom. The future kingdom will therefore consist of people who heeded the message of Jesus, regardless of their ethnic identity.

### 2.9.1.2 Jesus and the Sacred Canopy

*Primordialist tendencies:* Jesus shared the belief in Israel's divine election and God's gift of the Torah. In terms of Millennialism, there can be no kingdom of God without a complete Israel. God will show his faithfulness to Israel and the covenant as the patriarchs and faithful Israelites will share in the resurrection.

*Constructionist tendencies:* When the kingdom of God is established in full, Gentiles will also sit and eat with the patriarchs at the eschatological banquet, while some of Jesus' contemporaries, presumably including the devout, will be thrown out of the kingdom. The Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites will be present and condemn that generation. On occasion, Jesus also performed miracles for Gentiles, which pointed to the future offer salvation for them. The future aspect of the kingdom therefore envisages a symbolic universe where ethnic identity is not a determining factor.

- **Shared “Historical” Memories and Myths of Common Ancestry:**

*Primordialist tendencies:* Jesus chose Twelve disciples, employing this example of ethno-symbolism to point to a regathered and reconstituted Israel. There can be no kingdom of God without a complete Israel.

Jesus referred to the patriarchs participating in the resurrection, and the symbolism behind the Twelve disciples imply that Jesus ascribed positive value to Israel's epic history. Jesus further shares the belief in God's faithful guidance of Israel through history.

*Constructionist tendencies:* By accepting the immersion of John, Jesus accepts that physical descent from Abraham, even for the devout, will mean nothing on its own at the coming judgement. Here any notion of ethno-symbolism is used to confront the present understanding of covenant membership and salvation history. Here ethno-symbolism is not used to maintain the status quo, or to help Judeans endure in the current situation. It is used in view of the demands of the future yet present kingdom of God in a challenging way.

### 2.9.1.3 Findings

*Jesus' ethnic identity is therefore a curious and perplexing mixture of primordialism and constructionism. The constructionist element, however, given its content by the*

*demands of the (future yet present in some way) kingdom of God, dominates.* There are *elements of discontinuity in every cultural feature*, besides language, which anyhow does not really play an important role here in terms of our assessment of Meier's historical Jesus. Thus the balance of the evidence makes us understand Meier's historical Jesus as a different kind of Judean. Jesus is an eschatological prophet, who announces the arrival of the kingdom (= rule or reign) of God, an alternative symbolic universe that builds on traditional covenantal nomism, but in some respects undermines it in the process. Particularly the future vision requires different expectations and ways of doing things accustomed to. This kingdom envisages no celebration of Judean ethnic identity exclusive of complete Gentile participation. *Covenantal nomism, thus Judean ethnic identity, is in (re)construction*, and this process will gather momentum when the kingdom is fully established. In all of this to call Jesus a "Marginal Judean" is being kind. Jesus already in some ways stood aloof from the Judean symbolic universe but nevertheless retained a close contact. Indeed, the *Judean* symbolic universe is already in the process of being transformed into a *universal* symbolic universe, which paradoxically, will still focus on geographical Israel.

## **2.9.2 John D Crossan – Jesus a Mediterranean "Jewish" Peasant**

On that scale mentioned by Holmén between the commonly Judean and the marginally Judean, Jesus definitively leans heavily towards the marginal side of the scale. Again, we will do a brief overview of the most salient features.

### **2.9.2.1 Jesus and the Habitus/Israel**

Jesus grew up in Nazareth, but as a Judean village, it must be seen in cultural continuity with Sepphoris and its Hellenised traditions. Overall Jesus moved within the ambience of inclusive Hellenistic Judeanism and its synthesis of Judean and Gentile tradition. Jesus was therefore socialised into an environment that was not inclined to be primordialist.

- **Religion:**

*Constructionist tendencies:* Jesus challenged the legitimacy of the Temple's spiritual power. In fact, he engages in religious banditry in this regard and sees the Temple as a source of victimisation. Through his healings/magic, which fell in line with the traditions of Elijah and Elisha, he is placed on par or even above the authority of the

Temple. He declares the leper as “clean” and so serves as an alternative or negation of Mosaic purity laws. In the process, the beneficiaries of his magic implicitly receive the forgiveness of sins.

The itinerant mission of Jesus and his followers are in opposition to the localised Temple. Jesus serves as the Temple’s functional opponent and its substitute. By implication, Jesus opposes aspects of the Torah as well. When Jesus was in Jerusalem, he symbolically destroyed the Temple and said he would destroy it beyond repair.

- **Kinship:**

*Constructionist tendencies:* Jesus demonstrated a strong communal solidarity with marginalised Judeans, but one gets the impression that ideologically, it was not reserved for Judeans alone.

Jesus opposes the brokered and patriarchal family in line with Mi 7:6. He establishes an alternative kinship pattern based on egalitarian principles.

- **Covenantal Praxis:**

*Constructionist tendencies:* Jesus was baptised by John, but thereafter he moved away from John’s eschatological message to proclaim the brokerless kingdom of God available in the present.

Jesus ignores purity laws. He negates the value of food taboos and table rituals. According to Jesus, Judeans of different classes and ranks are free to eat together. Their ritual status is irrelevant.

When magic and meal come together in Jesus’ itinerant mission to enact the brokerless kingdom, he and his followers adopt a peculiar dress code somewhat similar yet different to Greco-Roman Cynicism.

- **Land:**

*Constructionist tendencies:* Jesus preached a non-eschatological message of the brokerless kingdom that is available in the present. It concerns a mode of being. People place themselves under divine rule but it is not dependent on nation or place. Indeed, there is a very strong universal element to Jesus’ teaching.

### 2.9.2.2 Jesus and the Sacred Canopy

Jesus evidently had a profound faith in God, but not necessarily the God peculiar to Israel, for even Gentiles know God albeit different names. As for the rest, not much can be said here.

### 2.9.2.3 Findings

*Jesus' ethnic identity is therefore overwhelmingly constructionist.* There are *elements of discontinuity in every cultural feature* when it comes to Jesus. The balance of the evidence makes us understand Crossan's historical Jesus most definitively as a different kind of Judean. Jesus is a peasant Judean Cynic, who sets the kingdom over and against the brokered and hierarchical Mediterranean, of which Judeanism was a part as well. But overall, the immediate social background of Jesus is stretched very thin over the larger Greco-Roman world. There is very little, if any cultural particularity in the historical Jesus. As can be seen the cultural features of *shared "historical" memories and myths of common ancestry* does not really function in Crossan's reconstruction. Although Jesus' magic is placed in the tradition of Elijah and Elisha, and Jesus' attack on the family hierarchy is similar to Micah 7:6, there is no explicit connection that Jesus makes with the past. Ethno-symbolism is virtually non-existent in Jesus' frame of reference. Nothing is said of God's divine election of Israel, or his gift of the Torah, or covenant membership. Evidently Jesus has no concern for the future fate of Israel with regards to its restoration. *Had Jesus any notion of covenantal nomism, or Judean ethnic identity, it was in the process of radical (re)construction.* If Meier's Jesus in some ways stood aloof from the Judean symbolic universe, Crossan's Jesus is off the radar. He appears more to be a peasant Mediterranean philosopher-like figure, oh, who by the way, happens to be Judean. The present and brokerless kingdom of God involves a counter-cultural lifestyle with a strong egalitarian social vision, which by accident or design, may potentially involve any person of whatever ethnic background. The symbolic universe in which Jesus operated was truly universal in its scope, which according to our analysis, obliterates ethnic identity altogether.

### 2.9.3 Summary

It is interesting to compare Meier and Crossan's reconstructions. Jesus' discontinuity or his constructionist tendency is either explained by his eschatological perspective

regarding the future but also present kingdom (Meier) or by Jesus moving within the realm of a counter-cultural inclusive Hellenistic Judeanism (Crossan). But both agree that Jesus to a greater or lesser extent stood in discontinuity with covenantal nomism when compared with our proposed model. As a reminder, the model represents our understanding that covenantal nomism of our period was essentially primordialist. In terms of Jesus' discontinuity, the three cultural features normally regarded as the most widespread or important for ethnic groups are quite telling. Jesus had no pre-occupation for an exclusive and independent political homeland, although "Israel" was where Jesus focussed his mission. Jesus developed an alternative kinship pattern. Belief in a common ancestry was in one respect revered, while on the other subverted since covenant status was no longer dependent on *biological* ancestry (Meier only).

In terms of covenantal praxis (or customs), again has Jesus at times as straying from the accepted norm. Jesus in (at least some) situations (healing and eating) showed little regard for purity and food laws. Lastly, when it came to religion, in word and deed Jesus anticipated the destruction of the Temple. On these last two cultural features in particular, Meier and Crossan share what seems to be a broad agreement on Jesus' actions (cf Borg 1983; 1987; Horsley 1987<sup>13</sup>; Sanders 1985; 1993; Becker 1998). So in particular instances, when compared with our proposed model in all its aspects, the Jesus produced by historical reconstruction can hardly be described as being profoundly Judean. What both Meier and Crossan suggest in their own unique way is the following: Jesus of Nazareth – and at that moment *within* Judeanism itself – was covenantal nomism or Judean ethnic identity in (re)construction. Importantly, this process of ethnic identity formation was a move in the opposite direction of mainstream Judean ethnicity, which was essentially primordialist in character.<sup>14</sup> This can potentially help to explain "of how it could be that Jesus lived within [Judeanism] and yet became the origin of a movement that eventually broke with it?" (Paget 2001:151).

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<sup>13</sup> Horsley, however, argues that Jesus did not recruit or specially welcome social outcasts such as tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, beggars, cripples and the poor. These traditions come from the early Messianist communities. Jesus restored the healed to normal social interaction in their communities.

<sup>14</sup> See our analysis of first-century Judeanism in the next chapter.