

COVENANTAL NOMISM AS A ‘SYMBOLIC UNIVERSE’

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Abstract

It is explored how Sanders' notion of covenantal nomism can be adapted to explain the Judean "symbolic universe". This article throughout approaches Judeanism as an ethnic identity. At first covenantal nomism is adapted to function as an ethnic descriptor. Ethnicity theory is then utilized to explain what ethnicity is and how it is formed and maintained. Duling's Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity is then adapted to model first century Judean ethnic identity. The proposed model is termed covenantal nomism. Lastly, it is explained that the proposed model also functions as a pictorial representation of the Judean symbolic universe.

Key words: Covenantal Nomism, First-Century Judaism, Social Anthropology, Ethnicity Theory

1. Introduction

To begin with oft-repeated clichés, our world is both a small and a big place. It is “small” due to the rapid advance of telecommunications technology, and knowledge of anything and everything so to speak has become the norm. Satellite television, the internet, and other forms of media take us to places without the need for us to leave home. We also discover that there is also much more to the world than our immediate environment. In this sense it is a “big” place, spanning several continents boasting a plethora of various peoples and places. It becomes even bigger if we realize our planet is but one in our solar system, which forms part of one of billions of galaxies in an ever expanding universe.

Contrast the “world” of first-century CE Judeans.² Without the benefits of modern technology, for most knowledge was for the greater part limited to what they could see, smell, taste and hear in their home, village or urban environment. Their world would become bigger of course if they went on pilgrimage to Jerusalem, or heard of other news and places via the “grapevine”. Their world was also dominated by Yahweh, ancestral traditions and a collective memory, matters reserved for the emotions, mind, and the imagination. The challenge for scholars is to get a glimpse of their world, walk in their shoes, and to try and imagine what it would be like to be a child of Abraham living on the land that Yahweh gave to the forefathers. Naturally, our insight into their world is frustratingly incomplete, having to salvage what we can from ancient texts, archaeology, and modern theories.

This article is an exploration, an attempt so to speak, to help improve our understanding of the Judean “world” of the first century. For the average Judean, what did he/she under-

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² Throughout the terms “Jew” and “Judaism” are avoided because they are anachronistic (cf Pilch 1997) and misleading analytical filters. As Esler (2003:63-72) also pointed out, it was normal practice in antiquity that people were named after the territory from which they originated. The BDAG (2000) also prefer the terms “Judean” and “Judeanism”.

stand about him/herself and the world that he/she lived in? Attempts have already been made to explore what was essential to the world of Judeanism (“Judaism”). Dunn (1991:18-36; 2003:287-292) concentrated on the Temple, God, Election and Torah. Sanders developed the approach he labelled “covenantal nomism”, an approach which will be discussed in further detail below. The problem with these approaches is that it is limiting and regards Judeanism primarily as a *religious* system, the Achilles’ heel of most scholarship in general. This article, however, throughout will understand Judeanism as an *ethnic identity* (cf Stegemann 2006; Cromhout & Van Aarde 2006), where religion is but one of several elements in its makeup. The attempt to understand the “world” of Judeanism here will therefore be an exploration of an ethnic identity, not a religious system as such. This article aims to achieve this in the following way: First, it will be argued that Sanders’ covenantal nomism can be adapted to serve as an ethnic descriptor. Second, the insights of social or cultural anthropology will be employed to explain what is meant by the term “ethnicity”, and how it is formed and maintained. Third, adapting Duling’s Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity, a model for first-century Judeanism will be proposed, bearing the name “covenantal nomism”. Lastly, it will be shown that the model, in serving to describe Judean ethnic identity, is simultaneously developed to be a pictorial representation of the *Judean symbolic universe*. “Within” this universe, one finds *Judean ethnic identity*, real people who think and act in a particular way. To put it differently, when covenantal nomism is used as an ethnic descriptor in a model, it can be used as a “container” wherein all the elements of the Judean “world” – both physical and abstract – can be placed.

2. Covenantal Nomism

Sanders’ concept of covenantal nomism is an attempt to explain what was at the core of Palestinian “Judaism” (hereafter “Judeanism”). Sanders understands that at the centre of all life was the covenant that God made with his people. Sanders (1992:262) explains that “covenant” stands for God’s grace in election (“getting in” the covenant relationship), and “nomism” stands for the requirement of obedience to the law (“staying in” the covenant relationship). So for a first century “Jew” (hereafter “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. 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” (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 of *entering* or *attaining* 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 [Judeanism] is a term which implies the maintenance of status among the group of the elect (Sanders 1977:75, 420, 544).

One can see that covenantal nomism is understood primarily in *religious* terms as it is equivalent to divine election or “righteousness”, or it explains the system to which one

must belong in order to be "saved". At the same time, however, 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).

When viewed from the perspective of ethnic identity, a somewhat different, yet critically important picture emerges. The quote above can be paraphrased or modified 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 established or gave guidelines for 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.

When viewed from the perspective of ethnic identity, it can be seen that covenantal nomism broadly explains who is an ethnic Judean and who is not, and how it came to be that way. It came to be that way through God's election of Israel, the covenant and the gift of the Torah, elements which combine to serve as a communal *mythomoteur*, or constitutive political myth of an ethnic group (Smith 1986:61-68; 1994:716). So whether viewed from a theological or anthropological perspective, covenantal nomism deals with the understanding of the constitution of an ethnic identity. Let us take this line of reasoning to its logical conclusion. Based on Sanders' approach, it can be inferred 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 ("getting in"). The people elected must respond to that call, and so give expression to that ethnic identity through obedience to the constitution ("staying in"). Differently put, God established Judean ethnic identity. A group of people respond(ed) by being Judean, in whatever way was deemed necessary. It therefore seems quite appropriate to adapt covenantal nomism to serve as an *ethnic descriptor*. Covenantal nomism becomes an approach that describes an ethnic identity, not a "religious" system. 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 "Judaisms/Judeanisms" (cf Chilton & Neusner 1995). This is not to deny that diversity existed, but all sectarian groups can comfortably be treated under the rubric of Judean ethnic identity.

For now the adapted approach does not tell us much about the details of Judeanism, but it has the potential to serve as a "container" wherein all aspects that contribute towards Judean ethnic identity can be placed. "Within" it can be explained in necessary detail how people become Judean and how they stay that way.

3. Ethnicity Theory

Above it was argued that Sanders' proposal of covenantal nomism can be redefined to serve primarily as an ethnic descriptor. Before we proceed, it will therefore be necessary to learn from the insights of cultural or social anthropology, particularly ethnicity theory, in order to

explain what ethnicity theorists argue with regards to the subject. 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 2005:126). The French word for an ethnic group, *ethnie*, is also used in English and is mainly found in social-scientific literature (Esler 2003:40). Ethnicity theory is a burgeoning enterprise due to the reality of modern ethnic conflict and resurgence in ethnic affiliation in most parts of the world. But what is ethnicity? There appears to be no universal definition as to what ethnicity (or “ethnic identity”) is, although in some writings, a degree of overlap is discernable.³ To give a somewhat abridged definition here, ethnicity is a form of social identity, referring to a collectivity of individuals who ascribe to themselves and/or by others, a sense of belonging and a common cultural tradition. The cultural tradition may in various combinations make use of and/or be dependent on a common name, a shared ancestry, a shared historical tradition, having common phenotypical or genetic features, a link to a specific territory, a shared language or dialect, kinship patterns, customs, and a shared religion (cf Duling 2005). Jenkins (1997:165) has proposed a “basic social anthropological model” of ethnicity, which is as follows:

- Ethnicity is about cultural differentiation [it involves the communication of similarity and difference];
- Ethnicity is concerned with culture – shared meaning – but is also rooted in, and the outcome of, social interaction;
- Ethnicity is no more fixed than the culture of which it is a component, or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced;
- Ethnicity is both collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and internalized in personal self-identification.

From the above it may be inferred that ethnicity is essentially about cultural differentiation. As shall be explained below, however, ethnicity is a more complicated social phenomenon, particularly in terms of exactly how it is formed and maintained.

3.1 Primordialism vs. Constructionism

So exactly how are ethnic groups formed and maintained? Initially, two major theoretical approaches to ethnicity were proposed; namely, Primordialism and Constructionism (Duling 2005:126-27). We shall first examine the former.

Primordialism, associated with Edward Shils (1957a; 1957b) and Clifford Geertz (1963), stresses that “ethnic groups are held together by ‘natural affections.’ These are bonds so compelling, so passionate, so ‘coercive,’ and so overpowering, that they are fixed, *a priori*, involuntary, ineffable, even as ‘sacred.’ These bonds are deeply rooted in family, territory, language, custom, and religion” (Duling 2005:126). They are, in a word, “primor-

³ It has been variously described as the “social organization of culture difference” (Barth 1969); or an “ethnic group is a self-perceived group of people who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include “folk” religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin... [T]he ethnic identity of a group of people consists of their subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups” (De Vos 1975:9, 16); or “ethnic identity can best be defined as a feeling of belonging and continuity-in-being (staying the same person(s) through time) resulting from an act of self-ascription, and/or by others, to a group of people who claim both common ancestry and a common cultural tradition” (Roosens 1994:84); or as a last example, ethnic communities may be defined “as named human populations with shared ancestry, myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity” (Smith 1986:32).

dial".⁴ In this instance one's 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).

Now some reactions to the primordialist approach are based on a misunderstanding of what Shils and Geertz were explaining, and are purely dismissive. Primordialism is criticized in that it regards ethnicity as "fixed", "natural", "pre-social" or the like, and incapable of changing (as opposed to the constructionist view that ethnicity is *fluid* and socially *constructed* – see below). It is agreed here that without a proper psychological explanation, a primordialist approach on its own can tend to be somewhat vague and deterministic. Ethnicity then 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). But these elements which have come to typify the primordialist approach (i.e. it regards ethnicity as "natural", "pre-social" etc.) neither Shils nor Geertz argued in the first place. As Jenkins points out, Geertz, for example, recognizes the role that culture plays in defining primordial bonds and that it varies in intensity in different societies and different time periods. Further, for Geertz "what matters analytically is that ties of blood, language and culture are *seen* by actors to be ineffable and obligatory; that they are *seen* as natural" (Jenkins 1997:45; emphasis original). Shils and Geertz merely described what these primordial attachments were like for the social actors themselves (cf Scott 1990:150; Fenton 2003:80-84).

On a more sensible level, 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). Particularly important here is the role of the family or kinship patterns in identity formation, and particularly in a context where ethnic differentiation is prominent (Jenkins 1997:47, 58-59).⁵ Fenton (2003:89-90) also explains:

[T]o "think out of existence" primordiality is somehow to turn one's back on affect, the powerful influence of familiarity and customariness in social life, and the diffuse sense of attachment that flows from circumstances of birth and socialization, use of language and ingrained habits of thought and social practice... It is simply to acknowledge that this kind of familiarity exists, that habits of thought do become ingrained and are often associated with early life, place, the family, and wider grouping or regions.

So although some have attempted to argue away the merits of primordialism (Eller & Coughlan 1993; Denzey 2002), one can hardly deny its abiding importance for ethnicity. Primordial attachments (particularly formed within the context of kinship and ancestry relations) contain meaning for their participants. It is the stuff of history, tradition, habit, and an individual sense of belonging (cf Scott 1990:163; Grosby 1996:55). This approach emphasizes the view of the participant, or how ethnic groups themselves understand reality (i.e. an insider or emic perspective).⁶ From an etic (or outsider) perspective, however, primordialism brings to attention the emotional and psychological strength of ethnic affiliation.

⁴ Fenton (2003:83) points out, however, that neither Shils nor Geertz themselves were defining *ethnicity*. They merely pointed out that some relationships (family, religion, language, customs etc) had a distinctive – primordial – quality when compared with others, such as your relationship with the state.

⁵ Jenkins, however, avoids using the term "primordial". Where ethnic identity is sufficiently salient to be internalized during early primary socialization, ethnicity can be characterized as a *primary* – not primordial – dimension of individual identity (Jenkins 1997:47).

⁶ According to Esler 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

Constructionism or the self-ascriptive approach to ethnicity⁷ associated with Frederik Barth (1969; cf Barth 1994:12), became the major alternative to primordialism (others would say it is instrumentalism – see below). Barth initially argued that the “cultural stuff”, although important for social boundaries, is “not as important as the act of *social boundary marking itself*” (Duling 2005:127; emphasis original). Constructionists took this further and argued that “ethnic identity is not inherent, fixed, or natural; rather, it is *fluid, freely chosen*, and thus can be seen to be *perpetually constructed, that is, continually reconstructed*” (Duling 2005:127; emphasis original). The emphasis shifted to *how* and *why* ethnic groups create and maintain their group boundaries. In this case the boundary between an ethnic group and outsiders is more of 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). Therefore, 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 claim that groups construct their ethnic boundaries in two major 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”. The latter is usually ethnocentric (Duling 2005:127).

A major development based on constructionism is instrumentalism, where an ethnic group’s self-construction is rational and self-interested and deliberately mobilized in an attempt to further its own political-economic agenda (Duling 2005:127; Esler 2003:46).

As with primordialism, constructionism and instrumentalism also has its critics. Instrumentalists have been criticized “for defining interests largely in material terms, for failing to take seriously the participant’s sense of the permanence of their *ethnies* (which might be termed ‘participant’s primordialism’), and, above all, for underplaying the affective dimensions of ethnicity” (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:9). With regards to the “boundary” issue, according to Roosens (1994), the construction of a boundary does not constitute identity. The boundary can only express, add to or play down an ethnic identity which already exists. “Ethnic identity can take its drive and pattern from an interplay of oppositions with outsiders, but it mostly combines this source of differentiation with an internal source of identification” (Roosens 1994:84). So any ethnicity is logically and ontologically prior to any boundary between “us” and “them”. Roosens (1994:85-87) even goes on to say that concrete interaction with a specific outgroup is not even required, and he brings to focus the role that kinship/the family and ancestry (genealogy) plays in this regard. What also binds the family is a sense of origin and history, shared virtues, loyalty to tradition and personal honour (Roosens 1994:90-93). So ethnicity is dependent on the “internal cultural stuff” that

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).

⁷ Variants or developments of this approach to primordialism are referred to as “circumstantialist” (which incorporates the “situationalist”/“instrumentalist” approach), and “transactionalist”. The circumstantialist approach views ethnic identity is important in some contexts, while not important in others. The identity is constant but circumstances determine whether it matters (Fenton 2003:84). At times circumstances lead to the *rational strategic selection* of ethnic identity, as a means to achieve desired political, economic, and other social ends (i.e. the situationalist/instrumentalist approach) (Scott 1990:148).

is independent of, and that exists before any external boundary. Smith (1986:49) and Fenton (2003:74-75) express similar viewpoints. Fenton also explains, however, that Barth did not discount the importance of cultural differences: "Where groups follow particular customs, adopt a familiar dress, and speak their own language, these things needed to be studied and understood" (Fenton 2003:111). Jenkins (1997:45) also explains that Barth "has never neglected the power and stability of ethnic identifications... [H]is argument was that in certain, not uncommon, circumstances ethnic change *can* happen, not that it *must*" (emphasis original). Jenkins also points out that Barth has recently explored "the importance of ongoing and historically relatively stable 'streams of tradition' or 'universes of discourse', within the constraints of which ethnic identities are produced and reproduced in practice" (cf Jenkins 1996:812; 1994:198).

Overall, the constructionist (or self-ascriptive) approach has become the dominant theoretical perspective on ethnicity, even though most people regard their cultural practices as deeply rooted in antiquity (Avruch 2003:72; Jenkins 1996:814). Jones (1997:84) explains that:

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.

Duling (2005:127) also explains that most theorists agree that people ascribe their ethnicity to themselves (constructionism), but there is still great interest in the "cultural stuff". There is also still wide disagreement on whether self-constructed ethnicity is "irrational and inef-fable" (primordialist) or "rational and self-interested" (instrumentalist).⁸ This brings us to another important dimension in the debate. As can be seen from the above discussion, primordialism and constructionism/ instrumentalism were basically regarded as mutually exclusive, exaggerating the differences between Geertz and Barth in particular. Hence the reaction to primordialism: Ethnicity is not "fixed", or "pre-social" and it is subject to change; hence the reaction to constructionism/instrumentalism: Ethnic attachments are sometimes stubborn and also exists before any boundary between "us" and "them". But as Jenkins points out, the approaches of Geertz and Barth have as much in common as what separates them (Jenkins 1997:45, 48; 1994:812-13). So although it is universally agreed that ethnic identity is socially constructed (i.e. it is not "natural", "pre-social" or rooted in human biology), there appears to be a growing recognition among ethnicity theorists that some form of reconciliation or intermediate position is necessary between the constructionist approach on the one hand (particularly its emphasis on the *fluid* and *free* transactional nature of ethnicity across the "boundary"), and on the other, the primordial dimensions of ethnicity and/or the importance of cultural content (Hutchinson & Smith 1996:9; Fenton 2003:111, 194-95; Jenkins 1997:121-22). There have been attempts to integrate the various approaches (e.g. Scott 1990) and it is also suggested that both perspectives are continuously present, but to varying degrees (Jones 1997:80). For our purposes here, primordialism and constructionism/instrumentalism are therefore not seen as mutually exclusive in line with

⁸ 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."

recent approaches. The interaction across the “boundary” cannot be separated from the cultural contents of ethnicity (Jenkins 1997:121-22) and/or its “primordial” dimensions (Scott 1990:149). Either position cannot explain ethnicity on its own. Fenton (2003:90) also explains that it is “perfectly possible to have a conception of ethnic identity which allows us to see them ... as being constituted by elements which are civic, instrumental, circumstantial and primordial.” Perhaps it is better to conclude that the social and historical context of an ethnic group will dictate how we approach their ethnic identity. At times ethnicity is more fluid and changing. At times ethnic attachments are more stubborn. At times ethnicity is important; at times it is not. Within the same group, any combination of these dynamics can also be present at the same time.

3.2 Ethnicity as Grounded in the *Habitus*

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. At the outset she draws attention to Bourdieu’s theory of practice which 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* therefore is made up of durable dispositions (or “unreflexive habit” [Jenkins 1994:203; 1997:58; 2003:64]), that produce 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 draws attention to the work of Bentley, who builds 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). Hence 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.

It needs to be mentioned that Jenkins also brings into focus that the “sense of self”, located in the *habitus*, is much influenced by categorization. “Entering into ethnic identifica-

tion during childhood is definitively a matter of categorization: We learn who we are because, in the first instance, other people – whether they be co-members or Others – tell us. Socialization *is* categorization” (Jenkins 1997:166; emphasis original). Where ethnicity is important, a child will not only learn she is an “X”, but also what it means: “In terms of her esteem and worth in her own eyes and in the eyes of others; in terms of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour; and in terms of what it means *not* to be an ‘X’...” (Jenkins 1997:59; emphasis original). This “sense of self” may continue into adulthood. This would be particularly relevant to the first century personality where the individual would always see himself or herself through the eyes of others (Malina 1993). Malina speaks of honour as a grant of reputation by others. It is nothing other than your conscience. At the same time the individual is also a group-orientated personality. The “dyadic” person is essentially a “group-embedded and group-orientated person... Such persons internalize and make their own what others say, do, and think about them because they believe it is necessary, for being human, to live out the expectation of others” (Malina 1993:67). Important is the interaction between the individual and “person-sustaining groups” such as the family, village, city and nation. The insights of Malina can certainly be appropriated to an individual’s sense of ethnic identity. If so, ethnicity is not complicated by the social phenomena of individualism and social mobility as encountered in the modern western world (cf Fenton 2003). If it existed, it was the exception and not the norm. For our purposes here, the “sense of self” and group-orientated personality, and the reciprocal relationships and categorization that it implies, should form important elements of the *habitus*.

Returning to Jones (1996:93-99), she continues to adapt Bentley’s theory, by broadening the concept of the *habitus*. She points to the fact that various groups of people can come to form a new collectivity, either in opposition to outside culture (e.g. the colonization of African peoples), or alternatively, as a result of social dislocation and subordination in the process of urban migration (i.e. ethnicity can encode relations of power, be it social, economic, or political) (cf Fenton 2003:113-34; cf Stein 2004). Lastly, 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). The rationale of Jones is that 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).

Much, but not everything of what has been stated above, explains first-century Palestinian Judeanism. For example, it is questioned whether the broadening of the *habitus* and the idea of “overlapping ethnic boundaries” are *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. But Judeanism was ethnically exclusive, so ethnicity was important! Further, it can be argued here

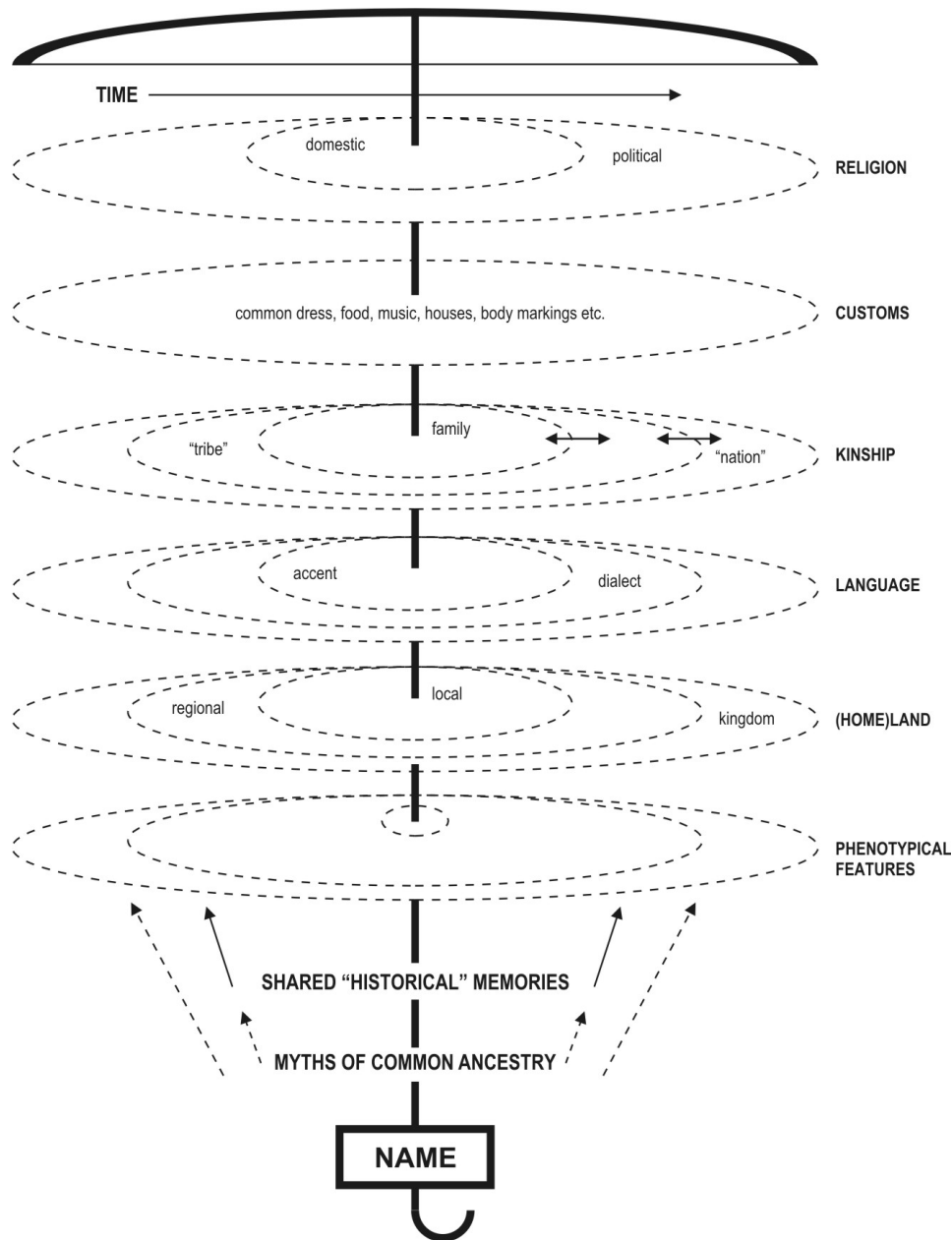
that the overwhelming majority of Judeans, in this instance focusing on those who lived in Palestine in particular, found themselves in similar *habitus*, relevant to every social and historical context due to the all-encompassing and permanent nature of the covenant. Admitting certain peculiarities, their beliefs and cultural practices, were, to a large degree, homogenous. Judeanism can be understood as a more “vertical” ethnic group, where “a single ethnic culture permeates in varying degrees most strata of the population...” (Smith 1986:77). The manifestation of their ethnic identity was *similar in beliefs and cultural practices in different social and historical contexts*. Most certainly the dimensions of belongingness, personal honour and self-esteem also come into play here. The implications are that Judeanism is understood as a highly integrated and uniform system of dispositions, but more about Judean ethnicity later when the proposed model is explained.

Jones can also be seen as perhaps regarding ethnicity too much as *oppositional* in nature. Her approach nevertheless allows for the following contingencies: Ethnicity is the result of socialization and categorization. At times ethnicity can be more fluid and changing; at times ethnic attachments can be more stubborn. At times ethnicity can be important and at other times not. These various dynamics of ethnicity can be present at the same time. It therefore can take into account the “internal” content and the primordial dimensions of ethnicity, as well as the interaction across the “boundary”. Overall, it is a good working theory from which to work, and to adapt to the circumstances of first-century Judeanism.

4. DC Dulings’s Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity

Ethnicity theory has broadly recognized several cultural features that are important for ethnic identity, although not all of them are required for ethnic formation. The various features proposed has quite logically been summarized by Duling (2005:127-28) to include the following: 1) *name*, a corporate name that identifies the group; 2) *myths of common ancestry*, the group claims to be descendents of a particular person or group/family; 3) *shared “historical” memories*, the group points to common heroes and events of the past; 4) *land*, the group has actual or symbolic attachment to an ancestral land; 5) *language*, or local dialect; 6) *kinship*, members of the group belong to family units which in turn, demonstrate communal solidarity with the local community or tribe, and with the group as a national entity; 7) *customs* identifiable with that group (dress, food, sport etc); 8) the cultural feature of *religion*; and 9) *phenotypical features*, which point to genetic features (cf Esler 2003:43-44).

Duling in turn developed a model that lists these key representative socio-cultural features that could influence an ethnic group’s values, norms and behaviour. He describes it as an outsider’s model (etic model) that is “imposed” on the available data. Duling (2005:127) further describes it as a “socio-cultural umbrella” that highlights “cultural stuff” but the broken lines and temporal arrow (see graphic) attempt to allow for the dominant constructionist approach in ethnicity theory. Duling’s model, he admits, runs the risk of oversimplifying distinctive historic or local ethnographic information, but Duling regards his model as heuristic; it is open to criticism and modification or, if necessary, even reconstruction. Meanwhile, any discussions of ethnicity can look out for such features in ancient literature (Duling 2005:127). It is also important to note that the most widespread of these features are kinship relations and myths of common ancestry, and some connection with a homeland is not far behind (Duling 2005:127; cf Esler 2003:44). Duling’s (2005:128) model is as follows:



D C Duling's Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity

Are these cultural features found in Duling's model evident in ancient literature? The answer is "yes". Duling points to several texts where it becomes evident that ancient peoples were recognized by their name, language, ancestry, customs and religion to name but a few (cf Herodotus, Histories 8.144.2; Strabo, Geography 1.2.34; Gn 9:26; 10:31). It is therefore

by no means inappropriate to apply modern ethnicity theory, with the necessary caution, to ancient peoples (Duling 2005:127-29; Esler 2003:53). According to Smith (1986:32-46; 1997) ethnic communities played an active part in human society from at least the third millennium BCE. What helped to shape ethnic groups were (1) *sedentarization and nostalgia*, where peoples gave up their pastoral and nomadic lifestyle and formed small village settlements, which formed oases of folk culture and local ties, to which was attached a nostalgia for the past; (2) *organized religion*, where, for example, the origin myths of the ethnic group and their religious beliefs about creation are interrelated, and the role that religion played in the communication of ethnic myths and symbols; and (3) *inter-state warfare*, particularly those between different kinds of political authority. Smith (1986:46) concludes that “ethnicity provides one of the central axes of alignment and division in the pre-modern world, and one of the most durable.”

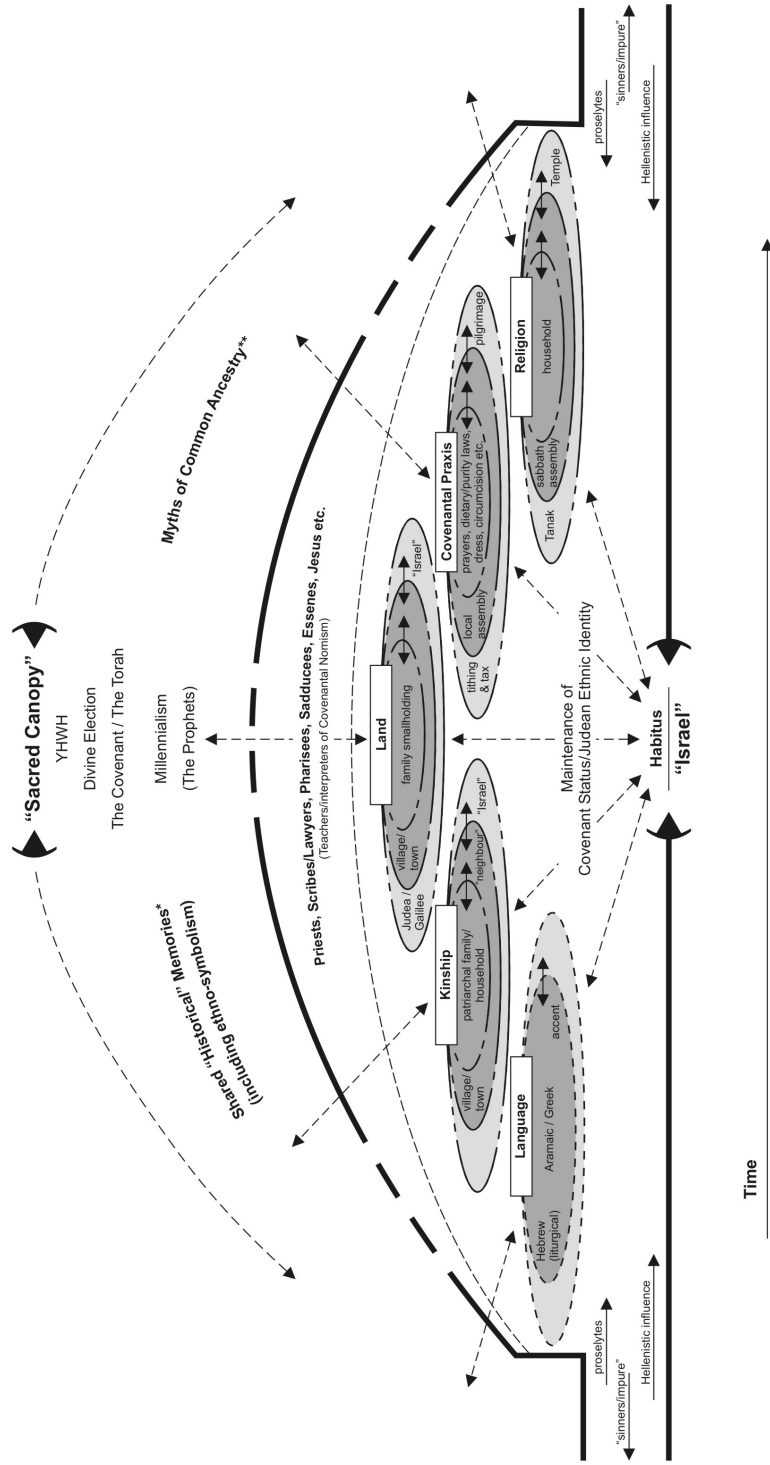
5. The Socio-cultural Model of Judean Ethnicity: A Proposal

As can be seen, the model of Duling is more generic in nature and can be used to study any ethnic group. It was argued elsewhere, however, that his model can be adapted to help explain first-century Judean ethnic identity (see Cromhout & Van Aarde 2006).⁹ Here the rationale of the model was also explained in detail so the explanation of it here will only repeat the most salient features, while adding a few insights as well. It must also be understood that the proposed model attempts to establish guidelines for a *mainstream* or *common Palestinian* Judeanism. The proposed model is as follows:

⁹ The proposed model was a synthesis of covenantal nomism when redefined as an ethnic descriptor, Berger & Luckmann’s notion of a “symbolic universe” (see below), Dunn’s “four pillars of Second Temple ‘Judaism’” and his “new perspective” on Paul, the insights of ethnicity theory, as well as Duling’s Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity.

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

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



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

The socio-cultural model of Judean ethnicity admittedly is a modern construct, as Duling put it, “imposed” on the available data. At the beginning it was argued that Sanders’ notion of covenantal nomism can be adapted to serve as an ethnic descriptor. That is why the model bears the appropriate name of “Covenantal Nomism”. The name describes the entire process of Judean ethnic identity formation in a nutshell, how a group of people become Judean, and how they stay that way. The model therefore corresponds to these two dynamics by consisting of two main areas, namely, the “Sacred Canopy” and the “Habitat/Israel”. The “Sacred Canopy” is primarily the dimension in the model dealing with God who 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 “Habitat/Israel” (which extends to include more tangible cultural features), refers to a group of people, Israel, responding to that call by being Judean (“staying in”). The Habitat/Israel will be discussed in further detail first.

5.1 The Habitat/Israel

Judean ethnicity is the result of socialization. First, it 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. Here we enter the realm of affect, the powerful influence of familiarity and customariness in social life, and the strong attachments that result from ingrained habits of thought and social practice (cf Fenton 2003:89-90). Second, within the *habitus* the “sense of self” is internalized through categorization, be it through the family, the village/town, or through society as a whole. In this regard, the identity of the individual as a group-orientated personality, and his/her sense of belongingness and self-esteem form important elements. Here we enter the realm of origins and history, tradition, shared values and meaning.

The Habitat/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.

As has already been mentioned, ethnicity theory explains that kinship relations and myths of common ancestry and a certain connection with a homeland are the most widespread of the cultural features. We have given some prominence to the cultural feature of *land* in our model, as it has always been a primary feature of Judean ethnicity, and is related to the very strong hopes of restoration the Judeans had (i.e. “Millennialism”). Land is flanked by *kinship* and *covenantal praxis*¹⁰ (the latter stands in close association with *religion*) and which in their own way were also primary sources of identity. But overall, the Habitat/Israel points to Judeans living on their ancestral land, circumcising their sons, eating food according to the laws of *kashrut*, going on pilgrimage, reciting the Shema, 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 Habitat/Israel and the immediate cultural features that gave expression to that ethnic identity. The argument is also

¹⁰ It was argued previously that Judean “customs” can more appropriately be called covenantal praxis. Judean customs inevitably were a demonstration that their practitioners were Judean, or members of God’s covenant people (Cromhout & Van Aarde 2006).

made here that the predominant constructionist approach in Duling's model, represented by the broken lines, does not properly explain first-century Palestinian Judeanism. His broken lines is replaced by a predominantly primordialist approach, represented by the more solid lines. It is argued therefore that Judean ethnicity was *essentially* primordialist, meaning, it was made up of elements that for the greater part can be described as "primordial attachments". The analysis here has got nothing to do with the (mistaken) view that primordialism regards ethnicity as deterministic, "natural", or "pre-social". Judean ethnicity was socially constructed, but ethnicity was always important. Socialization and the objectification of cultural practices (be they "internal" or "external") were governed by the requirements of the covenant and Torah. So it was not simply a matter of habitual dispositions or the role of affect, or a sense of history and tradition, it was also about being obedient to God's will (shall we say *personal conviction*?). Judeans did not have the "freedom" to construct their ethnicity as other groups had. Being God's chosen people imposed serious restrictions. So the extreme 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.

In addition, Judeanism formed part of the Roman Empire, hence it was the victim of political and economic oppression and exploitation. A related feature is that Judeanism was under pressure from Hellenism – at one stage it was even persecuted and forced to adopt Hellenistic culture (Maccabean revolt).¹¹ 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" than to an interactive and self-ascriptive (the extreme constructionist) approach, and even less to an instrumentalist one. In this regard Scott has argued that that primordial sentiments will become greater the greater the amount of *opposition* experienced by that group. He explains further "with respect to the *content* of ethnic identity, the primordial sentiments will also attach to the symbols against which the greatest opposition is expressed, whether language, territory, heroes, music, dance, cuisine, or clothing, such that they will become even more salient in the individual's reckoning of his or her ethnicity" (Scott 1990:163; emphasis original). And the greater the opposition experienced by the group, the greater its ethnic solidarity becomes, which according to Scott (1990:166), also tends to increase the lower the person's socio-economic status. It must further be recalled that ethnic identities also encode relations of power. Judean ethnicity encoded an identity in which reality conflicted with the ideal, in which a dominated people longed for divine deliverance.

Judeanism most certainly also had the more constructionist elements to it, however. For example, the laws on clean and unclean foods from the time of the Maccabees took on increasing importance in Judean folklore and Judean self-understanding (Dunn 1990:193). Secondly, in post-exilic Israel Gentiles could now also convert to Judeanism, while inter-marriage was prohibited (Cohen 1987:51, 54). But these two examples, however, had their basis in primordialism. The latter can be regarded as part of the defensive marriage strategy of post-exilic Judeanism as outlined by Malina (1993:134-38).

¹¹ The Maccabean and other revolts can also be described as a form of *ethnicism*, "a collective movement, whose activities and efforts are aimed at resisting perceived threats from outside and corrosion within, at renewing a community's forms and traditions, and at reintegrating a community's members and strata which have become dangerously divided by conflicting pressures... [E]thnicism has manifested three broad aims in antiquity ... territorial restoration, genealogical restoration and cultural renewal" (Smith 1986:50-51). Further, Smith (1986:55-56) explains that ethnicism is fundamentally defensive, provoked by military threat, socio-economic challenges, and cultural contact. All these things can accurately describe the situation of first-century Judeanism, and the period that led up to it.

A third example is an exception, which concerns the cultural feature of *language*. When viewing the model, it is noticeable that it is the only cultural feature that is represented by broken lines, indicating that 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.

A convenient way of analyzing an ethnic group is also by differentiating between the varying perspectives of those involved with the group. These processes of ethnic identity formation can also be modelled on three separate though connected levels of abstraction: Micro, median and macro (Barth 1994; cf 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. It has to do with “the management of selves in the complex context of relationships, demands, values and ideas; the resultant experiences of self-value, and the embracements and rejections of symbols and of social fellowships that are formative of the person’s consciousness of ethnic identity” (Barth 1994:21). The median level is concerned with entrepreneurship, leadership and rhetoric. In this instance processes create and mobilize groups and intervene to constrain or compel people’s expression and action on the micro level. Lastly, the macro level concerns itself with outsiders with power over the group. It involves state policies (whether legal or ideological) that allocates rights and obligations, which may involve the use of force and the control and manipulation of public information. These processes of ethnic identity formation are represented in the model, where the micro and median levels are indicated by the darker grey areas, and the macro level by the lighter grey areas. These areas broadly correspond to Malina’s “person-sustaining groups”. By representing the micro and median level with the same colour, I attempted to show how closely connected these two levels are in Judean society.

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 Judeanism. They were the link between the Sacred Canopy and the *Habitus/Israel*. The historical Jesus and the Pharisees functioned here as well.

5.2 The Sacred Canopy

The second main part of the model concerns the “Sacred Canopy”. For lack of a better description, it constitutes the Judean “religion” or “theology”. The *habitus* not only shapes, and is shaped by common cultural practices, but they also shape and are shaped by Israel’s common beliefs; that is, the “Sacred Canopy”. Not to be forgotten is the role of categorization. This dialectical interrelationship primarily has to do with the belief that Yahweh established/prescribes Judean ethnicity (“getting in”). It therefore also involves the objectification of cultural practices in the recognition and communication of affinity *and* difference *vis-à-vis* other peoples. But the sacred canopy represents the more “intangible” aspects of Judean ethnicity, or the furthest reach of Judean self-externalization (cf Berger 1973:37). The sacred canopy concerns that part of covenantal nomism under which all of the system or identity we call Judeanism took shape.

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 (Smith 1994:716). In this regard 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. Collectively, these most definitively constituted a strong force in the persistence of Judean ethnic identity. Inseparable from this, how-

ever, are *shared "historical" memories* and the rich ethno-symbolism¹² 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 ethnic group (see Smith 1986:61-68; 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 latter naturally leads into the last element of the furthest reach of Judean self-externalization, namely, Millennialism. 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.

6. Covenantal Nomism as a 'Symbolic Universe'

Above the rationale of the model was explained. The model itself, and now coming to the main focus from hereon, is also developed to be a pictorial representation of the Judean symbolic universe, though admittedly, it entailed a relatively high degree of abstraction. In other words, the model is also a "container", where it is used as a theoretical device wherein all the elements of the Judean "world" can be placed. It is another way to understand Judean identity, for within this "world" one finds an ethnic identity, a way of being, of doing, and knowing (cf Fishman 1996). So how then can covenantal nomism, as represented in the model, function to describe a "symbolic universe"?

The 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 habituation. 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 socialized into. As such it is perceived as 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 internalized as subjective reality:

¹² Ethno-symbolism 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 2005:127). This can be seen in Judean literature (e.g. Jubilees and Pseudo-Philo) where past traditions are used creatively for the Judean struggle against Hellenism and the maintenance of Judean identity.

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).

It should be recalled that ethnicity is described as a “social identity which is both collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and internalized in personal self-awareness” (Jenkins 1996:810-11). The similarities here to the notion of ethnicity as grounded in the *habitus* should be obvious.

Berger and Luckmann explains further that 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 the 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 Josephus, Apion 2.170-3). For Judeans, there was no differentiation between “ritual” and “ethics”, between religious, social and economic dimensions 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 was just as important as eating food accidentally that should have gone to the priest or altar (cf Sanders 1992:194-95).

For a moment, refer to the model, particularly to that area referred to as the “Sacred Canopy”. It is that construct under which the entire Judean institutional order is integrated into an all-embracing and sacred frame of reference. It was that externalization that informed the overall Judean self-concept. It represents the more “religious” or “theological” aspects of Judean ethnic identity. Berger (1973:42, 44) explains that religion:

legitimizes 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 legitimized 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 (emphasis original).

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).

From the perspective of ethnicity theory, first-century Judeanism can be understood as a "totalizing ethnicity", where "ethnic organization and ethnic attributions of meaning pervade all or almost all spheres of life. Under these circumstances ethnic identity is totalizing or summative – it draws in to itself everything else" (Fenton 2003:115). Fishman (1996:66, 68) also says that ethnicity "is a *Weltanschauung* that helps to explain origins, clarify eternal questions, rationalize human destiny, and purports to offer an entre to universal truths ... [Ethnicity] is an experience of deeply rooted, intimate and eternal belonging." What Fenton and Fishman describe is similar to what the proposed socio-cultural model of Judean ethnicity attempts to depict graphically.

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, these 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 (cf Bruegemann 2002 on the importance 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 (recall the role of categorization and Malina's dyadic personality), 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 was objectified in things such as the patriarchal family (cf Oporto 2001) and the purity order which was symbolised by the Temple's architecture (Schmidt 2001:32-33). In terms of the latter, the priests who function in the temple have the highest degree of purity, then comes the laity and proselytes. These, however, contracted various forms impurity which nevertheless could be removed. At the bottom are those permanently "impure" (e.g. sinners and those with various bodily defects or ailments), and entirely outside of this order are the Gentiles, who were nevertheless regarded as "impure" themselves.

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).

In this regard it can be mentioned that ethnicity is a social identity where commitment is primarily, but not exclusively, orientated to the past (De Vos 1975:17-19).¹³ A shared cultural heritage derived from the past also influences present behaviour, and at the same time, ethnicity is concerned with the future survival of that group. In a sense, the survival of the group ensures your own survival (cf Nash 1996:27). Ethnicity “makes every human a link in an eternal bond from generation to generation – from past ancestors to those in the future. Ethnicity is experienced as a guarantor of eternity” (Fishman 1996:63).

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). 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 being a striking example. 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. These can be understood as “rites of passage”, and it is “particularly in rites of passage that one finds highly emotional symbolic reinforcement of ethnic patterns” (De Vos 1975:26).

“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). From the perspective of ethnicity, this can be called *ethnocentrism* (cf Smith 1986:47-48). There are two ways in which attempts at nihilation 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 sex-

¹³ De Vos also speaks of “present” and “future” commitments. Present commitments are where your primary loyalty is directed to your country, or an occupation. Future commitments may involve loyalty to a revolutionary or a universalist religious movement.

ual immorality, in short, of "lawlessness". They are not part of the Judean symbolic universe, not divinely elected, ignorant of God's law, impure, and in some texts are described as bereft of the truth. One text will be quoted which can serve as a classic example of universe maintenance through nihilation. In the wake of the Maccabean revolt Judeans were encouraged:

[K]eep the commandments of Abraham, your father. Separate yourself from the gentiles, and do not eat with them... Because their deeds are defiled, and all their ways are contaminated, and despicable, and abominable (Jub 22:16).

The last element of the symbolic universe that will be discussed 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. In this regard attention must be brought to the following. Smith (1986:43) makes the important observation that in pre-modern eras, "what we grasp as religious competition may equally well be understood as ethnic competition for the monopoly of symbolic domination and communication in a given population, whose 'ethnic' profile is as much *shaped* by priestly and scribal activities as it is reinforced" (emphasis original). So the priests, Pharisees, Essenes, Zealots, even the first Messianists, could be approached in a way that understands that each group had their own particular ideas of what it meant to be Judean. Each group attempted to shape Judean ethnicity in their own way.

The above was to illustrate how the redefined understanding of covenantal nomism can also be used as a "container" for the Judean symbolic universe. Covenantal nomism, as represented in the proposed model, was the Judean social construction of reality that had to be maintained in the face of historical developments and Hellenistic and Roman ideology. It 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.

7. Summary

This article throughout approached and understood Judeanism as an ethnic identity. It was argued that Sanders' proposal of covenantal nomism can be adapted to serve as an ethnic descriptor. It can be modified analytically where it serves to explain an ethnic identity, not a religious system. It was then explained that ethnicity is essentially about cultural differentiation. In terms of how ethnicity is formed and maintained, a middle road between primordialism and constructionism/instrumentalism was adopted. The interaction across the "boundary" cannot be separated from the primordial dimensions of ethnicity and/or its cultural content. This approach was then complimented by seeing ethnicity as grounded in the *habitus*. It refers to habitual dispositions ("structuring structures") that shape, and are shaped by objective commonalities of practice. Attention was also focussed on how the "sense of self" is shaped through categorization. Both utilizing these insights, and by adapting Duling's Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity, a model for first-century Judean ethnic

identity was proposed. It is called “Covenantal Nomism”, corresponding to Sanders’ idea of “getting in” and “staying in” the covenant relationship, the “Sacred Canopy” explaining the former process, and the “Habitus/Israel” explaining the latter. Lastly, it was explained that the model was also developed to be a pictorial representation of the Judean symbolic universe, where all Judean institutions, practices and beliefs were placed within the context of an all-embracing frame of reference. It was the Judean social construction of reality, their “world”, where its inhabitants found meaning and lived out their ethnic identity under their God.

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