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EARLY CHRISTIAN IDENTITY FORMATION AND PRAYER IN THE LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

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Abstract:

This article analyzes the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians in order to examine how early Christian identity was formed and expressed. It is argued that the social identity of the addressees of Ephesians is strategically confirmed in these prayers in at least three ways. First, the prayers of Ephesians delineate who belongs to the ingroup and who belongs to the outgroup respectively. Secondly, the prayers of Ephesians present the ideal or the prototypical believer, affirming the identity of the true Christ-believer and, accordingly, disaffirming the identity of the false or deviating Christ-believer. Thirdly, the prayers of Ephesians give a common narrative and theological self-understanding that serves to shape the cohesion of the ingroup of believers, to include and unite those who confess the same belief, and, in turn, exclude others. It is concluded that prayers could function as a powerful vehicle to express and affirm personal and social identity among early Christ-believers.

Key words:

Prayer, Identity, Early Christian Identity, The Letter to the Ephesians, Prototypicality, Ethnicity, Narrativity.

In what way did early Christian prayers express, form and reaffirm the identity of the early Christian movement? In order to investigate this question, this article will analyze the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians.[1] The letter contains several prayers that intend to express and confirm the identity of early Christ-believers in Asia Minor. I will elaborate on the function and purpose of these prayers with the help of a couple of social identity theories that I find potentially helpful in the task of examining issues relating to early Christian identity formation. The article argues that the identity of the addressees of Ephesians is strategically confirmed in at least three ways:

First, the prayers of Ephesians delineate who belongs to the ingroup and who belongs to the outgroup respectively. This is particularly demonstrated in the way the author reshapes the understanding of the ethnicity of the Christian community; the outgroup of Gentile believers is made into an ingroup of the people of God. Secondly, the prayers of Ephesians present the ideal or the prototypical believer, affirming the identity of the true Christ-believer and, accordingly, disaffirming the identity of the false or deviating Christ-believer. Thirdly, the prayers of Ephesians give a common narrative and theological self-understanding that serves to shape the cohesion of the ingroup of believers, to include and unite those who confess the same belief, and, in turn, exclude others.

Defining Identity

Before turning to the letter to the Ephesians, a word of definition of the slippery term "identity" is necessary. The term "identity" belongs originally to theories about the character of the human individual. Most scholars today agree that we may speak of at least two types of identity. First, there is the more individualistic-focused use of the term (personal identity) and, secondly, there is the collective use of the term (social identity). The personal identity includes the unique personal

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[1] The content of this article is further elaborated in Mikael Tellbe, "Identity and Prayer", in: R. Hvalvik & K.O. Sandnes (eds.), *Early Christian Prayer and Identity Formation* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 336), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2014, 13–34, and idem., "Prayer and Social Identity Formation in the Letter to the Ephesians", in: *Early Christian Prayer*, 115–135.

characteristics of the single individual, while the social identity refers to the memberships the individual claims in various groups or the identity of the collective group. In both uses, identity is seen as a social construct by the subjects under investigation and as something flexible, not as something fixed and static. Since the focus of this article is primarily on prayers that are prayed for a group of Christ-believers, I will mainly focus on how these prayers formed the social identity of this group. Moreover, in my perspective, the term "identity" is basically a social concept; identities, whether modern or ancient ones, are formed in relation to other individuals or groups. The British socio-logist Richard Jenkins even argues, "all human identities are by definition *social* identities".[2]

"Social identity" can be defined in two ways. First, it can be defined as the identity of a social group ("group identity"). This view of identity corresponds mainly to questions such as: Who are we? What distinguish us from other groups in this society? Where do we draw lines between our group and others? This concerns mainly group-members' common sense of belonging together in a particular, ethnic, cultural, religious and social minority group.[3] Secondly, social science has mainly focused on defining self in terms of group membership, i.e., the individual's self-concepts as it pertains to positions or roles within social groupings.[4] This aspect of identity answers questions such as: Who am I? How am I in this particular situation? How does this relate to who I am in other social groups? How does this self-understanding affect my belonging in this particular group? "Social

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[2] Richard Jenkins, *Social Identity*, London: Routledge 2004, 4 (italics his). Jenkins (ibid., 5) defines "identity" as "our understanding of who we are and of who other people are, and, reciprocally, other people's understanding of themselves and of others (which include us)".

[3] Cf. Peter Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of Early Christians: Associations, Judeans and Cultural Minorities,* New York: T & T Clark 2009, 6.

[4] See Henri Tajfel, "Social Categorization, Social Identity and Social Comparision", in: Henri Tajfel (ed.), *Differentiation Between Social Groups*, London: Academic Press 1978, 61–76; idem, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social* Psychology, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1981; idem, *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations,* Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1982; John C. Turner, "Towards a Cognitive Redefinition of the Social Group", in: Henri Tajfel (ed.), *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1982, 15–40.

identity" is thus the outcome of a process, whereby an individual's patterns of thoughts, feelings and actions have been attributed to significant group members and the individual has incorporated these as a mental image. Hence, social identity results in an individual's perception of belonging to a social ingroup (e.g., the house of Israel or a group of Christ-believers).

Social identity is constantly "negotiated". It is not a static character, nor the essence, or the "soul" of a group, but an ongoing, relational process of self-understanding and self-categorization, often with a strongly ideological perspective.[5] The process of self-definition and social identity formation implies differentiation from one or more "others" by the drawing up of boundary lines, so-called "othering". The "other", or the enemy, becomes an intrinsic part of a group's self-definition; the authors understand themselves and their readers in terms of the "other", by insisting on what one is not. Difference and similarity reflect each other across a shared boundary; as expressed by Jenkins, "at the boundary we discover what we are in what we are not".[6] Hence, the definition of deviants, antitypes and "outsiders" becomes significant as a way of defining the prototypical member, the normative "insider", and the social identity of the group. This process may be referred to as a form of categorization, a process that is based on stereotyping, whether positively (of group members) or negatively (of non-members).

In contrast to the more individualistic tendencies of modern, Western societies and personality development in those cultures, Bruce Malina and others have drawn attention to the primarily collective character of ancient Greco-Roman societies and the dyadic or group-oriented nature of ancient personalities.[7] In collective cultures such as the ancient Mediterranean, the private self – so dear to contemporary individualism – was considered of little or no interest. In collectivistic cultures, people are socialized into the value that it is not

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[5] Cf. Bengt Holmberg, "Understanding the First Hundred Years of Christian Identity", in: B. Holmberg (ed.), *Exploring Christian Identity* (Wissenschaftlisches Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 226), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2008, 1–32 (29).

[6] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 79.

[7] Bruce J. Malina, *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology,* Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2001, 58–80.

my unique features that are valuable and stable but the features of the social context to which I belong. Malina introduces the concept of "dyadic personality", even arguing that the collectively oriented persons of the Mediterranean world did not find introspection meaningful and interesting, since their identity was confirmed in interaction with others.[8] In studying identity formation in antiquity from the perspective of prayer, in particularly in the Hebrew and early Christian texts, I find it is most helpful to elaborate on social identity theories or approaches. As pointed out above, this is primarily because these texts were written in the Mediterranean collective culture with the purpose of forming the identity of the Jewish and Christian communities.[9] Furthermore, it should be accentuated that the social identity of an ingroup is ordinarily based on common behavior norms and values.[10] As we do things together, we express our collective identity. Common symbols and symbolic acts – for example, as we pray together – generate a sense of shared belonging.[11]

An aspect of this is ritual, what Catherine Bell calls "the social dimensions of religion".[12] Thus, rituals are typical examples of identity forming behavior and actions.[13] According to Jenkins, "The enhance-

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[8] Malina, *New Testament World*, 66–68. This conclusion has however been questioned by several scholars, see Rikard Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer: A Cognitive Perspective on Identity and Behavior Norms in Ephesians* (Linköping Studies in Arts and Science, 493/ Linköping Studies in Identity and Pluralism, 10), Linköping: Linköping University 2009, 59–60.

[9] Admittedly, an intrinsic commensurability between ancient and modern societies cannot be demonstrated. Therefore, we have to apply modern social theories with care, always being aware of the so-called "sociological fallacy," i.e., using modern social theories as though they can be safely transposed across the centuries without further verification; see Edwin A. Judge, "The Social Identity of the First Christians: A Question of Method in Religious History", *Journal of Religious History* 11 (1980), 201–217 (210).

[10] See Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 63–88.

[11] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 111–112.

[12] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions,* Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997, 22.

[13] See Gerhard Rouwhorst, "Identität durch Gebet: Gebetstexte als Zeugen eines jahrhundertelangen Ringens zum Kontinuität und Differenz zwischen Judentum und Christentum", in: A. Gerhards, A. Doeker & P. Ebenbauer (eds.), *Identität durch Gebet:*

ment of experience which ritual offers cognitively and particularly emotionally, plays an important role in the internalisation of identification."[14] For example, in order to express their belief early Christ-believing Jews and Gentiles began to replace traditional ritual actions (e.g., bloody animal sacrifices) by new (bloodless) rites, by the Eucharist, baptism, the laying on of hands, foot-washing and by the holy kiss.[15] There is thus a close relation between belief and ritual. Ritual is generally thought to express beliefs in symbolic ways for the purposes of their continual reaffirmation and inculcation.[16] In this way, ritual is symbolic action, representing what the society holds to be of primary importance, or indeed the very structure of the society. Hence, rituals communicate the fundamental beliefs and values of a society or a group. Rituals are "performative" in the meaning that they create as well as reflect social reality.[17]

Thus, early Christian texts may be examined in light of this performative composite of structure and practice in order to advance our understanding of the performative process behind the formation and maintenance of early Christian identity. For example, rituals of prayer expressed this identity; as the early Christ-believers prayed in the name of Jesus they articulated their particular self-understanding as believers in relation to Jesus Christ.

Prayers in the Letter to the Ephesians

After these preliminary comments, we now turn to the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians. Overall, prayers play a significant role in the argument and structure of the Pauline letters.[18] There is no systematic

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Zur gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion institutionaliserten Betens in Judentum und Christentum, Paderborn: Schöningh 2003, 37–55 (38).

[14] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 150–151.

[15] Gerd Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian* Religion, London: SCM Press 1999, 123–124.

[16] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1992, 182.

[17] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul,* 2nd ed., New Haven: Yale University Press 2003, 142.

[18] Since, in my point of view, it is almost impossible to determine whether the letters of the *corpus Paulinum* were written, partly or completely, by Paul himself or by an amanuensis, a co-worker or a later "Pauline school", I use the term "Pauline" for all thirteen

treatment of the theme of prayer in these letters, but most of them either begin or end with a eulogy, doxology, prayer, thanksgiving or a prayer-wish.[19] In some of the letters, there are sections in the midst of the argument that smoothly turn from exposition into prayer or doxology and then back to exposition, at times making it hard to distinguish between prayer and exposition. Prayers, praises, prayer wishes, prayer reports, expositions and exhortations are repeatedly intermingled.

The central role of prayer in the Pauline theology is well illustrated by the letter to the Ephesians, containing several sections of prayer, possibly even some liturgical material.[20] Some scholars even argue that the first half of the letter (chaps. 1–3) can be taken as an extended thanksgiving.[21] This section is bracketed by a rather elaborated introductory eulogy, 1:3–14, and a concluding doxology, 3:20–21. In between, there are at least two comprehensive thanksgivings and prayers

letters of this *corpus*. Hence, I will focus on how the putative "Pauline" persona works in the letter to the Ephesians.

[19] For a comprehensive list of the prayers on the Pauline letters, see Gordon P. Wiles, *Paul's Intercessory Prayers: The Significance of Intercessory Prayer Passages in the Letters of St. Paul,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1974, 297–302.

[20] There are several terms of prayer in Ephesians: "blessed" (εὐλογητός, 1:3), "praise" (ἔπαινος, 1:6, 12, 14), "thanksgiving" (εὐχαριστία, 5:4), "prayer" (προσευχή, 1:16; 6:18), "request" (δεήσις, 6:18, 18), "to give thanks" (εὐχαριστέω, 1:16; 5:20), and "to pray" (προσεύχομαι, 6:18). According to Chrys C. Caragounis (*The Ephesian Mysterion: Meaning and Content* [Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series, 8], Lund: Gleerup 1977, 36–37), more than 71% of Eph 1–3 is made up of eulogy, prayer and doxology. It must be said, though, that this figure is somewhat speculative, due to the uncertainty on what could be counted as belonging to the prayers and not. Concerning the prayers of Ephesians, Andrew T. Lincoln, (*Ephesians,* Dallas: Word Books 1990, 47, 197) insightfully prefers to call them "prayer-reports", since they are not an exact citation of prayer. However, the sense of these prayers is the same as real prayers, namely to change the situation of the people for whom they are made. Cf. also Christos Karakolis, "Paul Praying in the Post-Pauline Era: A Structural and Theological Study of Paul's Prayer in Eph 3,14–19", in: H. Klein, V. Mihoc & K.-W. Niebuhr (eds.), *Das Gebet im Neuen Testamen* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, 249), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009, 133–163 (161).

[21] So, e.g., Jack T. Sanders, "The Transition from Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962), 348–362 (355–362); Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii, 50.

in 1:15–23 and 3:14–19. Typical for the combined eulogy, thanksgiving and prayer of 1:3–23 is that whereas it is obvious where the eulogy and the prayer start, the ending is not clear-cut.[22] The author moves easily from adoration, 1:3, to exposition, from exposition to thanksgiving, 1:15–16, to prayer, 1:17, including some possible hymnic or credal elements, 1:20–23, and then from prayer back to exposition. Before the author turns to the paraenetical section of chaps. 4–6, he ends with a prayer, 3:14–19, followed by a doxology, 3:20–21. Interestingly, the author seems to intend to begin to pray already in 3:1 ("For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles..."), but the sentence is incomplete (anacoluthon) and instead the argument moves into exposition, 3:2–13. The prayer is taken up again in 3:14 ("For this reason I kneel before the father").[23]

Thus, although I doubt that the first half of Ephesians (chaps. 1–3) as a whole should be taken as an extended thanksgiving and prayer, the theme of prayer permeates the whole section, being introduced with an eulogy in 1:3–14 (a single complex sentence), followed with thanksgiving and prayer in 1:15–23 (a single complex sentence), and then completed with a prayer, 3:14–19 (a single complex sentence), and a doxology, 3:20–21 (a single sentence). Hence, we get the following chiastic outline of eulogy, prayer, doxology and exposition in the first three chapters of the letter:

a) 1:3–14   Eulogy (εὐλογητὸς...)   → Exposition

   b) 1:15–23   Prayer/Thanksgiving (διὰ τοῦτο…)   → Exposition

      c) 2:1–22   Exposition

   b₁) 3:1   Prayer (τούτου χάριν…)   → Exposition

   b₁) 3:14–19   Prayer (τούτου χάριν …)   → Exposition

a₁) 3:20–21   Doxology (τῷ δὲ δυναμένῳ… ἡ δόξα)

Besides these doxologies, prayers and thanksgivings in chaps. 1–3, there are a couple of admonitions to prayer in chaps. 4–6, most notably 5:18–20 and 6:18–20. In these two sections, thanksgiving and prayer are

[22] Sanders ("Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving", 356) even argues that the prayer of 1:15–23 continues "at least as far as 2:10".

[23] If nothing else is said, the translations are from New International Version (NIV 2011).

the result of the work of the Spirit in the believers (see below). In 6:18–20, prayer is depicted as a weapon in the spiritual warfare that the believer is involved in (see below). In this section, the author also asks the recipients to engage in prayer for himself and his mission. Finally, the letter ends with wish-prayer for the recipients' well-being in peace, love and grace, 6:23–24. In this way, prayer frames the whole letter, as it moves from eulogy to prayer wish.

Thus, eulogy, thanksgiving, supplication and doxology play a crucial part in the way the theology of the letter to the Ephesians is spelled out, probably more clearly in this letter than in any of the other Pauline letters. Concluding that the eulogy and prayer sections of Eph 1–3 contain more theologically important words and even more theologically important peculiar words in relation to their comparison referent than do the paraenetic sections, Chrys Caragounis states that the eulogy-prayer sections "ought to be considered as forming the core of the theological content of the Epistle".[24] Hence, the essential part of the theology of Ephesians is, from the beginning to the end, steeped and shaped in the mood of prayer. This raises crucial questions not only about why the author so consistently "prays his theology" but also what this way of conveying his theology means for our understanding of the process of identity formation.

Prayer and Identity Formation in the Letter to the Ephesians

First of all, the prayers of the letter tell us something about the identity of the author. Prayer rituals and formulas are embodied expressions of identity, where the author expresses his understanding of God and himself. The author forms the opening eulogy as a Jewish *berakah* (blessing) with a characteristic Hebrew sentence structure of the Qumran texts.[25] Several scholars have pointed out that the whole section of Eph. 1:3–23 not only reflects the piety of the Hebrew scriptures; in fact, the structure of the passage indicates that its author was

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[24] Caragounis, *Ephesian Mysterion*, 38.

[25] See Reinhard Deichgräber, *Gotteshymnus und Christushymnus in der frühen Christenheit: Untersuchungen zu Form, Sprache und Stil der frühchristlichen Hymnen,* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1967, 72–75; K.G. Kuhn, "The Epistle to the Ephesians in the Light of the Qumran Texts", in: J. Murphy-O'Connor (ed.), *Paul and Qumran: Studies in New Testament Exegesis,* Chicago: Priory Press 1968, 115–131 (116–120).

conditioned by patterns established by the Jewish *Shemoneh Esreh* ("Eighteen Benedictions"), the basic statutory prayer of Judaism in the first century CE.[26] Although we cannot conclude from this alone that the author is of Jewish origin, we can at least say that he is clearly influenced by Jewish thinking and writings.

Secondly, the author is also a Christ-believer, praying to God, the Father, through/in Jesus Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ). We will come back to this way of praying below, but the author's understanding of faith is clearly shaped by his relationship with the risen Christ and his understanding of belonging to the people of God as it is defined through/in Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, although we are not dealing with liturgical texts primarily, as a Christ-believer the author's mind is steeped in the prayer liturgies of the old Jewish traditions and the emerging Christian traditions. As such, the prayers of the author also have a didactic function: his prayers express knowledge of God and knowledge of God is expressed in prayer. In the mind of the author, there is apparently no tension between theological exposition and devotional prayer. His theology is expressed in praise and prayer, and his praise and prayer lead him to expose and expand his theology; prayer and reflection belong together. One may ask what this may say about the author? Quite clearly, in his perspective, the task of theologizing is not limited to theoretical knowledge about God; it is also a matter of experiential knowledge. In the perspective of the author, knowledge of God is not only a matter of intellectual cognition; it is a relational experience: "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better (ἐν ἐπιγνώσει αὐτοῦ)", 1:17b.[27] Apparently, the recipients' knowledge of God should lead them to experience God.

Most importantly, the author is engaged in the formation and

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[26] E.g., Caragounis, *Ephesian Mysterion*, 39–40; Richard N. Longenecker, "Prayer in the Pauline Letters", in: R.N. Longenecker (ed.), *Into God's Presence: Prayer in the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2001, 201–223 (214).

[27] With genitive, the expression ἐπιγνώσις τοῦ θεοῦ carries the meaning of intimate knowledge of God; cf. Prov. 2:5; Hos. 4:1; Col. 1:9–10; 2 Pet. 1:2–3. See Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2003, 258–259.

reinforcement of the social identity of the Christian community that he is addressing. The author addresses a seemingly insignificant and marginalized group of Gentile Christ-believers, 2:11–13; 3:1; 4:17, who are in need of a strong affirmation and ingroup identity. Accordingly, the letter of Ephesians as a whole continually serves to affirm them in their new faith. In his well-argued thesis about social identity formation in Ephesians, Rickard Roitto states: "The purpose of the letter as a whole is to inspire the recipients to behave according to their identity in Christ, with a particular interest in ethnic relations."[28] The author wants to reaffirm the readers' new self-understanding and social identity. Elaborating on this idea in First Corinthians, Richard Hays calls this process "the conversion of imagination", i.e., an imaginative paradigm shift where the readers understand their identity anew in perspective of the gospel of Jesus Christ.[29] In a similar way, the author of the letter to the Ephesians wants his readers to understand what it means to believe in Christ and to live their lives in accordance with this new identity in Christ.

In this process of shaping the self-understanding of the readers, the language of worship serves a significant didactic and paraenetic role.[30] According to Andrew Lincoln, the language of worship enables the author "to reinforce the perspectives and values he and his readers already share and in the process touch and build upon their religious experience and emotions".[31] Furthermore, in doing so, the author "attempts both to reinforce the common values which establish his readers' identity as Gentile Christ-believers who belong to the Church and to persuade them to change behavior to that which is more appropriate to such an identity".[32]

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[28] Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 148.

[29] Richard B. Hays, *The Conversion of Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture,* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2005, 5–6.

[30] Peter T. O'Brien points out the didactic function and the paraenetical purpose of the introductory thanksgivings in the Pauline letters; see his *Introductory Thanksgivings in the Letters of* Paul (Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 49), Leiden: Brill 1977, 262–263. Cf. also Caragounis (*Ephesian Mysterion*, 55), concluding that "the function of both Eulogy and prayer is ultimately instructive".

[31] Andrew T. Lincoln & A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Theology of the Later Pauline Epistles* (New Testament Theology), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993, 143.

[32] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii–lxxix; cf. lxxxvi.

In the following, I will elaborate on the theme of identity formation from the perspective of ethnicity, prototypicality and narrativity.

Ethnicity, Prayer and Identity

In the process of forming and defining social groups, the notion of "identity" is closely related to the complex idea of "ethnicity". As has been pointed out, the knowledge of one's membership of a social group, together with the value and significance that is attached to this membership, constitutes the "social identity" of its subject. Jonathan Hall argues that the ethnic group in this sense is a social, rather than a biological, category; it is defined by socially and discursively constructed criteria rather than by physical indices.[33] Accordingly, Hall defines an ethnic group "as a social collectivity whose members are united by their subscription to a putative belief in shared descent and to an association with a primordial homeland".[34] The ethnic identity of a group becomes particularly salient when confronted with other groups; in fact, it can be said that an ethnic group is made by its boundaries. Any ethnic group that gives itself a name is implicitly or explicitly naming itself in relation to, and/or in opposition to, some other name or group. It claims that its members are not the members of some other group, and it asserts that its members constitute an "us" versus the members of other groups, who constitute "them".[35] Thus, ethnic identity can only be constituted by opposition to other ethnic identities. However, it is not the boundary itself that makes the ethnic group; it is the ethnic group that makes the boundary, thereby articulating the share of its members in a sense of common origin, a distinctive history and destiny, and in a collective uniqueness and solidarity.

Ancient Mediterranean culture was clearly ethnocentric; people were corporately defined in relation to other groups of people, particularly in relation to other ethnic groups. For example, Jewish notions

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[33] See Jonathan M. Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997, 32–33.

[34] Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 36.

[35] Cf. Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Group and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*, Bergen: Universitets Forlaget 1969, 14.

of ethnicity were shaped, articulated and reinforced particularly during centuries of exile, oppression and dispersion. "Jew" is predominantly the terminology used by the outsiders, and when it appears as a self-designation, it does so in contexts that speak of dealings with outsiders.[36] By their minds and manners the Jews erected a boundary between themselves and the rest of humanity, the non-Jews (i.e., "the Gentiles"). At the core of Jewish Diaspora, identity was found in the notion of shared ethnicity or in the ethnic bond, expressed in the combination of ancestry *and* custom.

Although the early Christian movement was not ethnically defined, the formation of early Christian identity was a process in constant dialogue and negotiation with Jewish identity. An important aspect of this identity formation can be found in the prayers of second Temple Judaism and early Christianity. The analysis presented in the monograph *Identität durch Gebet* (2003) addresses identity and prayer more or less exclusively vis-a-vis the Jewish background of the emerging Christian movement. The editors rightly say,

> Im Blick auf den Differenzierungprozess zwischen jüdischer und christlicher Identität kommt ein wichtiger Aspekt hinzu, insofern es sich nicht um die Herausbildung eines völlig neuen religiösen Selbstverständnisses handelt, sondern um eine auf gemeinsamen Fundamenten wachsende Differenz zwischen jüdischem und christlichem Gottesglauben ... Gebetstexte gehören zu den zentralen und deutlichsten Zeugnissen dieser vielsichtigen und komplexen Differenzierungsgeschichte.[37]

Accordingly, this analysis focuses on issues of continuity and discontinuity between Jewish and early Christian prayers and liturgy: How did Jews and Christians pray? Where is the continuity/discontinuity? How do the prayers of these groups define themselves in relation to God?

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[36] See E.J. Bickerman, *The Jews in the Greek Age,* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1988, 23–29.

[37] Albert Gerhards, Andrea Doeker & Peter Ebenbauer (eds.), *Identität Durch Gebet: Zur Gemeinschaftsbildenden Funktion Institutionaliserten Betens in Judentum und Christentum* (Studien zu Judentum und Christentum, 534), Paderborn: Schöningh 2003, 13–14.

The reason why some prayers were collected and kept in the history of the Jewish community and of the Christian community is that prayers expressed who the believers understood themselves to be. According to Jacob Neusner, rabbinic literature "was created not only to chronicle the past but to promote and justify the world-view of those responsible for its redaction".[38] Prayer may thus express a sense of belonging to the people of God. This is, for example, a common feature of the prayers of Psalms: prayers shaped the national identity of Israel as the people of God, e.g., Ps. 46, 104–107. This is also an important aspect of early Christian prayers. For example, early Christ-believers used the Jewish *berakoth*-prayers (blessings) as a model for their eulogies and prayers, e.g., Luke 1:68; Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3. Fundamental in these prayers are the self-understanding of the Christ-believing community as the true people of God.

The formation of early Christian identity was a prolonged process of defining ethnicity in constant dialogue with Jewish identity specifically but also with Gentile/pagan identity generally. Turning to the letter of Ephesians, the author takes part in this ongoing process and gives his specific contribution. He constantly moves in the area of defining the recipients' understanding of ethnicity. The letter is structured on the theme of belonging, either belonging to the ingroup or belonging to the outgroup. The recipients belong to the ingroup and the non-believing Gentiles belong to the outgroup. In the letter opening and in the introductory *berakah*, the author makes clear that the readers belong to the ingroup of the people of God: they are "God's holy people", 1:1, "chosen", "predestined" and "adopted", 1:4–5, 11. In the *berakah*, this belonging is marked by the author as he shifts from first person plural ("we") to second person plural ("you also"), and then back to first plural ("our"), 1:12–14; "also you (καὶ ὑμεῖς) were included in Christ", 1:13, i.e., belong to the ingroup of believers. This also serves as a reminder that the author belonged to this group before his recipients, thus placing them in a subordinate client-relationship to himself, the patron. In the following prayer, the author shifts from second plural ("you") to an inclusive first plural ("us"), 1:18–19. The readers are depicted as God's inheritance as they consti-

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[38] Quote in Paul F. Bradshaw, "Parallels Between Early Jewish and Christian Prayers", in: A. Gerhards *et al.* (eds.), *Identität durch Gebet*, 21–36 (23).

tute the people of God, 1:18. In the concluding prayer and doxology, he changes from second plural ("you") to first plural ("us"), 3:19–20. Apparently, the author wants to include the recipients in the ingroup of "we"/"us".

In the argument as a whole, this inclusion of the recipients is made clear in two ways. First, the distinction between "you" and "we" marks a clear line between "then" and "now", between the recipients' former lives and their lives in the present, 2:1–3; 4:17–24. There is a clear contrast in the letter between the recipients "past" (πότε), 2:2, 3, 11, 13; 5:8, and their present status. Formerly, as unbelieving Gentiles, they belonged to the outgroup but now they belong to the ingroup. Once, they were "foreigners and strangers", 2:19, but now they belong to ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ, the true people of God, 3:10. This way of presenting their lives in temporal terms also creates definite boundary markers, serving to reaffirm their new, true identity in the present in contrast to their old identity.

Secondly, non-believing, pagan Gentiles are clearly depicted as members of the deviating outgroup. In the distinction between "you" and "we" the author makes clear that that the recipients once belonged to the outgroup but now they belong to the ingroup, i.e., being among those that belong to the covenant of Israel, "the commonwealth of Israel" (ἡ πολιτεία τοῦ Ἰσραὴλ), 2:12. Once, the recipients also were "Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' ... separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world." This non-status is now changed in Christ: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ", 2:11–13.

The letter to the Ephesians demonstrates that at the time of writing issues concerning the definition and self-understanding of a Gentile Christian movement versus Jewish identity were certainly matters of concern in western Minor Asia.[39] It is, however, not quite clear how the

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[39] See Werner Thiessen, *Christen in Ephesus: Die historische und theologische Situation in vorpaulinischer und paulinischer Zeit und zur Zeit der Apostelgeschichte und der Pastoralbriefe* (Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter, 12), Tübingen: Francke Verlag 1995, 347–350. I have demonstrated elsewhere that issues relating to the process of the "parting of the ways" were under debate in all the texts that relate to the city of Ephesus

author defines the relation between Israel and "the church" in 2:11–13.[40] Whatever our final explanation of this relation will be, it seems obvious that matters concerning the Law and Law-observance were not a major issue in perspective of the author. If there had been Law-observant Jews in the community, the role of the Law in relation to Gentile believers would most likely have been a matter of dispute, at least to some extent. Interestingly, the author redefines the significance of Israel's identity marker number one, the circumcision, 2:11. In the long run, this would also imply a redefinition of true membership in Israel, not only creating a sub-group within Israel but a new group outside Israel. This suggests to me that the author is in a process of redefining the meaning of the very term "Israel".

Also the section of 3:2–13, a section framed by the author's intention to pray in 3:1 and 3:14, is spelled out from a perspective of belonging to the ingroup or the outgroup. As in the two previous chapters, the readers are included in the ingroup by the use of "you" and "we". The "mystery of the gospel" is that the Gentiles are "heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus", 3:6. Outsiders are thus made into insiders. As a result, the author admonishes his readers: "In him and through faith in him *we* may approach God with freedom and confidence", 3:12 (italics mine). The author completes his argument by approaching God in prayer together with his readers: "For this reason I kneel before the Father ... I pray that ... he may strengthen you", 3:14, 16.

The sharp contrast between the ingroup of Gentile and Jewish Christ-believers together in Christ and the outgroup of deviating non-believing, Gentiles (and Jews?) thus functions in several ways. Roitto suggests at least three; first, this contrast increases the distinctiveness

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in the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century CE. See Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (Wissenschaftlisches Untersuchung zum Neuen Testament, 242), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2009, 57–136.

[40] It is not my intention to discuss this in further detail here. For this, see Lincoln, *Ephesians*, xciii; Lincoln & Wedderburn, *Theology*, 107, 133–134; Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, vol. 1 (Anchor Bible, 34), Garden City: Doubleday 1974, 269; Rudolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark 1991, 106–107, 111, 126; Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 181–193.

and the self-esteem of the group; secondly, it inspires the recipients not to feel committed to non-believing Gentiles but rather to the identity in Christ, and, thirdly, it forms the ideals and norms of the ingroup prototype.[41] To this we now turn.

Prototypicality, Prayer and Identity

A social theory that may help us in elaborating on early Christian identity formation is the sociology of deviance, a particular branch of sociological inquiry into crime and rule breaking. An important aspect in an interactionist perspective of deviance is the categorization or labeling of someone/something as deviant by the ascription of names, titles, abuses, invectives, etc. The purpose of labeling is to cut off the rule-breaker from the rest of the social group by invoking socially shared assumptions that someone thus labeled is essentially and qualitatively different from other members of this group, i.e., an out-sider.[42] The result of this process of deviance is a total change of the identity of the rule-breaker into that of a deviant. As a result, the deviant "acquires a master status derived from the particular area of deviance engaged in".[43] The crucial value for the process of name-calling and boundary-making is that it points to the important function of shaping and enforcing boundaries, of isolating the deviants and of maintaining unity and reinforcing norms and normative value systems within a social group, i.e., the formation of a shared social identity.[44]

Closely related to theories about deviance are social theories about the prototypical ingroup member. Stressing the interaction between personal and social identity, the social identity theorist John Turner argues that a person's self-conception tends to vary in particular group

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[41] Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 177.

[42] Bruce J. Malina and Jerome H. Neyrey, "Conflict in Luke-Acts: Labelling and Deviance Theory", in: J.H. Neyrey (ed.), *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, Peabody: Hendrickson 1991, 97–122 (106–107).

[43] Lloyd K. Pietersen, "Despicable Deviants: Labelling Theory and the Polemic of the Pastorals", *Sociology of Religion* 58:4 (1997), 343–352 (347).

[44] See José M. Marques, Dominic Abrams, Dario Páez & Michael A. Hogg. "Social Categorization, Social Identification, and Rejection of Deviant Group Members", in: M.A. Hogg & R.S. Tindale (eds.), *Blackwell Handbook of Social Psychology: Group Processes*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing 2003, 400–424.

situations, notably by a movement along a continuum from pronounced personal identity at one end of the spectrum to a pronounced social identity at the other. The central idea is that of self-categorization, which means that people define themselves in terms of their membership to particular shared social categories.[45] According to Turner, "there is a depersonalization of the self – a 'cognitive redefinition of the self' – from unique attributes and individual differences to shared category memberships and associated stereotypes".[46] For example, when a member participates in a group activity, he/she tends to depersonalize himself/herself and to think of himself/herself in terms of the other members of the group, or at least in contrast to other groups. Self-categorization as a group member leads people to develop a shared group-level fate and regulates whether or not people conform, and expect others to conform, to the group norms.

In any such categorization process, people tend to exaggerate the differences between the categories (accentuation of intergroup difference) and simultaneously to minimize the differences within the categories (assimilation or intragroup similarity).[47] According to Turner, members of a social group belong together in the sense that they stereotype themselves in order to enhance the sense of identity shared with ingroup members and to accentuate their similarities within the group and the features that bind them together (*intraclass* similarities), while heightening the sense of contrast between themselves and accentuating differences to outgroups (*interclass* differences).[48]

As an image of depersonalization, i.e., when someone stops being preoccupied by personal agendas and becomes concerned with the in-

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[45] John C. Turner, with Michael A. Hogg *et al.*, *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell 1987, 42–43, 49.

[46] John C. Turner, "Some Current Issues in Research on Social Identity and Self-Categorization Theories", in: N. Ellemers, R. Spears and B. Doosje (eds.), *Social Identity: Context, Commitment, Content,* Oxford: Blackwell 1999, 6–34 (11).

[47] See David G. Horrell, "'Becoming Christian': Solidifying Christian Identity and Content", in: A.J. Blasi, J. Duhaime & P.-A. Durcotte (eds.), *Handbook of Early Christianity: Social Sciences Approaches,* Oxford: Altamina Press 2002, 309–335 (312). Cf. Tajfel, *Human Groups*; Henri Tajfel & John C. Turner, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict", in: W.G. Austin & S. Worchel (eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict*, Monterey: Brooks/Cole 1979, 33–47.

[48] So Turner *et al.*, *Rediscovering*, 49.

terests of the group, Turner draws attention to the development of the idea of prototypicality, i.e., to the prototypical group member.[49] Inside the group, members who act and believe like the prototypical group member will be more appreciated, gain a higher status and have more influence on the other members. Those who deviate from the ideals of the group will be less liked and some sort of reprimand (accusations, shame, expulsion, etc.) will be affected if the deviation is large enough.

Turning to the letter of the Ephesians, the author wants to bring the ingroup together by stereotyping others and by reminding them of the single category (beliefs, traditions and norms) that they have in common. In doing so, he forms the idea of the ideal or prototypical group member, seeking to encourage the members of the ingroup to identify with this prototype, thus increasing the cohesion within the group. This process of shaping of the prototypical group-member is clearly spelled out in the prayers of the letter. In what way?

First, the shaping of the notion of the prototypical believer begins already in the introductory eulogy as the author develops the identity that the group members should esteem and value. The eulogy serves to reaffirm the self-understanding of the recipients as chosen and predestined by God for holiness, redeemed and forgiven through the blood of Christ, and filled and sealed by the Holy Spirit, 1:3–14. According to Roitto, the themes mentioned in this eulogy make "the ingroup identity salient and hopefully increases the recipients' sense that their identity is important and valuable".[50] As such, several of the themes in this eulogy set the agenda for the rest of the letter in order to be developed further on.[51]

Secondly, in the concluding prayer of chaps. 1–3, the author points out what is lacking in prototypicality, 3:14–19. By letting the recipients know what the author prays for them, he also signals what is lacking, insufficient or flawed in their appreciation of their faith. The addressees, in Lincoln's terms, "need an improvement in the quality of their lives before God".[52] This prayer thus serves to remind them about their shortcomings so that they will long to become more prototypical.

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[49] Turner *et al.*, *Rediscovering*, 46–47, 79–80.

[50] Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 150.

[51] Cf. O'Brien, "Ephesians I", 509–512.

[52] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii; cf. 201, 219.

Here, the author acts as the prototypical believer and the recipients as the less prototypical believers; he wants his readers ("you") to grow in power, knowledge and love. If they do so, they will become mature believers, "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God", 3:19. As such, they will act as prototypical Christ-believers for the whole group.

Thirdly, in terms of identity formation, the extended thanksgiving and prayer in 1:15–23 has two aims, combining the function of the eulogy in 1:3–14 and of the prayer in 3:14–19. In the thanksgiving, the author affirms the recipients' "faith in the Lord Jesus" and their "love for all God's people", 1:15. The tenor is affirmative; the author wants to "include them, bond with them and make them appreciate their identity".[53] In the subsequent prayer, the author points out that the recipients are lacking spiritual vision, thus accentuating what they need to attain in their lives; they deviate from the ideal believers and they need improvement. Hence, he prays that the recipients may be given "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better", 1:17. In order that they "may know the hope … the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power", 1:18–19, they are in need of enlightened hearts. Thus, the thanksgiving and prayer of 1:15–23 both confirms the prototypical believers and points out what is lacking in their prototypicality.

Fourthly, in the paraenetical section of the letter, chaps. 4–6, the author moves from modeling prayer himself to admonishing his readers to pray. The social identity of an ingroup is ordinarily based on common behavior norms and values. Behavior and customs express collective identity and a sense of shared belonging. Shared rituals, for example, common prayers, are typical examples of such identity forming behavior and actions. In the letter to the Ephesians, particularly in the paraenetical section, the author prepares a cognitive and experiential basis for group behavior based on the idea of self-categorization and prototypicality. Here the author delineates in detail the prototypical behaviors of the Christ-believers.

Prayer is one aspect of this prototypicality. For example, one characteristic sign of the prototypical Christ-believer is thanksgiving: "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ", 5:20. This is set in contrast to the deviant out-

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[53] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, lxxviii, 151.

siders (the antitypes), who are characterized by "obscenity", "foolish talk", "coarse joking", and are lacking in "thanksgiving" (εὐχαριστία), 5:4. The antitype to the ideal believer is here typically used in order to strengthen the solidarity and self-understanding of the ingroup, cf. 4:17–24; 5:1–7. In effect, boundaries are drawn that give concrete markers that distinguish the insider form the outsider.

In 6:18–20, the recipients are encouraged to pray and supplicate. Again, the admonition is set in the context of the in-working power of the Spirit: "pray (προσευχόμενοι) in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers (προσευχῆς) and requests (δεήσεως)", 6:18a. The prototypical believer is depicted as a person of prayer, praying "on all occasions" and "always keeping on praying for all the Lord's people", 6:18b. In the first part of the letter, the author models how to pray for his readers; he ends the letter with presenting himself as a prayer request: "Pray also for me", 6:19. As such, he still continues to model the ideal believer, in particular as he asks the readers to pray that he may declare the gospel "fearlessly, as I should", i.e., as a true representative of Christ and the believing community. Thus, in presenting himself as the ideal believer, the author urges his readers to stick to this ideal, becoming and being prototypical believers themselves.

Narrativity, Prayer and Identity

The social identity theorist Daniel Bar-Tal recognizes that social identity is not solely based on the mere fact of categorization but on "group beliefs" held by the members.[54] Every group nourishes a narrative about who they are, why the group exists and has value. In particular, a common history and narrative could provide a rationale and character to group existence.[55] Narratives tell the group who they are and inspire and motivate behavior. Thereby the narratives articulate that its members share a sense of common origin, a distinctive history, destiny and identity.

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[54] Daniel Bar-Tal, "Group Beliefs as An Expression of Social Identity", in: S. Worchel, J.F. Morales, D. Paez & J.-C. Deschamps (eds.), *Social Identity: International Perspectives*, London: Sage 1998, 93–113 (94). See also Daniel Bar-Tal, *Group Beliefs: A Conception for Analyzing Group Structure, Processes, and Behavior*, New York: Springer 1990.

[55] So Bar-Tal, "Group Beliefs", 112.

Common meta-narratives and stories have deeper structures, which give a social group meaning and self-understanding. The story of Jesus is a typical example of such a story. The narrative of God's saving acts in history and in Jesus Christ was the basic structure of the common group beliefs, which held various clusters of early Christ-believers together, shaping their common social identity.[56] The story of Jesus in history, retold orally and re-enacted and modeled by believers, individually and corporately, shaped the boundary lines of belonging as well as of exclusion, a narrative that would have united some, while others would have been disqualified and excluded.

As it concerns identity and prayer, the old dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi*, reminds us that faith is made visible in prayer. A prayer tells a story – about the one a person prays to (the object) but also about the person who prays (the subject). This is a common feature in the Psalms, where the one praying often tells a story about himself, and then he relates this story to the meta-story of creation, Exodus, or to the general story of the faithfulness and goodness of God, e.g., Ps. 8, 13, 77, 103, 105, 107. The prayers of the New Testament are also frequently based on a narrative, serving to form and reaffirm the identity of the one praying or/and of the ones being prayed for.

Applying this to the letter to the Ephesians, the author gives his addressees a story to identify with. The purpose of this story is to strengthen the ingroup and to shape cohesion, solidarity and unity within this group. In particular, this holds true for the author's prayers as they articulate certain convictions and beliefs that he presupposes he would have in common with his readers. There are a number of significant features of this common narrative.

First, the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians express a distinct triadic shape of belief.[57] The introductory eulogy is typical for the prayers of the letter. The object of praise and glory is "the God and Father",

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[56] Hence, Judith M. Lieu (*Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004, 310–316) proposes that the narrative was the medium through which the first Christ-believers formed their identity.

[57] Although the term "Trinitarian" is commonly used by scholars in describing the theology of Ephesians (e.g., Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 106–108), I deliberately avoid this anachronistic term. In lack of better terminology, I prefer to speak of a triadic pattern of theology in Ephesians.

1:3. Three times in the eulogy the author turns to God in praise, "to the praise of his glory" (εἰς ἔπαινον τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ), 1:6, 12, 14. This address of praise and prayer is typical Jewish in character, where God, the Father, is the original cause and fundamental rationale of the recipients' identity. The address is also elaborated in the prayer of 3:14, "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name". God, the Father, the object of praise in all the prayers, also becomes the subject, being the initiator and administrator of all the blessings that the recipients take part of, 1:3–6; cf. 1:17–20a; 3:14, 19–21.

The address of the prayers is further defined as "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ", 1:3, and "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ", 1:17; cf. "God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ", 1:2; 6:23. This typically binitarian liturgical form has a specifically Christian character, in particular as the God of Israel, to whom the praise is addressed, is known as "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ".[58] Furthermore, the introductory eulogy gets a specific Christian flavor by the repetitive use of expressions like "in Christ" (ἐν Χριστῷ) and "in him" (ἐν αὐτῷ), 1:3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 13. Jesus Christ, the Son, is presented as the agent of God's plan of salvation, 1:7–12, 20b–23; 3:17–19.

There is also a distinctive emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the prayers of the letter. In the third section of the eulogy, 1:13–14, the Spirit is depicted as "a seal" and "a deposit", stressing the present role of the Spirit as guaranteeing the eschatological redemption and inheritance of the believers. In the prayer of 1:17b–18, the Spirit is called "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation", who gives knowledge of God and his work in Jesus Christ, 1:17b–19. In the prayer of 3:14–19, the Spirit is the power that enables the indwelling of Christ in the believers, 3:16–17.

Thus, there is a distinct way in the letter of praying to God, the Father, through/in Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit. Overall, the letter to the Ephesians is well known for its triadic patterns.[59] This is particularly spelled out in the extended prayers. For example, in 3:16–17, the prayer is directed to the Father in order that he may grant the Spirit of power so that Christ may dwell in the believers. In a similar vein, the

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[58] Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 11.

[59] See 1:4–14, 17; 2:18, 22; 3:4–5, 14–17; 4:4–6; 5:18–20. This is particularly articulated by Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 106–110.

author prays, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better", 1:17. We cannot from these verses alone de-lineate the author's specific ontological understanding – the stress is certainly functional – of the relation between the Father, the Son and the Spirit. So much can be said, though, that this triadic way of praying differs clearly from the typical Jewish way of praying and marks a distinct Jewish-Christian identity of the author. His way of talking about the work of the Father, the Son and the Spirit is central to his narrative understanding of belief.

Secondly, the prayers of the letter to the Ephesians present the reci-pients as partakers in the story of God in Christ. Concerning the overall narrative of Ephesians, Roitto states, "In Ephesians, the narrative rationale of the group is that God has chosen them and paved way for their identity through the Christ-event".[60] In the prayers, this is particularly demonstrated in the way the author draws his readers into the narrative of God's grand plan of salvation in Jesus Christ and through the Spirit. In the eulogy, the readers are depicted as "chosen", "predestined", "adopted" by God, the Father, "redeemed" and "forgiven" in Jesus Christ, and "marked with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit", 1:3–14. In a similar way, the prayer of 1:15–23, aims to set the readers in the story of God in Christ through the Spirit; it is asked that they be given the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in order that they may see the work of God in Christ, the hope, riches and power "for us who believe". This prayer continually focuses on the readers' partaking in the work of God, particularly captured in the role of the believing community in God's grand story, 1:22–23. The author prays that his readers should see the lordship of Christ and adjust their lives in accordance to this, 1:9–10, 17–23; 4:17. The same goes for the prayer of 3:14–19; the readers are asked to get a grasp of "how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ" and "the fullness of God". In the following doxology, 3:20–21, the author makes clear that this has been revealed by God not only in Jesus Christ but also in the community of Christ-believers. Thus, the readers are partakers in the grand story of God; this is how they should understand their new identity in Jesus Christ.

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[60] Roitto, *Behaving as a Christ-Believer*, 167.

This triadic way of presenting the theological narrative of Ephesians is also set in a temporal pattern of past, present and future. According to Charles Taylor, "in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going".[61] This time-based aspect of identity formation is particularly salient in the introductory eulogy. The author begins to establish the readers' self-understanding in the past work of God, the Father, who has blessed, chosen and predestined the believers, 1:3–6, who has redeemed and forgiven them through the Son, 1:7–8, and who has granted them the Spirit, 1:13–14. In the present, they live in a unique relationship to God as adopted sons and with the Spirit as a seal and deposit, while they are awaiting the final redemption and all-embracing lordship of Jesus Christ, 1:9–10, 14. Also the prayers of 1:15–23 and 3:14–19 can be read in similar temporal categories. Here, the eschatological perspective serves to explain how the believing community, which is already the fullness of Christ, 1:23, still needs to be filled and attain the fullness of God/Christ, 3:19; cf. 4:11–16.

Thirdly, the prayers of Ephesians anticipate the behavioral response to the story of God in Christ. Almost all of the major behavioral motives of the prayers of 1:3–3:21 are further developed in the paraenetical section of 4:1–6:20; for example, the theme of love, unity, holiness, fullness and forgiveness. Thus, the prayers prescribe the positive values and norms of the ingroup and, in turn, reinforce the expected behavioral response that is expected to belong to the core social identity of the group.

The author presents himself as exemplary in relation to God, a *typos* that his readers also should imitate (*imitatio*) in their new way of living. For example, the author prays that his readers may gain knowledge of God's dealings in Christ, 1:17–18. This specific Christian knowledge is, however, not a goal in itself; greater is "the love of Christ ... that surpasses knowledge", 3:18–19. To know the love of Christ involves being known by God and being filled by his love in Christ. This central theme of love is especially picked up in the paraenetical part of the letter where the believers are urged to "walk in the way of love", 5:1, and "speak the truth in love", 4:15; cf. 4:2; 5:25, 28,

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[61] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989, 47.

33. Thus, love becomes the primary ethical "identity descriptor" of the group of Christ-believers.[62]

Concluding Remarks

This article has argued that prayers may function as a powerful vehicle to express and affirm personal and social identity. In praying with and for the believers, the author of Ephesians draws his readers into an understanding of themselves that bonds them not only with the author but also with "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ". In praying for and with his readers, the author brings them before God; in Jesus Christ Jews and Gentiles together have "access to the Father by one Spirit", 2:18. In fact, being united in Christ they have their social identity as a dwelling place of God: "In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit", 2:21–22. Depicting the believers in such specific terminology serves as a strong affirmation of the idea that offering prayers and praise to God belongs to the core identity of the prototypical community of Christ-believers.

Thus, the language of prayer has both a vertical and horizontal function. As I hope to have demonstrated, prayer is used as an effective tool in the task of affirming and forming the social identify of the believing community in the letter to the Ephesians. The prayers of the letter reveal that the author believes that a strong ingroup identity can be achieved through a revitalization of their relationship to and knowledge of God. Being used in this way, the language of prayer could even be a more dynamic vehicle in the process of forming and reinforcing identity than argumentative or paraenetical texts. This has to do with the power of rituals in identity formation. As pointed out by the sociologist Richard Jenkins, "The enhancement of experience which ritual offers cognitively and particularly emotionally, plays an important role in the internalisation of identification."[63] Prayer as a

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[62] Cf. Samuel Byrskog, "Ephesians 4:1–6: Paraenesis and Identity Formation", in: M. Wolter (ed.), *Ethik als angewandte Ekklesiologie: Der Brief an die Epheser*, Rome: 'Benedictina' Publishing 2005, 109–138 (138).

[63] Jenkins, *Social Identity*, 150–151.

religious ritual serves not only to convey a rational understanding of God but also, somehow, to internalize this understanding, intending to create a cognitive and affective experience of God. In praying his theology, the author of Ephesians sets his teaching not only in a two-part relation of author – addressees but in a three-part relation of author – addressees – God, the Father. In this way, the addressees are challenged to read and apprehend their identity in a spirit of reverence and awe.