

A Socio-Cultural Model of Judean Ethnicity

Introduction

DENNIS DULING (2005) recently developed a Socio-Cultural Model of Ethnicity (see pp. 93–98 below). This model serves as a guide in two ways: 1) it lists what cultural features to look out for and 2) defines the processes that are behind ethnic identity formation. Both aspects illuminate our understanding of what a particular ethnic identity may involve. This chapter is dedicated to adapting Duling's generic model in order for it to serve as a guide when assigning content to *Judean* ethnic identity. In other words, the model must help us answer: What did it mean, broadly speaking, to be Judean? This model, it is suggested here, will help in some way as to what "common Judeanism" involved. This "common Judeanism" serves as a point of centre so to speak, to which any form of deviance or differentiation can be compared (e.g., the Pharisees, Essenes, and Sadducees; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.11–25; *War* 2.119–66). In particular, the model can also help us understand Messianist Judean identity, as it developed, was lived out and expressed by the early followers of Jesus. Later on, we will specifically concentrate on the community presupposed by Q. So as already intimated, a model of Judean ethnicity can be helpful on various levels. It can be used as a guide for understanding mainstream or common Judean ethnic identity, while it may also be used to investigate or compare the ethnic identity of various forms sectarian Judeanism.

Attempts have already been made to help define what was essential to Judeanism. At first we will have a look at Sanders' "covenantal nomism," and then at Dunn's "four pillars of Second Temple Judaism/Judeanism." In what is to follow the aim will be to demonstrate that

although both these approaches tell us a lot about Judeanism, they do not tell us everything about what it meant to be a Judean. They in particular lack the insights of ethnicity theory (which will be discussed later) and generally focus more on the “religious” aspects, while other aspects of ethnic identity—such as *land, kinship, myths of common ancestry, and shared “historical” memories*—are not given the same prominence it deserves.

Covenantal Nomism

Arguably, Sanders’ notion of covenantal nomism has revolutionized our understanding of Palestinian “Judaism” (hereafter “Judeanism”). 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. Sanders (1992:262) explains that “covenant” stands for God’s grace in election (“getting in”), and “nomism” stands for the requirement of obedience to the law (“staying in”). Otherwise, Sanders explains covenantal nomism as follows: “(1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God’s promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement, and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God’s mercy belong to the group which will be saved.” He adds: “An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be God’s mercy rather than human achievement” (Sanders 1977:422). Importantly, the emphasis is on *maintaining* your covenant relationship with God—obedience to the Law was not thought of as a means 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)

Viewed from the perspective of ethnic identity, we can paraphrase/modify the above quote as follows: Covenantal nomism is the view that one's place in God's plan is established on the basis of the covenant, a covenant which in itself established 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.

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

It deals with the theological understanding of the constitution of God's people: how they get that way, how they stay that way. In terms of [Judeanism] as a religion, this leaves out a lot of details of what people did, though it requires analysis of why they thought that they *should* do what they did . . . What it covers . . . is crucial for understanding [Judeanism], which is a national religion and way of life, focused on the God of Israel and the people of Israel: God called them; being [Judean] consists of responding to that call. (Sanders 1992:262–63; emphasis original)

From all of the above we can infer that covenantal nomism involves the existence of a two-way relationship. God called a particular people and in that process established a constitution or charter (= covenant as expressed through the Torah) of Judean ethnic identity. The people elected must respond to that call, and so give expression to that ethnic identity through obedience to the constitution. Differently put, God established Judean ethnic identity. A group of people respond(ed) by being Judean, in whatever way was deemed necessary. For our purposes therefore it seems appropriate to redefine covenantal nomism as an *ethnic descriptor*. Seen from this view, we can speak of covenantal nomism as defining a "common Judeanism," where its religious or theological

aspects become part of a greater whole. This also avoids the pitfall of “Judaisms/Judeanisms.” Thus covenantal nomism, when redefined as an ethnic descriptor, can be understood as encapsulating the Judean “symbolic universe,” containing more or less everything that typified Judean ethnic identity. Covenantal nomism was the Judean social construction of reality, a reality that took shape over several centuries of development. In the chapters to follow the focus will be on how covenantal nomism *as an ethnic identity* was interpreted and understood and what the “popular opinion” dictated in terms of how it should be given expression in every day life. The point is this: the redefined covenantal nomism as outlined above called into being, contained, shaped and defined Judean ethnicity. Also, on an anthropological and more concrete level, covenantal nomism *is* Judean ethnic identity—certain people translated that symbolic universe into everyday living. For the present purposes redefined covenantal nomism and Judean ethnicity are virtually synonymous in meaning.

Covenantal Nomism as a “Symbolic Universe”

The notion of the “symbolic universe” is drawing on the insights of Berger & Luckmann (1966). To begin with, human beings exist within a social order, but it is a result of human production in the course of ongoing human externalization. This process occurs within the context of social interaction. All human activity is subject to habitualization. Habitualized 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 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 1966:60)

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 1966:61). Thus externalization and objectification is followed by internalization. “*Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product*” (Berger & Luckmann 1966:61; 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 socialization and so becomes internalized as subjective reality.

Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men. Objectification is the attainment by the products of this activity (again both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its original producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves. Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectification that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that a man is a product of society. (Berger 1973:14)

The institutional order requires legitimation if it is to be transmitted to a new generation. “Legitimation not only tells the individual why he *should* perform one action and not another; it also tells him why things *are* what they are. In other words, ‘knowledge’ precedes ‘values’ in the legitimation of institutions” (Berger & Luckmann 1966:94; 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 1966:96; 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 1966:96).

The commonalities between the redefined notion of covenantal nomism *as an ethnic identity* and the idea behind the symbolic universe can immediately be perceived. Judeanism was quite distinct in its worldview. 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 secularization, 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* 2.170–73). For Judeans, there was no differentiation between "ritual" and "ethics," between religious, social and economic dynamics of life, as God gave all the commandments and obedience to his will required equal obedience to all. For example, the treatment of one's neighbor¹ was just as important as eating food accidentally that should have gone to the priest or altar (cf. Sanders 1992:194–95). When seen within the context of covenantal nomism as a symbolic universe, for some Roman rule (and control of the temple hierarchy) was intolerable; others accepted it as long as the temple rites were not interfered with beyond a reasonable point.

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 1966:98). For first-century Palestinian Judeanism, the character of its symbolic universe was primarily shaped by Israel's relationship with the *land*. They lost the land through the Babylonian exile. They regained it, but only partially, as they remained under foreign domination for most of their history. But it was the Babylonian exile that provided the background for the shaping of the Torah, the primary reference for the Judean symbolic universe. The land was theirs as a perpetual inheritance, but it was the sins of Israel that caused them to lose control of it. Obedience and holiness was required, and along with hopes of restoration, as given through the prophets, it existed as important parts of that universe. The Judean symbolic universe could only become complete by Israel's obedience, restoration and ownership of the land.

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

The symbolic universe is also nomic, or ordering in character. Everything is placed into its proper place, which also facilitates the formation of individual identity. This identity is dependant on the person's relationship with significant others, and the identity "is ultimately legitimated by placing it within the context of a symbolic universe" (Berger & Luckmann 1966:100). 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 1966:102). Now in Judean society, this hierarchy of being was objectified in things such as the patriarchal family (cf. Guijarro 2001) and the purity order which was symbolized 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. Berger & Luckmann (1966:103) also explain that the

symbolic universe also orders history. It locates all collective events in a cohesive unity that includes past, present and future. With regard to the past, it establishes a "memory" that is shared by all the individuals socialized within the collectivity. With regard to the future, it establishes a common frame of reference for the projection of individual actions. Thus the symbolic universe links men with their predecessors and their successors in a meaningful totality . . . All the members of a society can now conceive of themselves as *belonging* to a meaningful universe, which was there before they were born and will be there after they die (emphasis original).

Naturally, once symbolic universes come into being, they require to be maintained. Various universe-maintenance procedures can be used. This is especially necessary when a society is confronted with another society with its own history. Here an alternative symbolic universe comes into focus, with its own official traditions, which may judge your own universe as ignorant, mad or the like. "The alternative universe presented by the other society must be met with the best possible reasons for the superiority of one's own" (Berger & Luckmann 1966:108). As we

shall see in the next chapter, this is especially true of Judeanism in its confrontation with Hellenism. Universe-maintenance can employ mythology, or more developed mythologies develop into more systematic theologies—Judeanism case in point!

Universe-maintenance also employs therapy and nihilation.

Therapy entails the application of conceptual machinery to ensure that actual or potential deviants stay within the institutionalized definitions of reality, or, in other words, to prevent the ‘inhabitants’ of a given universe from ‘emigrating’ . . . This requires a body of knowledge that includes a theory of deviance, a diagnostic apparatus, and a conceptual system for the ‘cure of souls.’ (Berger & Luckmann 1966:113)

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. In this manner Judeans could maintain their position within the covenant, or the Judean symbolic universe. “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 1966:114). There are two ways in which this can be done. First, the phenomena are afforded a negative ontological status. It is regarded as inferior and should not be taken seriously. Second, deviant phenomena are grappled with theoretically in terms of concepts belonging to your own universe. Both these examples of nihilation are evident in Judeanism and are mutually complimentary. Gentile ways are regarded as inferior. They are guilty of idolatry and sexual immorality, in short, of “lawlessness.” They are not part of the Judean symbolic universe, not divinely elected, ignorant of God’s law, impure,² and in some texts described as bereft of the truth.

The last element of the symbolic universe we will discuss here is its maintenance by “experts.” As more complex forms of knowledge appear, “they claim ultimate jurisdiction over that stock of knowledge in its totality.” These universal experts “claim to know the ultimate significance of what everybody knows and does” (Berger & Luckmann 1966:117). Now one of the consequences “is a strengthening of traditionalism in the institutionalized actions thus legitimated, that is, a strengthening of

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

the inherent tendency of institutionalization toward inertia" (Berger & Luckmann 1966:117). The Judean parallel is obvious in the existence of the priesthood and their control of the temple and scribal training in the law. Other "expert groups" also appeared, such as the Pharisees and Essenes for example.

The above was to illustrate how easily the redefined understanding of covenantal nomism can be understood as the Judean symbolic universe. It was the Judean social construction of reality that had to be maintained in the face of historical developments and Hellenistic and Roman ideology. Covenantal nomism was therefore also the legitimization of Judean ethnic identity, where all Judean institutions, practices and beliefs were placed within the context of an all-embracing frame of reference. Within this universe people were told why they *should* do the things they did and why things *are* what they are. 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.

The Four Pillars of Second Temple Judeanism

Another attempt at establishing a "common Judeanism," or to identify what was essential to Judeanism, was formulated by Dunn. Dunn (2003:281) takes into account the factionalism that existed in first-century Judeanism, but he also says "there was a common foundation of practice and belief which constituted the . . . common factors unifying all the different particular forms of first-century [Judeanism] and on which they were built." Dunn (1991:18–36; 2003:287–92) in particular speaks, using our own terminology, of the "four pillars of Second Temple Judeanism." These include the temple, God, election, and Torah, although Dunn admits that this is not a complete characterization of Judeanism. Here follows Dunn's proposal in abbreviated form.

Temple

The land of Israel was focused in the temple. Dunn (2003:287) maintains that there "can be no doubt that the temple was the central focus of Israel's national and religious life prior to its destruction in 70 CE. Judea was a temple state." The temple was 1) a *political* center, the basis for the high priest and high priestly families; 2) an *economic* center, where the daily sacrifices and offerings were made and which required the payment of the annual temple tax. It was also the focal point of the

three main pilgrimage festivals; and 3) a *religious* center, the place where God had chosen to put his name, the focal point for an encounter between the divine and the human, as well as the sacrificial cult on which human well-being and salvation depended (Dunn 1991:31–35). As Dunn (2003:287) observes, it was “a primary identity marker of Israel the covenant people.” In the Roman period “Jew,” or rather Judean, was as much a religious identifier as an ethnic identifier since it focused identity in Judea, the state that depended on the status of Jerusalem as the location of the temple. The disputes and renunciations relating to the temple attest to its importance on how it should function correctly.

God

“Belief in God,” Dunn (2003:288) explains, “as one and in God’s un-image-ableness was certainly fundamental to the first-century [Judean].” The *Shema* was probably said by most Judeans on a regular basis (Deut 6:4, 7) testifying to the unity of God (*Ant.* 5.1, 27, 112). Little of this is apparent upon the surface of late Second Temple Judeanism simply because it was not a matter for controversy and so could be taken for granted. Judeans were exclusive monotheists and Judean literature gives testimony of strong attacks on pagan, or rather Gentile idolatry (e.g., WisSol 11–15; *Sib. Or.* 3:8–45). We need to recall Josephus’ report of violent reaction from the people when Pilate brought in standards regarded as idolatrous into Jerusalem (*Ant.* 18.55–59) and the attempt of Caligula to have a statue of himself set up within the temple (*Ant.* 18.261–72).

Election

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

Election became a central category of self-definition in the post-exilic period onwards (Ezra 9–10). It was the foundational motivation to resist Hellenistic syncretism in the Maccabean crisis, and “it con-

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

Torah

The Torah was the focus of the covenant. The Torah (the first five books of Moses) had been given to Israel as a mark of God's favor and choice of Israel. It was an integral part of God's covenant with Israel, to show its people how to live as the people of God (Deuteronomy), or to put it in another way, the commandments spell out Israel's covenant obligations. They were the people of the law/covenant, an identity that was at stake during the Maccabean crisis (1 Macc 1:57; 2:27, 50; 2 Macc 1:2–4; 2:21–22; 5:15; 13:14). So understandably the watchword for national resistance during that period was "zeal for the law" (1 Macc 2:26–27, 50, 58; 2 Macc 4:2; 7:2, 9, 11, 37; 8:21). So too in the period following the Maccabean crisis, the close relationship between election, covenant and law remained a fundamental theme of Judean self-understanding (Sir 17:11–17; 39:8; *Jub.* 1:4–5; 2:21; 6:4–16; 15; 22:15–16; 23:19; *Pss. Sol.* 10:4; *L.A.B.* 9:7–8; 23:10; 30:2; 35:2–3). So generally there was a common pattern of "covenantal nomism" characteristic of Judeanism in our period (Dunn 1991:24–25).

Because of the law, great emphasis was placed on Israel's *distinctiveness* as a chosen people. It was also the Torah that served as the boundary separating Israel from other nations (*Jub.* 22:16; *Let. Aris.*

139, 142; Philo, *Moses* 1.278) by its insistence on the maintenance of the purity code (Lev 20:24–26; cf. Dan 1:8–16)—it served as an “identity marker.” The Gentiles were “without the law, outside the law,” and so were equated with being “sinners” (1 Macc 2:44, 48; Tob 13:6 [LXX 8]; *Jub.* 23:23–4; *Pss. Sol.* 1:1; 2:1–2; 17:22–5). With this sense of distinctiveness came a sense of *privilege*; the Judeans were the nation specially chosen by God and were favored by the gift of the covenant and law. With this came a somewhat exaggerated pride, as Gentiles were attracted to Judean customs (Philo, *Moses* 2.17–25; Josephus, *Apion* 2.277–286) and the law was understood to be the embodiment of divine Wisdom. This sense of privilege gave rise to perplexity as *4 Ezra* (3:28–36; 4:23–4; 5:23–30; 6:55–9) could not understand how God can spare the sinful nations yet be so harsh with his law-keeping people (Dunn 1991:25–28).

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

Judean Customs as Covenantal Praxis

In addition to the four pillars discussed above, it is to Dunn’s credit that he realized the importance of customs or ritual practices to Judean self-understanding. In his studies on Paul’s attitude towards the Law in Galatians, Dunn has drawn on Sanders’ notion of covenantal nomism and developed what is known now as a “new perspective.” Paul, as Dunn explains, was not opposing a legalistic works-righteousness (e.g., see Ridderbos 1975:139–40) when some Judean Messianists insisted on Gentiles undergoing circumcision or when they withdrew from having table-fellowship with them (Gal 2). Paul was opposing specific covenant works, or “works of the law,” namely circumcision and food

laws. Why? Because “*these observances were widely regarded as characteristically and distinctively [Judean]*”. Writers like Petronius,³ Plutarch,⁴ Tacitus⁵ and Juvenal⁶ took it for granted that, in particular, circumcision, abstention from pork, and the Sabbath, were observances which marked out the practitioners as [Judeans], or as people who were very attracted to [Judean] ways” (Dunn 1990:191–92; emphasis original). Dunn (1990:192) continues in that

these observances in particular functioned as identity markers, they served to identify their practitioners as [Judean] in the eyes of the wider public, they were peculiar rites which marked out the [Judeans] as that particular people . . . These identity markers identified [Judeanness] because they were seen by the [Judeans] themselves as fundamental observances of the covenant. They functioned as badges of covenant membership.⁷

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

3. Cf. Petronius, *Satyricon* 102.14; *Fragmenta* 37 on circumcision.

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

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

6. Cf. Juvenal (*Sat.* 6.160; 14.98) on abstention from pork and on the Sabbath (*Sat.* 14.96–106).

7. Smiles (2002) has criticized Dunn’s understanding of the Judean “zeal” for the Law in that he places too much emphasis on “Israel’s distinctiveness” and the Law’s social function as an “identity” and “boundary” marker, that is, too keep Gentiles out. What Paul primarily opposes was not “separatism,” but “activism,” the belief that law-observance is constitutive of the covenant. “Separatism was for the sake of obedience [to the Law]; the reverse was never true” (Smiles 2002:298). It must be said that Dunn does not neglect to mention that zeal or law-observance was important for participation in the covenant. But attention needs to be drawn to the following: “activism” and “separatism” were more often than not opposite ends of the same coin. Ethnic identity (see below) is usually both *oppositional* in nature (= “separatism”) and about internal cultural content (= “activism”). This is especially true in circumstances of cultural contact between two groups or cultures, and especially where the one culture is under threat. Since Judeanism was under threat for most of its history, obedience to the Law was as much for the sake of separatism as the reverse was true.

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

Against the background of the redefined understanding of covenantal nomism, Dunn’s explanation of Paul’s polemic becomes even clearer. Paul opposes a rigid attachment to covenantal nomism, an ethnic identity, but in the sense that God’s mercy is no longer restricted to those who perform Judean customs that marked out that identity. What Paul also expected from his fellow Judean Messianists was for them to sacrifice important elements of their identity. It is like asking black Christians in many parts of Africa to distance themselves from the traditional roles of the ancestors. But the important thing for our work lies in the highly prominent place that customs had in Judeanism as is evident in the polemics of the early Messianist movement and the Judean literature of the period. Judeanism as a religion was more a matter of *doing* things than theology or faith. Ancient Judeanism had no creeds. Judean customs are important for they were related to covenant membership. It therefore seems appropriate, from here on, to refer to Judean customs as *covenantal praxis*. Covenantal praxis was a way to assert your covenant membership or ethnic identity, a way to affirm your participation in covenantal nomism, the Judean symbolic universe. Cohen explains that for Judeans and Gentiles

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

[Judeans]”⁸ . . . For Philo too the essence of conversion is the adoption of the way of life of the [Judeans].⁹ (Cohen 1987:61)

Schmidt expresses a similar viewpoint:

More than beliefs, multiple and debated, it is *rites* that weave the protective web of [Judean] identity. The rites classify and identify. They separate those who practise from those who do not. They trace the dividing line between [Judeans] and Gentiles, between those who join the community and those who are cast out. They form a bond between all the subgroups, all the constituents of the [Judean] community. (Schmidt 2001:25; emphasis original)

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

Ethnicity Theory

The insights gained from the work of Sanders, Dunn, Berger and Luckmann, helpful as they are, need to be complimented with the insights of social or cultural anthropology, particularly ethnicity theory. Ethnicity theory is a relatively new form of science. The term “ethnicity” was not used until 1941, and only from the 1960s 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

8. Cf. *War* 7.50; *Ant.* 20.100 (on apostasy); *Ant.* 20.17, 41 (on conversion).

9. Cf. *Virtues* 102–8.

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.¹⁰ 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, ethnic-

10. 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).

ity is a more complicated social phenomenon, particularly in terms of exactly how it is formed and maintained.

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).

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, “primordial.”¹¹ 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

11. 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.

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).¹² 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).¹³ From an etic (or outsider) perspective, however,

12. 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).

13. 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 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).

primordialism brings to attention the emotional and psychological strength of ethnic affiliation.

Constructionism or the self-ascriptive approach to ethnicity¹⁴ 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).

14. Variants or developments of this approach in reaction 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).