

Participation, Justification, and Conversion

Edited by
ATHANASIOS DESPOTIS

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*
442

Mohr Siebeck

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442



Participation, Justification, and Conversion

Eastern Orthodox Interpretation of
Paul and the Debate between
“Old and New Perspectives on Paul”

edited by

Athanasios Despotis

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of the School of Theology of the University of Athens

Preface

This volume is the second part of a research project referring to the relationship between the “New Perspective on Paul” and the Eastern Orthodox Interpretation of Paul. The first part was a *Habilitationsschrift* published in German, *Die New Perspective on Paul und die griechisch-orthodoxe Paulusinterpretation* (2014). I am deeply obliged to the contributors from around the world and from different denominations who have invested their academic experience to reflect upon this new field of research. It was a great enrichment for me to cooperate with such qualified international scholars who share the same passion for Pauline studies. I also owe gratitude to the editorial team, Artemis Sofia Markou (Dipl. Phil.), Dr. Philip Sumpter, and André Wyss (M. Theol.) who supported me in correcting the chapters. Also, great thanks to the German Research Foundation (DFG) for covering the publication costs and to Prof. Dr. Jörg Frey as well as Dr. Henning Ziebritzki who accepted this book in the renowned WUNT series. However, an important chapter regarding Phil 3:2–11 is missing due to an unfulfilled promise of submission, which unduly delayed the publication of this book. Since a further delay would depreciate the rest of the contributions and make their bibliography seem dated, I decided to proceed without the said chapter and ask for the reader’s understanding. Lastly, it is not a coincidence that the School of Theology of the University of Athens celebrates its 180th Anniversary (1837–2017) this year. Since the apostle Paul as well as many other Eastern Orthodox exegetes have a direct or indirect relationship to the ancient or the modern city of Athens and its philosophical and theological schools, this editorial is dedicated to this anniversary. I hope this collection will shed some more light on the Eastern Orthodox theological tradition and will offer material for critical reflection during the forthcoming (73rd) General Meeting of the SNTS which will be hosted in Athens in 2018.

The Editor

March 2017
During the Great and Holy Lent

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Introduction

The Aim of this Book

The debate between the “Old” and the “New Perspective” has been a focal point of Pauline studies in recent years. However, the potential affinities and differences between the “New Perspective” and the Eastern Orthodox interpretation of Paul have not been adequately researched yet.¹ Only one recently published study² provides some research on the Greek Orthodox interpretation of Paul from its beginnings to the present day and compares it with the “New Perspective on Paul”. However, this book shows that it is beneficial to read the research opinions of various Orthodox exegetes of Paul who consider the same questions rather than to leave this subject to the reflections of any one author who may favour the one or the other view. Therefore, the current project takes up the discussion between the “Eastern Orthodox” and the “New” and “Old Perspectives” on Paul, which was first introduced in the study mentioned above and seeks to develop it further.

The title of this editorial, i.e. “Participation, Justification and Conversion”, refers to topics that are gaining momentum in Pauline research. The main relevant questions with which the contributors are dealing are as follows: What does the participatory-union concept mean and what is its role in the process of justification by faith? Are participation and justification alternatives or concepts compatible with each other? Moreover, are these concepts related to the conversion experiences of the early Christ-believers and how do they reflect them? However, the aim of this project is not to construct a discussion on general topics but to open a dialogue on an exegetical basis. The authors of the first three papers set the framework for the following exegetical task: They discuss the central issue of faith as well as reflections of the real contexts of mission and conversion in Paul. In the subsequent papers, eight authors present representative orthodox readings of relevant Pauline texts. The three remaining

¹ The book of James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy, eds., *Justification: Five Views* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011) includes some contributions from the “Old” (traditional and progressive reformed), the “New”, the Roman Catholic as well as from the Finnish-Lutheran perspective but it neither considers the Eastern Orthodox tradition nor provides any new exegetical input concerning the interpretation of the specific Pauline texts.

² Athanasios Despotis, *Die "New Perspective on Paul" und die griechisch-orthodoxe Paulusinterpretation*, VIOTh 11 (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2014).

papers take directions which transcend the stereotypes of the “Old” and “New Perspectives” and the Eastern and Western traditions.

Description of the Papers and Their Relationship to Each Other

In the first paper, *Michael Wolter* analyses the concept *πίστις Χριστοῦ* which is crucial for the understanding of the Pauline argument regarding justification by faith. Wolter claims that “Pauline Christianity is a religion of mission and conversion” and investigates the semantics of faith in this framework. The author works on the basis of the traditional understanding of the term *πίστις Χριστοῦ* as a particular interpretation of the “Christ event” and links it to faith as acceptance of the gospel of Christ, i.e. “attaining the conviction that what Paul has said about Jesus and God in his gospel is true.” From this point of view, “conversion is fuelled by *πίστις* and conversion is *πιστεῦσαι*.” Wolter emphasises the cognitive aspect of the experience of religious transformation as believing in the gospel. Similarly, he underscores the integrative function of faith. Faith equalises all social and ethnic differences because the claim of the gospel is equally valid for all people. Nevertheless, even though this Pauline focus on faith breaks down old boundaries, it also raises new ones: The division between believers and ‘unbelievers’. In Wolter’s words: “Paul establishes a new master paradigm by means of which he categorises all humanity in an entirely new and unique way.” The author concludes that the understanding of *πίστις Χριστοῦ* as “faithfulness of Christ” is based on a fundamental error in reasoning. Therefore, Wolter’s view is in contrast to Michael Gorman’s contribution in this volume. Thus, a dynamic dialogue takes off already on the first pages of this book.

The next paper moves the focus to the other crucial issue in relation justification by faith and the experience of conversion or spiritual transformation, i.e. the semantics of the verb *δικαιοῦσθαι* (to be justified). The author concentrates on the usage of the concept of justification in Rom 6:7 and compares it with two other undisputed Pauline texts referring to justification in baptismal contexts, i.e. 1 Cor 6:11 and Gal 3:24. This investigation shows that justification describes an ongoing and dynamic process of spiritual transformation (conversion) which finds the first climax at baptism, continues in the life of the believer in the community and will be accomplished at the final resurrection and judgment. However, the comparison between the three texts mentioned above proves that the link between *δικαιοῦσθαι* (be justified) and *πίστις* (faith) occurs only where Paul tries to solve an ecclesiological issue, i.e. the inclusion of the Gentiles among the eschatological people of God. This paper integrates views of the “New Perspective on Paul” and follows the Eastern Orthodox tradition

by putting an emphasis on the understanding of the justification idea in baptismal contexts as a reference to an ontological transformation. Nonetheless, this paper diverges from other voices in this volume which are nearer to the “Old Perspective”. E.g. there is a strong contrast to Fr. Vasile Mihoc’s view which assumes that Paul received the argument regarding justification by faith on the road to Damascus. This means that the reader who expects to find a thesis unanimously supported by all exegetes will find it difficult to extract it from this volume.

Furthermore, *Kobus Kok* and *John Anthony Dunne* turn the discussion to the other critical issue of this book, i.e. “participation”, and discuss its relationship to the missionary commission of Paul and the concept of justification. Participation refers to a nexus of concepts like to “be in Christ”, “get co-crucified”, “die” and “be buried” with Christ in baptism. The meta-theme of participation also refers to expressions which describe the deep relationship with and incorporation in Christ (e.g. ἐν ἑμοῖς Gal 1:14). “Participation” is a transforming process in the sense that Paul does not only proclaim but also becomes the gospel, a view expressed by Gorman and adopted by the two authors. In this regard, “participation” establishes a Gentile mission and creates “missional Gentiles”. Similarly, justification happens by means of union with Christ. The authors also reflect on a relevant commentary of John Chrysostom on Gal 1:14 from the interdisciplinary perspective of the “Dialogical Self Theory”. In this way, Kok and Dunne demonstrate that Christ is internalised by Paul’s “self” and becomes a dialogical partner of his inner space. The authors also refer to the working of the Spirit that transforms believers, enables them to participate in Christ and to mirror the image of God for the benefit of outsiders. Kok and Dunne’s view represent a type of missional hermeneutics that is detached from the focus on the liturgical life and the function of the rituals or “mysteries”, which appear in the following Eastern Orthodox readings.

Nikolakopoulos opens the part regarding the readings prevalent in the Eastern Church by describing the concept of justification from a Christological and soteriological point of view. He also focuses on the rhetoric and considers the reference of the Golden-Mouthed (Chrysostom) to 1 Cor 1:30. The author claims that one detects several aspects of the Pauline “Rechtfertigungslehre” in the context of the verse above. This thesis partially challenges the view of the second paper regarding the emergence of the argument regarding justification by faith. In Nikolakopoulos’ view, the interpretation of God’s calling to faith as a “creatio ex nihilo” links 1 Cor 1:30 to the Pauline argument in Rom 4 where Abraham’s turning to faith is interpreted in similar terms. Furthermore, Nikolakopoulos underscores the Christological aspect of the Pauline idea of justification that connects the text in question with the loci classici of the Pauline argument on justification by faith, i.e. Rom 3:21–31 and Gal 2:15–21. All three texts share the concept of justification, though this idea is only implicitly reflected in 1 Cor 1:30. The author argues that the thread that runs through all

these relevant texts is the theology of the cross and the understanding of the Christ event as well as the believer's incorporation into the Church as a justifying event. Yet, this process presupposes human synergy: "Die Rechtfertigung wird von Gott allen Menschen umsonst gegeben, und die Menschen sollen zumindest mitmachen. Sie sollten dieses Angebot annehmen, indem sie glauben." The paper of Nikolakopoulos highlights particular characteristics of Eastern Orthodox exegesis: an emphasis on Christology and soteriology, the synthetical approach of the Pauline arguments and, in conclusion, the interpretation of *πίστις* as a free human response to God's transforming initiative.

The next author, *Fr. Stelian Tofană*, turns the discussion to the issue of participation. The text which Tofană comments, 2 Cor 4:7–11, interprets the gospel of Christ as illumination and the suffering of the believer as participation in the suffering of Christ. Tofană reminds the reader that the issue regarding participation does not refer only to baptismal incorporation in Christ but to real sharing in Christ's suffering up to death. Therefore, Paul's suffering up unto death for the sake of the gospel is "a culmination of the bodily death of Jesus Christ". In this sense, Paul is not only metaphorically "dead" but experiences a long process of sufferings "on his way to encounter Christ and to assume his redemptive death". The author stresses the sharing in Christ's suffering to conclude that the life of the convert shall be characterised by the mortification of the "sinful nature" in everyday life. Therefore, the Pauline concept of "new creation" presupposes an ongoing struggle that leads to the achievement of "the last stage of the process of sanctification, namely the deification (theōsis)". Tofană believes that the "issue of the New Perspective on Paul" needs to be reviewed because the Pauline anthropology is defined and understood, in what may be new in it, only when man is understood as a part of the body of Christ, been called to make an effort in achieving the justification and the holiness, and not to be their simply passive recipient. This conclusion refers to a fundamental insight among the Eastern Orthodox readings that justification is not a forensic fiction or a kind of "transition language" but an ongoing process requiring the believer's volitional effort to follow the Christian way of life.

Edith Humphrey undertakes the sophisticated task of showing "which facets of the older perspective and which of the new are consonant with the patristic readings" of the passage 2 Cor 5:16–21. Humphrey emphasises the conjoining of forensic and substitutional language in this Pauline text. She also shows how the Western and Eastern interpretations of Paul clearly differ because their representatives derive from various Christological and anthropological presuppositions. In this way, the author explains why traditional "reformational" readings of Paul speak of "imputed righteousness", the representatives of the "New Perspective" often find Pauline language regarding justification metaphorical or eschatological, and the Eastern Fathers prefer ontological language. Humphrey also discusses the interpretation of Douglas Campbell and challenges his view that Paul's statements about sin and justification reflect the arguments of

his opponents. The author argues that Greek Fathers place 2 Cor 5:16–21 in a larger canvas and stress the ontological change that happens due to the “Christ event”. Therefore, Humphrey claims that the concepts of participation and justification are held together in the Eastern interpretation of Paul and liturgical texts: “Orthodox approaches, while not disparaging God’s words and acts of clemency, nor dismissing the importance of spiritual and ethical solidarity with Christ, see transformation as involving the entire person, and salvation as addressing not merely sin and disposition, but also death”. Finally, Humphrey notices that while the text under discussion begins with the apostle’s own “cognitive conversion” it ends with “the converting action of Christ that has the potency to make everything and everyone new”. This insight reveals the emphasis of the Eastern interpretation not on the converting power of the word of the gospel (cf. the essay Wolter’s) but the transformative aspect of the entire Christian life and the “mysteries” (rituals).

Another Orthodox scholar, *Fr. Vasile Mihoc*, takes a negative position regarding the claims of the “New Perspective” and especially of James Dunn’s interpretation of Gal 2:15–21. Paul’s encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus radically changed Paul’s theology according to Mihoc. The converted Jew understood, once and for all, the limited character of the Mosaic law and that both Jews and Gentiles are called to the grace of salvation. However, this view is being challenged a. o. by Rikard Roitto who claims the opposite in the last paper of this volume. Mihoc criticises the interpretation of the term “works of the law” as a reference to badges of Jewish nationalism. Contrarily, this term refers to moral or ritual prescriptions of the Mosaic law, a view which is in contrast with other approaches to Paul in this volume and in particular the contribution of Michael Azar or the paper discussing the ethics of love as an eschatological interpretation of the law. However, Mihoc underscores the Orthodox understanding of justification as the founding of a new life and “not an external act of God by which man is declared righteous.” The author also stresses the implicit tie of Gal 2:19–20 to the “mystery of Holy Baptism” and the ontological foundation of the new life, i.e. justification. Like most Orthodox exegetes, Mihoc understands the Pauline language of participation and justification as being in a deep relationship to the rituals or “mysteries”. Therefore, the contribution of Roitto at the end offers a great support to justify this emphasis in the Orthodox tradition. Finally, the author adopts the idea that Pauline converts “must choose between the law and grace.”

If there is a reason to appreciate the research presented in this book it is that of the polyphony of the contributors. The essays of those who criticise the “New Perspective” appear alongside those of its sympathisers. *Sotirios Despotis* follows another direction than Mihoc to show that the “New Perspective” can be in accordance with the interpretation of John Chrysostom. The author comments on Gal 3:6–9, 23–29 and claims that in this passage baptism is understood as the climax of an ontological transformation and union with Christ.

This transformation is the basis of the justification process that will be accomplished at the eschaton. The author claims that Galatians 3 refers to the transformation of the Gentiles who become inheritors of Abraham not by circumcision but by union with the Messiah and His Spirit. The author demonstrates that the idea of adoption by union with Christ transcends the concept of inclusion of proselytes in the family of Abraham. In accordance with the other Orthodox exegetes, he underscores the function of the experience and the remembrance of spiritual transformation that occurs through baptism. Similarly, he shows that, in Paul's mind, the status of the Gentile converts and all Christ-believers transcends the status of the non-believing Jewish people. This happens because the baptised have the eschatological gift of the Holy Spirit, which justifies them and creates them anew.

Fr. Jack Khalil turns the exegetical discussion to the locus classicus of the Pauline argument regarding justification by faith, i.e. Rom 3:21–26. The structure of this large paper reveals the hermeneutical presuppositions of the author. He pays attention especially to the “polemical nature of the apostle’s thoughts” for, in his view, Rom 3:21–26 delivers an answer to the false Jewish objections described in Rom 3:1–8. Therefore, Khalil begins his survey by commenting on the preceding vv. 1–20 in detail to show that this pericope “provides the impetus for the apostle’s exposition of justification through faith.” The author favours the interpretation of John Chrysostom and challenges aspects of both the “Old” and the “New Perspectives”. However, Khalil’s understanding of justification in Rom 3 has a clear forensic dimension: it refers to the forgiveness of sins. The author does not accept Dunn’s and Wright’s readings regarding the concept of “God’s righteousness” and also challenges Bultmann’s argument about the pre-Pauline origin of v. 25. Khalil’s view is nearer to other contributions in this volume who remain sceptical towards the “ecclesiological” understanding of the justification language in Paul, e.g. Mihoc’s essay. Furthermore, the author adopts a Christocentric view that is common among all Eastern Orthodox scholars, yet he plays down the importance of Rom 3:29–31 which plays crucial role in the view of other authors in this volume who interpret the argument regarding justification by faith in the context of the table-fellowship issue between Jews and Gentile converts (cf. the paper regarding the verb δικαιῶσθαι in baptismal contexts).

Besides, *Deacon Michael Azar* refers to the Eastern-Western dialogue from the perspective of Rom 7:1–6. In Azar’s view, the question regarding Paul’s and his converts’ relationship to the law has always been understood in other terms than those of the exegesis of the Reformation. It is not the separation *from* the law but rather its (i.e. the Law’s) transformation which plays a crucial role both in Paul’s text and Eastern Orthodox spirituality. The “law of sin and death” is transformed and becomes “the law of the Spirit of life”, which is *within* the second “marriage” of the wife (symbol of Christians) in Rom 7. This

view is also demonstrated by another paper in this volume referring to the Pauline ethics of love. Besides, Azar finds that the references to the “body of Christ” are not only metaphorical but also have “material” aspects. “Though the materiality of unity with Christ’s humanity would be deemphasised in certain Reformation traditions (from which, one should note, the discipline of modern biblical studies stems), it has had a tremendous impact on the development of Eastern Christological and sacramental thought.” From this point of view, Paul does not challenge the Mosaic law, its ritual aspects or material forms of religiosity but law and materiality leading to sin. Conversion to Christ “includes, stems from, and is effected by a renewed interpretation” of the law enabled by the Savior’s sojourn in the flesh. It is evident that Azar’s view is in remarkable contrast with Mihoc’s rhetoric of Mosaic law as opposed to the gospel.

The last exegetical survey underscores the role of the Spirit in the process of transformation which believers undergo. *James Buchanan Wallace* points out that Romans 8:15 describes conversion as the reception of the “Spirit of adoption” which offers life and security by participation in Christ. Wallace links the ideas of justification, participation and conversion and concludes that there is no tension: “participation entails the progressive deepening of a new existence of right relationship initially realised as justification.” The author detects that Paul uses a rhetoric of conversion which both Jews and Gentiles could understand and use to construct their own narratives of conversion. From an Eastern Orthodox point of view, Romans 8:15 refers to an ongoing embodied conversion process that transforms the human as a whole, the body and the soul. Regarding the relationship between the “New Perspective” and the Orthodox readings of Paul, Wallace concludes that while the “New Perspective” sheds light on the continuity of God’s plan the patristic thought describes the depth of what God has done for humanity, i.e. it refers to the healing of the human nature through the Son’s incarnation and Spirit’s work. The author also discusses the issue of predestination for Romans 8:28 speaks of God’s purpose. He argues that this text does not support individual predestination but refers to believers as a group who freely respond to God’s election by love. Finally, Wallace stresses the corporeal dimensions of the glory which believers assume in the present time and the eschaton according to Rom 8:29–30: the use of “image” and “glory” language may provide a warrant for those strands of the Eastern Orthodox tradition that suggest that conversion in some way transforms the body.

The next three papers discuss more general aspects of Pauline theology and ethics, going beyond the conventional standards. *Michael Gorman’s* seven theses regarding Gal 2:15–21 emphasise Christ’s faithfulness and love as the starting point of understanding justification, participation and conversion in Paul. Gorman argues that one cannot interpret Pauline texts by using hard-and-fast

understandings of what each concept means for each meaning is context-dependent. Thus, Paul offers in the text under discussion “his own understanding of justification”. It is because of the “faithfulness of the Messiah” that people are justified. The Messiah’s faithful and loving death is the *means* of justification. The *mode* of justification is human participation in Christ’s death. Humans appropriate the justifying grace of God by dying to the law and the “self”. However, Paul identifies the indwelling of the Messiah with the indwelling of the Spirit. Therefore, justification also involves life with God’s Spirit which transforms the believer. Humans share in Christ’s death by getting transformed in the Messiah, i.e. embodying His transformed ethics of faithfulness and love. Gorman manages in this way to combine several aspects of the Pauline texts as well as strands of interpretation and he also uses ontological language: “But, it may be most appropriate (though shocking to some), if we are going to allow Paul’s thought and language of justification as ‘ontological transformation into God’s righteousness in the Messiah’ to have its full theological impact, (1) to use the term ‘theōsis’ or ‘deification’ in connection with justification, and (2) to say that such transformation into Godlikeness is constitutive of justification itself”. Gorman concludes that this interpretation excludes neither the ecclesiological understanding of justification of the “New Perspective” nor the forensic approach of the “Old Perspective”. However, this reading breaks down some “theological walls”.

The next paper delivers an unconventional reading of the relationship between the love ethics and conversion in Paul. Mostly, the Pauline ethics of love are considered to be a consequence or expression of turning to faith in Christ. This paper demonstrates, however, that the Pauline notion of ἀγάπη has counterintuitive semantics and the Pauline ethics of love played a crucial role in the transmission of the Pauline gospel in the Mediterranean world. On the one hand, love was the *sine qua non* condition for the socialisation of Jewish and Gentile converts in the Christ-community and the only way to “keep united an ecclesia of Jews and Gentiles, freemen and slaves, men and women (Gal 3:28), strong and weak (Rom 14–15) as a family bound together not by common physical descent but by faith in Christ”. On the other hand, love is not only a consequence but also an essential presupposition for a constant and perfect faith in this era and the eschaton. Therefore, the ethics of love is the way to approach outsiders and make them repent and believe in the gospel. “This is also the way in which God leads the ‘ungodly’ to repentance (εἰς μετάνοιαν Rom 2:4): *Through His riches of kindness and forbearance and patience.*” Finally, the author refers to non-biblical evidence which supports the conclusion that the ethics of love can lead to repentance/conversion and, therefore, play a crucial role in the procedures of participation and justification in Christ.

The last paper reflects on how the Pauline language of participation and justification has as its starting point not abstract theoretical speculations but rather embodied social and ritual experiences. The author of this study, *Rikard Roitto*,

views the Pauline texts from the perspective of the Cognitive Science of Religion. Roitto claims that the ritual life in the Pauline communities, especially the Lord's Supper and the initiatory baptism, embedded theological and social values into the Pauline way of thinking. In-Christ theology reflects and embodies the experience of Christ during the ritualised meals. Consequently, "in Christ'-language is good contextual theology for a community whose communal life is centred on a meal that represents Christ". Roitto adopts the views of Sanders regarding the centrality of the participation concept in Pauline theology as well as the interpretation of the argument regarding justification as transfer-language: the idea of justification interprets the transference from a negative existence to a new existence with God 'in Christ'. However, the author recognises that this transition of the saved individual is conceptualised not only through justification language but "in several different ways by Paul. He thinks in terms of space, substance, and social relations". Nevertheless, "all conceptual roads lead to participation in Christ". Roitto concludes that the Pauline participation-theology grew out a ritual context and the metaphor of justification emerges as a way to describe transfer "into Christ" in contexts where he needs to show that the convert's condition has changed so that he/she does not have to be judged by God. Roitto's conclusions support crucial arguments of the second paper in this volume regarding the meaning of the verb δικαιῶσθαι in baptismal contexts.

This final paper, which is both interdisciplinary as well as innovative, invites the reader to go beyond the arguments of the "Old" and "New Perspectives on Paul". If this volume motivates the reader to accept this invitation, it would bring the efforts of its contributors to fruition.

Part I

The Real Contexts

The Reality of Faith

Some Thoughts about the Significance of Faith in the Theology of Paul

Michael Wolter

1. Mission and Conversion as the Basis of the Pauline Understanding of Faith

I would like to start¹ by looking at 1 Thess 2:13: And for this reason we ourselves give thanks to God without ceasing,

ὅτι παραλαβόντες λόγον ἀκοῆς παρ’ ἡμῶν τοῦ θεοῦ	because when you received from us the word of the message of God,
ἐδέξασθε οὐ λόγον ἀνθρώπων	you accepted it not as the word of human be- ings
ἀλλὰ καθὼς ἐστὶν ἀληθῶς λόγον θεοῦ, ὃς καὶ ἐνεργεῖται ἐν ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν.	but as what it really is, as God’s word, which is also at work in you—the believers.

This text contains two elements that are important for our topic:

1. There is, in the first place, the determined participle without an attribute “the believing” (οἱ πιστεύοντες). Paul uses this expression as reference for the group of the so-called “Christians”, for which he does not yet have a term.² Outside of Christian literature, there is no precedent for this use of οἱ πιστεύοντες as a designation for a group. This group called οἱ πιστεύοντες by Paul is different from other people not because of believing something different than other people do, but because of being the only group whose identity is constituted by the fact that they “believe”.³ While the people that belong to the group of οἱ πιστεύοντες find their common ground and distinction with reference to others in that they “believe”, all others that do *not* are “unbelievers” (ἄπιστοι; 1 Cor 6:6; 10:27; 14:22–23; 2 Cor 4:4; 6:14). It is not so that they believe something *else*, but they do not believe at all.

¹My sincere thanks go to Erastus Jonker (University of Pretoria) for the translation of this article.

²Rom 3:22; 4:11; 1 Cor 1:21; 14:22; Gal 3:22; 1 Thess 1:7; 2:10.13. Cf. also Acts 2:44; 4:32; 18:27; 19:18; Eph 1:19; Heb 4:3; 1 Pet 2:7.

³Cf. also Wilfried Härle, *Dogmatik* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 55.

Other expressions that characterise the commonality of Christians point in the same direction. For example, Gal 6:10, where Paul speaks of “those who belong to the household of faith” (οἰκεῖοι τῆς πίστεως). This involves a metaphor that refers to the community of Christians as a family whose solidarity is expressed by the fact that everyone that believes belongs to it. Another example is Gal 3:7, 9 οἱ ἐκ πίστεως (“those of faith”). This is interchangeable with οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ (1 Cor 15:23; Gal 5:24). Also, this expression was invented by Paul. It can be explained as an analogical form in the case of expressions like οἱ ἐκ νόμου (“those of the law” Rom 4:14, 16) and οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς (those of the circumcision” Rom 4:12; Gal 2:12). Thereby Paul is again drawing a line: In all of these cases, it is about giving that characteristic a name that describes an independent group and separates it from other human beings. This semantic profile that Paul gives to the terms πίστις and πιστεύειν is unique in comparison with non-Christian language. There is no other group or community of which one can say that they become a group or community through faith.

2. But let us return once more to 1 Thess 2:13, because the second element that is important for our topic has not yet been addressed. It is to be found in the description of the acceptance of the Pauline proclamation. Although the words “faith” and “believe” are not there, it is clear from the text in which way people come to faith or how believing begins according to the Pauline conception. According to this text, faith is nothing but hearing Paul’s proclamation of Christ as God’s word (1 Thess 2:13): as a message that is carried out under God’s orders and that expresses the fact that God’s salvation is made accessible through Jesus Christ. “Hearing” does not just refer to an acoustic occurrence, but designates a way of distinct interpretation of what is said. Without interpretation, there is no hearing, for that which we hear in this sense comes into being only through our interpretation. Therefore, there is no distance between hearing and believing. We can explicate that by means of a simple consideration: It is impossible to first hear the gospel of Jesus Christ as God’s word and *then* to decide whether you believe it or not. For already at the very moment when Paul’s proclamation of Christ is heard as God’s message of salvation when the hearers say “yes, this is God’s word”, faith has entered their existence. We can provide this understanding of “faith” and “believing” with an even stronger profile if we put it in the light of Phil 1:27, where Paul speaks of the πίστις τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, of the gospel-faith. For the interpretation of this expression, we can proceed with Paul’s use of the expression εὐαγγέλιον (“gospel”). He can provide the concept of εὐαγγέλιον with three different attributes: he is able to speak of the gospel of God (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ: Rom 1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor 11:7; 1 Thess 2:2, 8, 9), of the gospel of Christ (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ Χριστοῦ: Rom 1:9; 15:19; 1 Cor 9:12; 2 Cor 2:12; 4:4; 9:13; 10:14; Gal 1:7; Phil 1:27a; 1 Thess 3:2), and of “my gospel” (τὸ εὐαγγέλιόν μου: Rom 2:16; 2 Cor 4:3; 1 Thess 1:5). Of course, with these three qualifications, Paul is not trying to separate three different gospels from each other. In all three cases,

one and the same gospel is intended: the gospel proclaimed by Paul is only one and the same gospel: “His” gospel is “gospel of Christ”, and the “gospel of Christ” is, of course, the same gospel as the “gospel of God”. That means: When Paul speaks of Christ, he always speaks of God and vice versa. The Pauline gospel is only gospel of *Christ* insofar as it proclaims that God has acted for the salvation of all people through Christ. Likewise, it is only gospel of *God* insofar as it proclaims that God’s salvation is made accessible through Jesus Christ. Accordingly, it is precisely this theological correlation of God and Jesus in Paul’s gospel that determines his conception of faith: Faith consists of the assent to the claim of the gospel that whenever it speaks of God it speaks of Jesus, and whenever it speaks of Jesus it speaks of God.

3. It is possible to connect the elements that constitute the peculiarity of 1 Thess 2:13 and say: The first one [that Paul calls his church a community of “believing ones” (πιστεύοντες)], and the second one (the correlation between gospel and faith) are based on one common foundation, i.e. the fact that Pauline Christianity is a religion of mission and conversion. The churches established by Paul arose because there were people that assented to the just mentioned interpretation of what happened to Jesus and believed it to be true. They all had grown up in non-Christian families. This applied to all of them. “Conversion” then is not understood so as to mean turning towards an already existing πίστις, but rather conversion is fueled by πίστις, and conversion is πιστεῦσαι: “coming to faith”, i.e. attaining the conviction that what Paul has said about Jesus and God in his gospel is true.

4. At the end of this section should follow a short remark related to a popular approach towards the topic of faith, that is, the differentiation between a so-called “religious” and a so-called “secular” use of πίστις/πιστεύειν.⁴ Often this differentiation functions as the chief paradigm for understanding faith in early Christianity. Normally only the so-called “religious” use is considered theologically relevant.

This differentiation, however, is based on an anachronistic perspective that is imposed onto texts from the outside and as such tends to be misleading.

That this differentiation is not helpful can be recognised if we compare Acts 15:7 and 1 Cor 11:18 to each other:

In Acts 15:7 Peter starts his speech at the Council of Jerusalem with the words: “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among

⁴ Cf. already Wilhelm Bousset and Hugo Gressmann, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, HNT 21, 3rd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1926), 193; Rudolf Bultmann, “πίστις κτλ.”, *ThWNT* 6: 179–180. See also the debate in Dieter Lührmann, “Pistis im Judentum”, *ZNW* 64 (1973): 19–38; idem “Glaube, Bekenntnis, Erfahrung”, in *Glaube* ed. Wilfried Härle and Reiner Preul I; *MJTh* 4 = *MThSt* 33 (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1992), 13–36 and Gerhard Barth, “Pistis in hellenistischer Religiosität”, *ZNW* 73 (1982): 110–126.

you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should *hear* the word of the gospel and *believe* (ἀκοῦσαι ... καὶ πιστεῦσαι).”

In 1 Cor 11:18 Paul writes about grievances at the celebration of the Lord’s meal in Corinth: “For, in the first place, when you come together as a congregation, I *hear* that there are divisions among you. And I *believe* it in part (ἀκούω ... καὶ μέρος τι πιστεύω).”

Both texts reflect one and the same connection of “hearing” and “believing”, although one of them refers to the gospel and the other to rumours. From this semantic overlap, we can learn that Paul’s understanding of faith does not reflect a religious conception of “faith” and “believing”, but is based on a thoroughly colloquial and average use of “faith” and “believing”. For this connection between “faith” and “hearing”, there is also ample evidence outside the NT. Of special interest is a text from Plutarch’s treatise “Concerning Talkativeness” (*De garrulitate* 503d). Plutarch here says about the chatters:

οὐδὲ πίστιν ἔχουσιν ἧς πᾶς λόγος ἐφίεται·	They are not met with belief, which all speech
Τὸ γὰρ οἰκτεῖον αὐτοῦ τέλος τοῦτ' ἐστί,	strives for.
πίστιν ἐνεργάσασθαι τοῖς ἀκούουσιν.	For this is its proper end and aim,
Ἀπιστοῦνται δ' οἱ λάλοι, κἂν	to engender belief in the hearers.
ἀληθεύουσιν.	But chatters are disbelieved even if they are
	telling the truth.

The same connection is also attested in other texts. I quote three of them from very distinct times and contexts to demonstrate how widespread it was in the ancient world:

Aesopus, *Fab.* 301: When the landlord heard this and believed (ἀκούσας οὖν ταῦτα ... καὶ πιστεύσας) he became terrified ...

Xenophon, *Hell.* 6.1.8: Of which kind the projects are in which I offer you the second prize – listen, and don’t believe me anything which does not approve itself as true to your own reasoning (... ἄκουε, καὶ μηδὲν πιστεύέ μοι ὅ τι ἂν μὴ λογιζομένῳ σοι ἀληθὲς φαίνεται).

1 Macc 10:46: ὡς δὲ ἤκουσεν Jonathan and the people these words οὐκ ἐπίστευσαν αὐτοῖς.

All texts have in common that they understand faith as a very distinct way of hearing, i.e., as “affirmative hearing” which accepts what is heard as being *true*.⁵

⁵ This connection is completely ignored by Thomas Schumacher, *Zur Entstehung christlicher Sprache: Eine Untersuchung der paulinischen Idiomatik und der Verwendung des Begriffes πίστις*, BBB 168 (Bonn: Bonn University Press, 2012), 199–232, whereas it is taken into adequate consideration by Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 65–74 (“Tradition, Hearsay, Discourse, Reason, Rhetoric”).

However, with Paul faith and believing do not only refer to “becoming a Christian” but also to “being a Christian”.⁶ That brings us to our second section.

2. We, “the Believing Ones” (1 Cor 1:18, 21). Faith as Ethos and Its Effects

“Faith” and “believing” refer not only to a once-only event of conversion that arises by hearing the proclamation as God’s word but also to a long-term commitment to this agreement. This conception comes to expression in phrases like “standing firm in your faith” (1 Cor 16:13), “holding to your faith” (2 Cor 13:5), and also “living by faith” (Gal 2:20) – just to give a small selection of examples. From a sociological perspective faith attains the same function in Pauline Christianity as it happened with the Torah in Hellenistic Judaism: On the one hand, it creates social cohesion inwardly, on the other it distinguishes the group as a social minority from the outside, that is, from the majority society. To put it in Jimmy Dunn’s words: According to the Pauline conception faith functions both as “identity marker” and as “boundary marker”.⁷ Faith binds Christians to each other and differentiates them from other people. Accordingly, with Paul faith executes these functions in two directions:

1. Faith functions as an equaliser that removes the differences between people. Paul emphasises this meaning of faith at its clearest and most frequently concerning the abolition of the difference between Jews and Gentiles. He says this most emphatically perhaps in Rom 3:28–30:

(28) Therefore we are sure that one is justified by faith – and not from works of the law.
(29) Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, (30) since God is one who will justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith.

Three other texts can be placed alongside this:

Rom 1:16: For the gospel is a δύναμις θεοῦ εἰς σωτηρίαν παντὶ τῷ πιστεύοντι, Ἰουδαίῳ τε πρῶτον καὶ Ἑλληνι (“a power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek”).

Rom 10:11–12: πᾶς ὁ πιστεύων ἐπ’ αὐτῷ οὐ κατασχυνθήσεται. οὐ γάρ ἐστιν διαστολή Ἰουδαίου τε καὶ Ἑλλήνος (“everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. (12) For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek”).

⁶ Cf. Jürgen Becker, *Paulus. Der Apostel der Völker*, 3rd ed., UTB 2014 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 440.

⁷ Cf. James D. G. Dunn, “The New Perspective on Paul”, in *Jesus, Paul, and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*, ed. idem (Atlanta, GA; Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1990), 192, 194 and passim.

Gal 5:6: ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη (“in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love”).

Everyone is able to believe, regardless of whether he or she does this as a Jew living according to the law, or as a non-Jew that does not. The faith common to Jews and Gentiles can even tolerate that among the persons who have come to faith some continue to conduct their lives according to the Torah and others do not. Faith can also integrate this difference. This significance of faith can also explain why Paul in Galatians and Romans places the demarcation from the Torah so much on the foreground. Paul does not depreciate the intention of fulfilling the Torah because human beings misuse “works of the law” to procure righteousness before God by themselves.⁸ Rather he diminishes the theological status of the Torah because the Torah and its fulfilment mark the difference between Jews and non-Jews and because, by doing so, they contradict the inclusive claim of the gospel, that is equally valid for all people and through which God reaches out to the entire world.

However, for Paul it is not only the difference between Israel and the Gentiles that is set aside by faith but also the differences between all the other social status attributions, like that between slaves and freemen and between men and women (1 Cor 7:22; Gal 3:28). – It is in the short *Letter to Philemon* that we encounter this equalising power of faith in its fullest ethical implications. It is, from this perspective, quite close to Romans and Galatians, because in this letter it is the κοινωνία τῆς πίστεως, the commonality of faith, that makes the slave a brother of his master.⁹

2. The second direction is complementary to the first. We have already touched upon it earlier. Faith not only breaks down borders, but it also raises new ones, that is, the borders between the believing ones (οἱ πιστεύοντες) and the unbelievers (ἄπιστοι). How both work together is clear from 1 Cor 1:18–25 where Paul explains to his readers how the attitude to his proclamation that he calls “the word of the cross” can both break down borders and raise new ones:

⁸ This is the classical ‘Lutheran’ opinion; cf., e.g., Rudolf Bultmann, “Christus des Gesetzes Ende”, in *Glauben und Verstehen II*, 5th ed., ed. idem (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 37–40; idem, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments*, 6th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1968), 261, 262; Ernst Käsemann, *An die Römer*, 4th ed., HNT 8a (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1980), 144; Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NIC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 208, 209: “‘Works of the law’ is one specific form of ‘works’ generally”; and: “the problem with Jewish works is essentially the same as the problem with Gentile works.”

⁹ Cf. Michael Wolter, “The Letter to Philemon as Ethical Counterpart of Paul’s Doctrine of Justification”, in *Philemon in Perspective: Interpreting a Pauline letter*, ed. Francois Tolmie, BZNW 169 (Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 169–179.

(18) The word of the cross is foolishness for those who are perishing, but for those who are being saved, for us, it is the power of God (τοῖς μὲν ἀπολλυμένοις μωρία ἐστίν, τοῖς δὲ σωζομένοις ἡμῖν δύναμις θεοῦ ἐστίν). (19) For it is written: “I will reduce to nothing the wisdom of the wise, and I will repudiate the prudence of the prudent”. (20) Where (is there) one who is wise, where one who is a scholar, who one who is a debater of this age? Has God not made the wisdom of the world foolishness? (21) For because in the wisdom of God the world through (its) wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the proclamation to save those who believe (διὰ τῆς μωρίας τοῦ κηρύγματος σῶσαι τοὺς πιστεύοντας). (22) For Jews inquire about signs, and Greeks seek wisdom. (23) But we proclaim Christ as the one who was crucified, an offence for the Jews, foolishness for the Gentiles. (24) But for those who are the called – for both Jews and Greeks – (we proclaim) Christ as the power of God and the wisdom of God (αὐτοῖς δὲ τοῖς κλητοῖς, Ἰουδαίοις τε καὶ Ἑλλησιν, Χριστὸν θεοῦ δύναμιν καὶ θεοῦ σοφίαν). (25) For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

Faith is here understood exactly in the same way as in 1 Thess 2:13, i.e. as a kind of hearing: Faith in these verses means hearing the Pauline proclamation as the power (δύναμις) or wisdom (σοφία) of God. Accordingly, disbelief is to hear it as folly (μωρία) or offence (σκάνδαλον). This difference between faith and disbelief constitutes the difference between God and salvation on one side and the world and condemnation on the other side. It is important that the difference between Jews and Gentiles can be found on both sides: There are Jews and Gentiles on the side of God (v. 24) and there are Jews and Gentiles on the side of the world (v. 22–23). In doing so Paul establishes a new master paradigm by means of which he categorises all humanity in an entirely new and unique way, and by this – in the words of Gal 6:15 – make them a new creation. Old categories like “Israel” and “the nations” lose their theological meaning, for they make room for a new differentiation between people that is determined by their standpoint with reference to Jesus Christ. That brings us to our next section.

3. Faith as Assurance of Reality

1. What I mean by this headline can be understood if we take another look at 1 Thess 2:13. According to this text there are two possible reactions to Paul’s proclamation of Christ: You can believe it, or not. “Not believing” would be to hear it as the word of a human being, or – according to Plutarch, *Garr.* 503d – as the word of a chatterer. By contrast “believing” means: hearing it as λόγος θεοῦ and Paul is quick to add that this is what it really (ἀληθῶς) is. Faith is different from disbelief, in that faith accepts the claim that Paul’s gospel speaks of God when it speaks of Jesus and that in what Paul proclaims the audience does encounter the divine reality of salvation.

2. This essence of faith comes to the fore, especially where it concerns the resurrection of Jesus. That is clear from 1 Thess 4:14. Paul speaks here about