

Identification with Christ. A Psychological View of Pauline Theology¹

Peter Lampe

1. Introduction

Crossing borders into other scholarly contexts—for New Testament scholarship, this motto has been increasingly important. In the last decades, a fair number of Biblical scholars, including our jubilee-celebrator, have been engaged in a dialogue with modern linguistics as well as with the social and psychological sciences. New Testament exegetes have shed new light on old texts by using theoretical tools devised in these neighboring fields. In this essay, I would like to dialogue with one of these disciplines—with that of psychoanalysis. This may be a red flag to some. Crossing borderlines and engaging in an interdisciplinary dialogue is risky, and I may rip my pants climbing over the fence into the yard of psychology. I am convinced, however, that psychology—and even psychoanalysis as only one, often disputed niche in the psychological yard—is able to comment on some of Paul's theological language, contributing to the understanding of this language without leading to a theologically fatal reductionism.

We will focus our attention on a central category in Pauline thinking—on that of identification. Paul's readers are expected to identify with Christ, from their baptism on (Rom 6) throughout their Christian lives. For this identification process, the two primary christological points of orientation—or hinges—are Jesus' cross and his resurrection. Christians are expected to identify with the crucified and risen Christ.

This paper proposes that the non-Pauline term "identification" depicts the common focal point of a variety of Pauline phrases, such as "being crucified and buried with Christ," "carrying the marks of Jesus branded on one's body," "sharing Jesus' sufferings by becoming like him in his death" or "clothing oneself with Christ." As we borrow the "identification" term from our contemporary everyday language, the

¹ Guest lecture at the Universities of Bergen and Oslo in October 1993. The lecture format is maintained.

dialogue with psychoanalysis will assist us in controlling our usage of the “identification” term. This dialogue will help us to realize, for example, the difference between mere imitation and identification.

I will start out with a well known exegetical insight. The fascinating thing about Pauline Christology is the persistence with which the apostle applies traditional christological statements to human life. Christology is interpreted for basic structures of human existence, and therefore it is dressed in the gown of soteriology, as Bultmann noted. In Paul’s writings, however, this fact is conveyed in a less abstract way than in Bultmann’s perspective. For Paul, it is important to relate Christology to specific situations of persons and congregations and to the ethical problems involved in these concrete situations. In Paul, Christology is applied Christology, that is, practical Christology.

In Paul’s thinking, the Christ-story is applied to human existence partly by means of identification which operates as hermeneutical transmission. According to Paul, several identification processes take place between Christ and the believers. These processes are verbalized in two chains of statements; one chain is oriented soteriologically and the other ethically.

2. Soteriologically Oriented Statements

In view of the enormous attention that the soteriological identification statements have enjoyed in the theological tradition, I will refrain from discussing them in detail. At the conclusion, I will return to the soteriological aspect of the Christians’ identification with Christ.

At least two different invitations to identification are formulated by Paul. According to the concept of sacrifice of atonement (Rom 3:25), the believer may identify with the dying, sacrificial Christ, by perceiving *Christ’s* blood offering as the offering of one’s *own* culpable life from which the believer is redeemed.²

The concept of “corporate representation” is set forth in the frame of Adam-Christ-typology. Both Adam and Christ embody whole groups. Each one of them represents many people, and the act of each determines the destiny of the many (Rom 5:12-19). Christ’s act of righteousness on the cross leads to justification of the many, provided that they accept the invitation to identify with Christ as their representative and make *Christ’s* attribute of being righteous their *own*. Their righteousness then comes from Christ and not from their own achievements.

Whether we think in the category of atonement sacrifice or of corporate representation, in each case the formulation of 2 Cor 5:14 holds true: “One has died for

² Cf., e.g., Janowski 1982, 359.

all; therefore all have died.” The death of Christ is the Christians’ death.

3. *The Ethically-Oriented Chain of Statements: Identification as Basis for a New Christian Life Style*

This time not the categories of corporate representation and sacrifice of atonement are in the background but the idea of imitating Christ when following him—a widely spread idea in Early Christianity³ that Paul picks up on and takes to greater depths. We need to distinguish several clusters of statements from one another.

3.1. At first we will look at a very simple pattern. The identification with Christ as model leads to imitating specific behavior that Christ exhibited. Two aspects of Christ’s behavior are focused on by Paul.

3.1.1. The identification with Christ as model leads to interhuman love and up-building instead of selfishness (Rom 15:2-3,7; 1 Cor 10:33-11:1). It leads to altruism and self-denial (Phil 2:3-12), to love and generosity (2 Cor 8:7-9), to gentleness and meekness (2 Cor 10:1).⁴

In theological perspective this kind of identification with Christ is very elementary. Every child in Sunday school has heard about it. In a psychological view, however, this kind of identification process in the church is remarkable, compared to other groups in society. How is it possible that members of a social group develop loving behavior toward one another? This question already kept Sigmund Freud busy in his writing “Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse,” in which he frequently used the church—and the army—as illustrating examples. Interestingly enough, in the body of this writing, Freud did not mention the Christ-identification of Christians as a decisive motor for loving behavior within the church. Only in an appendix did Freud take notice of it:

Each Christian ... is supposed to identify with Christ and to love the other Christians, as Christ loved them.⁵

Freud here uses the term “identification” in the same way as it is still defined in today’s psychoanalysis, for example by Laplanche -Pontalis in their key work about psychoanalytical terminology:⁶ An individual (in this case a church member)

³ Cf., e.g., Matt 10:24-25,38-39; Mark 8:31-35; 10:39; 14:31; Luke 14:27; 9:23; 22:33; John 11:16; 15:27.

⁴ 2 Cor 10:1: “I appeal to you in the meek and gentle way that Christ exhibited.” *Διὰ* denotes manner, esp. with verbs of saying. Cf., e.g., Acts 15:27,32; 18:9; Eph 6:18.

⁵ Freud 1921, 125 (my translation).

⁶ J. Laplanche – J.-B. Pontalis 1992, 219.

adopts an attribute of another person (in this case Christ's love toward all Christians). By doing this, the individual transforms him- or herself according to this model.

Freud mentions this motor for loving behavior within the church only in an appendix, because this particular stimulus, according to him, is unusual for social groups. It distinguishes the church from other groups such as the army.

What *is* normal for social groups? We will follow very briefly some thoughts of this writing by Freud. In groups such as the army, the bonding between the group members generally is not based on love and affection but on identification processes. According to Freud⁷ identification can happen whenever an individual realizes that he or she has something in common with another person. Often the aspect they have in common is of emotional nature, that is, often they realize, that they both are attached to one and the same leader. The vertical bonding or attachment to a leader is the aspect that they share; it leads to the identification among themselves on the horizontal level. Applied to the church, this means:⁸ Each Christian loves Christ, and therefore feels bonded to the other Christians by means of identification. In the church, however, this is only one side of the coin, only one kind of identification, as Freud noted. The church requires more from the individual, more than other social groups do. The church member, in addition, is expected to identify *with Christ* and to *love* the other Christians as Christ did. In this way, in the vertical dimension, identification is added on to where there usually is only affection or love toward a leader. And on the horizontal level, love and affection toward fellow group members are added on to where there usually is only identification. This is what makes the church so outstanding. In the army it would be ridiculous if the common soldier *identified* with the general—like a whole bunch of little Napoleons running around. According to Freud, what seems funny in a military hierarchical context, is a serious “plus” of the church in comparison to other social groups. Freud suspects that this bonus, this further development of inner-group libido structure, is probably the reason why Christianity claims to have achieved a higher ethos than other social groups.⁹

So much for Freud's thoughts. The Pauline texts quoted earlier can be interpreted in this Freudian frame of reference. Christians not only have love and affection for Christ, some also *identify* with Christ and therefore start loving other people unselfishly like Christ himself did. Interhuman love is a consequence of the identification with Christ, as Freud construes it. However, I must add, this does not yet catch the depth of what Paul is saying. Yes, in Paul the vertical identification with Christ plays a role, but this identification is further qualified as identifying with a *crucified* Lord.

⁷ Freud 1921, 100-101.

⁸ See Freud 1921, 125.

⁹ Freud 1921, 125-126.

The cross stands out as the climax of Christ's self-denial for the benefit of others (Phil 2:8) and is the hinge for the Christian identification process with Christ. At the cross, Christ loved by letting his human self-interests come to an end (cf. Phil 2:3-8). Whoever applies Christ's cross to his or her own existence is led to self-humiliation. One does not need to "look to one's own interests" (Phil 2:4), to count oneself better than others (verse 3), but a person is free to make the interests of others his or her own (verse 4). And this is nothing less than love (verses 1-2). If agape toward others is unpopularly defined in a way that it includes self-denial, then the possibility to identify with a crucified Christ, who emptied himself, is a decisive help to practice a similar love. Freud, thus, needs to be modified in this way if we want to understand Paul adequately: Identification with a Christ who loves all Christians equally is, for Paul, an identification with a Christ who gave himself up—who emptied himself. In this way, love is defined in a much more radical and uncomfortable way than Freud projects. Paul is not only talking about loving others as oneself, he is talking about loving others *more* than oneself. "Do not seek your own advantage, but that of the other" (1 Cor 10:24; cf. 10:33; 13:5; Phil 2:3ff; Rom 15:1-3). Identifying with the *crucified* Christ promotes a radicalized understanding of interhuman love in Pauline churches—whether we like it or not.

3.1.2. A second behavior is also tied to the Christ-identification. Paul propagates a patient and joyful enduring of troubles (1 Thess 1:6; 2 Cor 6:4; 1 Cor 4:12-13). How is this possible? The apostle identifies with the crucified Christ model in such a way that Christ's death is actually echoed in his own afflictions. The suffering and weak apostolic existence is interpreted as a mirror image, as a reflection of Christ's death. In this way present tribulations and weaknesses are interpreted positively. They become acceptable. The Pauline texts speak for themselves:

I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body (Gal 6:17). We suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him (Rom 8:17). As the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ (2 Cor 1:5; cf. 1:8-11). We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed ..., always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh (2 Cor 4:8-11). I want to know Christ ... and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death (Phil 3:10; cf., e.g., 2 Cor 13:4; Gal 2:19).

The suffering with Christ is joyfully endured because of its image or reflection character; and secondly because Paul invites the readers to identify also with Christ's *rising* from the dead. The afflictions do not have the last word, because resurrection with Christ is expected in the eschaton (2 Cor 4:14,17). Proleptically, the resurrection aspect is experienced even in the apostle's cross existence (2 Cor 4:7ff.). It is

experienced where God's power is active in Paul's weaknesses. It is experienced where congregations are founded in spite of the apostle's troubles and shortcomings (2 Cor 4).

To summarize this point: The two-fold identification with Christ's suffering on the cross and his rising from the dead enables the apostle to interpret and to accept present afflictions as something positive and meaningful. It helps him to discover glimpses of the reality of resurrection already now in the presence of death. The two-fold invitation to identify with Christ creates a psychologically efficient dam against the floods of "despair" (2 Cor 4:8). Crucifixes hanging in catholic hospital rooms have exactly to do with this point.

When Paul gave his present weaknesses and pain a positive meaning by identifying with the crucified and risen Christ, already his ancient readers in Corinth shook their heads, because *they* focused on apostolic signs, wonders and power display and did not know how to handle apostolic weaknesses. In fact, they denied Paul his apostleship because of his human shortcomings. However, in a psychological perspective, the acceptance of one's own deficiencies and limits represents a step toward maturing and toward gaining identity.¹⁰ Paul's energy and missionary activity are not impeded by the experiences of his own shortcomings and inescapable afflictions. By accepting his weaknesses, Paul is freed to surprisingly much vigor. And maybe our mainline churches today can learn from this when anxiously facing decreasing membership numbers, when facing the loss of societal territories which have been settled by Christian values in the past but which are being secularized today. The provocative apostle invites today's churches to accept the new limits, to quit licking their wounds and to concentrate on their mission joyfully.

Paul also has a message for society as a whole. After decades of living beyond our means and resources, it is time to realize and to respect our limits, to mature collectively by willingly scaling back our present exuberant life styles—which might be the only chance for future generations to survive. Paul invites us to identify with a God's son who, in human eyes, is weak and emptied himself for the benefit of others (Phil 2:7). Admittedly, the apostle's invitation is a fading voice in the choir of western cultural traditions, but it gains actuality today. The task of the churches will be to make this voice known a little better, not by holding a microphone and a loud-speaker in front of Paul's mouth, but by beginning to accept Paul's invitation to *live* in accordance with the crucified Christ who emptied himself. If Christians scale back their life styles because they learn to identify with *this* Christ, they for their part might be able to become models and identification objects for non-Christians. In this way also non-Christian sectors of society might be transformed. We are talk-

¹⁰ Cf. Stollberg – Lührmann 1978, 217ff; Klessmann 1989, 156-72.

ing about two steps: The crucified Christ serves as identification object for Christians who therefore are transformed in their behavior (step 1). These transformed Christians for their parts become identification objects for non-Christians in society (step 2). Paul has a similar—not an identical but a similar—identification pyramid in mind when he calls himself imitator of Christ (1 Cor 11:1), an imitator who also serves as identification *object* for others. These others become imitators of Paul (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17).

3.2. It is time to move on in our definition of identification as a psychoanalytical category. Two aspects need to be made more specific:

3.2.1. In their psychoanalytical definition of identification, Laplanche – Pontalis maintain that the individual “transforms” him- or herself according to the model of the identification object.¹¹ Several psychoanalytical studies describe more specifically this transformation, this restructuring of one’s self. They clearly distinguish between mere imitation and authentic identification. What is the difference? The imitator only displays the behavior of the model person. The one who *identifies* with the model, on the other hand, also adopts the model’s motivations. She or he assumes the model’s role by taking over the goals and emotions that are expressed in the role. Acquiring the *motivations, goals* and *emotions* which are connected with a behavior—these are the key words that characterize genuine identification as opposed to imitation.¹²

We discussed two Pauline behavioral aspects: interhuman love on the one hand and acceptance of suffering on the other. We do not need to waste time on proving that these Pauline behavioral aspects were not only based on imitation but on identification with Christ. As the world was saved by means of Christ’s love and death, the apostle’s suffering and love serve the *σωτηρία* of others (1 Cor 1:18). Paul’s motivation and goal, of course, concur with the Saviour’s. And Paul’s loving behavior certainly is accompanied by corresponding emotions when he, for example, talks about zeal, cheerfulness, longing and desire (2 Cor 8:8; 9:2,7,14) or repeatedly mentions joy (6:10; 13:9) in the context of his afflictions. We have no reason to diagnose empty rhetorics here.

3.2.2. The psychological definition of identification needs to be also specified at a second point. According to psychoanalytical theory, a genuine identification which differs from mere imitation can only take place if the identifying individual has a libido component in his or her attitude toward the model person. Without this *Id*-impulse, there are only pseudo-identifications, only imitations which lead to an “as if”-personality.¹³

¹¹ Laplanche – Pontalis 1992, 219.

¹² Cf., e.g., Loch 1968, 271 and 281-82.

Can we find corresponding material in the Pauline texts? Is there affection, a libido impulse, in the Christians' relationship with Christ? Certainly there is. Several texts speak about mutual love between Christ and the Christians.¹⁴ In 2 Cor 11:2, Paul uses the metaphors of bride and groom. This libido impulse was possible because Christ, the model, was not only a past and remote figure but a risen Lord who was perceived as being present in the congregations, especially in the sacraments. A *personal* relationship could be maintained with him. The Christians prayed to him and praised him. They perceived him as near in their pneumatic experiences. Thus, *the early Christian doctrine about Christ's resurrection and the early Christian pneumatology were a prerequisite for successful genuine identifications in the psychoanalytical sense of the word.* Without the belief in Christ's resurrection and pneumatic presence, a past impressive teacher would have been *imitated* but probably not *identified with* in a genuine way.

3.3. *New creation or radical restructuring of the Ego by means of identification with Christ.* How genuine the Pauline Christ-identification was, that is, as how strongly he perceived the restructuring of his own self, is made clear by statements like Gal 2:19-20. According to the apostle, there is hardly any continuity between his old and the new ego. The restructuring of his self is echoed in statements such as: baptized Christians "have clothed themselves with Christ" (Gal 3:27; cf. Rom 13:14) or "It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20); Christ, the identification object, is internalized or introjected, as psychological language words it. And the early Christian language of drinking, that is, of physically internalizing the Spirit, who is identical with Christ, represents a remarkable parallel (1 Cor 12:13; 10:4; 2 Cor 3:17; cf. 1 Cor 6:17).

Paul perceives the restructuring of his self as so strong and incisive that he describes going through death into a newly created existence. With this we have arrived at *Romans 6*. Rom 6:6 explains baptism as a ritual identification process with Christ: "Our old self was crucified *with him* so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." The parts of the ego that hinder a new life according to new ethical standards are construed as having died in baptism with Christ. They are buried with him. The way is free for a new ethical orientation of one's life (Rom 6:1-13; also Gal 5:24; 6:14).

On the one hand, the identification act in baptism refers to Christ's cross. Paul's key phrases are "buried with him," "crucified with him," "died with Christ," or "united with him in a death like his." On the other hand, the identification act refers to Christ's rising from the dead. "As Christ was raised from the dead, we too might

¹³ Cf., e.g., Loch 1968, 279 and 282; Stork 1982, 166.

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., Gal 2:20; Phil 1:8; 2 Cor 5:14-15; Röm 5:5-8; 8:35,37,39.

walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4)—already now. This two-fold identification with the crucified and risen Lord is ritually acted out in baptism. And the participants in baptism perceive this identification act as so powerful that they can declare that a new existence, a new ego is being created in this sacrament. "Our *old* self was crucified with him" (Rom 6:6). There is "newness of life" (6:4) and new creation (2 Cor 5:17). This new existence, manifest in a new way of living and behaving, does not make the eschatological resurrection superfluous (Rom 6:5,8), but it partially anticipates the eschatological rising (6:4,11). Through baptism as ritual identification act, the early Christian is led to a new self-image, feeling revitalized and *capable* of a new moral behavior, feeling free from sin (cf. Rom 6:4,7).

With this, ethics are back on the table. However, this time they are touched upon in a more general way, comprising the entire new Christian life style and not only the two behavioral aspects of interhuman love and readiness for suffering. To put it in psychoanalytical language:¹⁵ In his identification with Christ, Paul not only adopts the two Christ attributes of love and readiness for suffering, transforming himself according to the Christ model in these two respects. No, he also adopts Christ's attribute of going through death into new life. That is, Paul's Christ-identification not only leads to some kind of transformation in one or two respects (like all identifications do). Also, the very attribute of radical transformation itself (through death on the cross into new life) is adopted. In this way, the reorganization of the self is put into the center. Paul interprets the Christian's radical restructuring as a transformation of the sinful self into a person capable of a new way of living.¹⁶

At this point we need to pick up briefly the old question about the ontological character of the new creation that takes place within the human personality.¹⁷ According to Peter Stuhlmacher Paul envisioned this new creation as a call from the creator, which truly overturned the old existence.¹⁸ In pre-Pauline and Pauline Christianity, baptism was construed as a real transformation of existence through God's creating word and call. This describes the exegetical perspective from within, which tries to understand what Paul was thinking.

What about the perspective from without, looking from the outside through psychological lenses? Is a new moral ability really created in baptism? Do changes in the psychic structure really take place which make possible a new way of living?

¹⁵ Cf. above at note 13.

¹⁶ In spite of becoming "capable," the person, however, stays vulnerable to relapses into sin. For Paul, even the restructured baptized person, of course, remains within the realm of *σάρξ*, and the imperative therefore joins the indicative.

¹⁷ We need to block out the debated question whether or not in Paul "new creation" also intends a cosmological along with the anthropological dimension. For the ethical aspects of *καινή κτίσις*, cf. 2 Cor 5:14-17; Gal 6:13-15; *Jub.* 19:25; *Tg. 1 Chr* 4:23.

¹⁸ P. Stuhlmacher 1967.

Exegetes interested in the internal theological perspective strongly emphasize the word of *God* as the source of new creation within us. In the psychological perspective from without, however, we cannot talk like this. What we can do is analyze the role of human words in baptism. If a new self-image is conveyed in baptism, asserting, "Yes, you *are* a new creation and you *are capable* of new moral behavior, freed from impediments that prevent a new way of living," then one receives a decisive psychological boost to restructure one's life and behavior. From a psychological perspective, the early Christian talk about a newly created ego does not *describe*, mirror or represent an already *existing* reality. No, it *creates* this reality of a new ego, being information (*informatio*) in the original sense of the word—that is, a forming and creating word, performative language.

Does it make sense to speak about creating words within the perspective of modern sciences, about words that transform reality by assuring and reassuring?¹⁹ The entire realm of social relationships is based on words and information that *create* reality. All social connections are based on cognitive and language processes that put the involved persons into social relationships. Apart from these informing, that is, creating mental and verbal processes, no social relationships exist. Apart from them, not even the bond between mother and child comes about, because biological birth itself is neither a sufficient nor a necessary prerequisite for a mother-child-relationship. It is not a sufficient prerequisite, because many biological mothers in world history have given up their newborn babies. And it is not a necessary prerequisite, because adoptions also can lead to mother-child-relationships. Adoption exemplifies well a mental and verbal process that creates and transforms social reality.

Creating words, reality-transforming words, are also exercised in some of the new psychotherapeutical movements which exhibit a pseudo-religious character.²⁰ They use assuring statements, such as, "You are OK and somebody special! You have a right to yourself!" etc. Once the patient begins accepting these assurances, the effect can be transforming. Such therapy is often done in groups. In this way, the created reality gains a dimension beyond the individual, because others also hear the assurances, accept them and begin acting in accordance with them. This added dimension from the group also holds true for the reality created by the early Christian assurance that those who are baptized are new creations, because this assurance was conveyed publicly in ritual contexts in the presence of entire congregations.

What have I done with this psychological commentary on the early Christian baptismal event, focusing on the reality creating character of words? In a psychological perspective from without, by definition, the early Christian assurance of be-

¹⁹ For performative language, cf., e.g., the excellent study by Austin 1980.

²⁰ Cf., e.g., Küenzlen 1985 and 1994.

ing a new creation can only be construed as a *human* language event. Does that force us to eliminate the theological perspective which focuses on *God's* word as the decisive language event? What do we do about this juxtaposition of perspectives from within and from without—should we just declare that one of them does not apply? I do not think so. The exegetical result from within has to be brought into a dialogue with the psychological perspective from without, if we want to communicate the gospel to people of the 20th and 21st centuries. This dialogue should not serve a reductionist purpose, with the discussion about God being abandoned and the theological-exegetical result being cut back to some statements that can be accounted for psychologically. One partner in the dialogue would be devoured by the other, and the dialogue obviously would be over. No, this dialogue first humbly should look for convergencies between both. In this way, it would be made obvious where people molded by modern sciences might possess some fertile ground for the seed of the theological message.

In this synthesis perspective, a creating *human* word, which is open to scrutiny by modern sciences, might be also interpreted as *God's* word by believers in the 20th century. Whereas *without* the scientific insight into the creating character of words, the traditional concept of God's creating word might decay as a dusty antique in the church attic.

The convergence between the perspectives from within and from without becomes even more dramatic once we recall the baptismal identification process. The assurance of a new existence is not only conveyed verbally. Also, it is made emotionally plausible by means of the act of identification with the dying and rising Christ. In this way the assurance of being new is significantly enhanced. And it is further enhanced by the fact that this identification act is reinforced by a *ritual*, by a baptismal ritual. Psychologically seen, this two-fold enhancement of the assurance of being new is a very effective set up.

Furthermore, psycho-analytically seen, the identification process inaugurates indeed a real change in the psyche of the baptized Christian. A restructuring of the self takes place in regard to behavioral, emotional and motivational aspects, as we have seen. Therefore also in the perspective from without, it can be stated that at least partially a transformed person emerges—and this is a remarkable convergence with the theological-exegetical insight about new creation in the perspective from within.

4. Conclusion

The Corinthian Christian culture oriented itself to the *risen* Lord, with his attributes of glorious resurrection and triumph. The Corinthians were therefore interested in

triumphant apostolic signs and wonders. They misinterpreted human weaknesses as absence of God's power. Paul on the other hand, reminds them that God is visible in the face of the crucified Christ, and that both resurrection *and* cross are the hinges for any identification with Christ. I hinted at two areas where the Pauline category of identification might be relevant for both society and the mainline churches. I am aware, however, that the hermeneutical application of Paul's identification perspective also creates serious problems. One might object that his message was particularly tailored for macho men in Corinth and elsewhere who boasted about their spiritual strengths and whose triumphant pose needed to be deflated. Can abused women identify with a crucified man? Can suffering have a positive meaning? Is self-denial a healthy basis for love? These questions, just to choose a few, show where Paul and our own culture are about to collide. They show where we are criticized by Paul, by our own tradition—in as much as we might want to criticize this tradition in return. Obviously we are not going to solve the conflict of these questions in a short essay. I only want to hint at one area where Paul's message especially goes against the traffic of our hedonistic culture: at our almost addictive media dependency. Through the media we are flooded with an odd mix of all kinds of invitations to identification—from Rambo to Barney. Every culture needs identification objects, and the ones that are picked say almost everything about this culture. Subconscious identification processes take place within the media consumers' personalities, and the role models in the mass media increase their influence in as much as the direct personal contacts—with family, friends and colleagues—lose importance in the individuals' lives. Psychology can diagnose this, but what do we do about it? The Pauline invitation to identify with Christ offers a challenging alternative to the mass media's seduction to identify with the stronger—an alternative perspective in which God can be glorified as *God* again. Why? Because perceiving oneself as being crucified with Christ means acknowledging that one's own attempts at self redemption and self healing are powerless. At the cross an individual has ceased to be the director of his or her own history and becomes totally dependant on God—the Creator into whose hands Christians commend their spirits.

Bibliography

- Austin, J. L. 1980: *How To Do Things With Words* (eds. J. O. Urmson – M. Sbisà), 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1980.
- Freud, S. 1921: *Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse* (1921), Studienausgabe Vol. IX, Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer 1982.

- Janowski, B. 1982: *Sühne als Heilsgeschehen. Studien zur Sühnetheologie der Priesterschrift und zur Wurzel KPR im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (WMANT 55), Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1982.
- Klessmann, M. 1989: "Zum Problem der Identität des Paulus," in: *Wege zum Menschen* 41 (1989) 156-72.
- Küenzlen, G. 1985: "Psychoboom und Weltanschauung. Der Glaube der humanistischen Psychologie," in: *Materialdienst der Evangelischen Zentralstelle für Weltanschauungsfragen* 3 (1985) 60-69.
- 1994: *Der Neue Mensch. Zur säkularen Religionsgeschichte der Moderne*, München: Fink 1994, 200-25.
- Laplanche, J. – Pontalis, J.-B. 1992: *Das Vokabular der Psychoanalyse*, 11. Auflage, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 1992.
- Loch, W. 1968: "Identifikation – Introjektion. Definitionen und Determinanten," in: *Psyche* 22 (1968) 271ff.
- Stollberg, D. – Lührmann, D. 1978: "Tiefenpsychologische oder historisch-kritische Exegese? Identität und der Tod des Ich (Gal 2,19-20)," in: Y. Spiegel (ed.), *Doppeldeutlich. Tiefendimensionen biblischer Texte*, München: Kaiser 1978, 217ff.
- Stork, J. 1982: "Die seelische Entwicklung des Kleinkindes aus psychoanalytischer Sicht," in: D. Eicke (ed.), *Tiefenpsychologie. Band 2: Neue Wege der Psychoanalyse*, Weinheim – Basel: Beltz 1982, 131-95.
- Stuhlmacher, P. 1967: "Erwägungen zum ontologischen Charakter der $\kappa\alpha\iota\nu\eta$ $\kappa\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ bei Paulus," in: *EvTh* 27 (1967) 1-35.

confined to their original context, but that they were and are read in many different contexts by subsequent readers and that they were in fact intended to be read in this way.¹ This implies that the social location of the exegete also needs to be accounted for, as it has a definite influence on the way texts are approached and understood.²

The self-reflecting and inclusive approach exemplified by Hartman in his exegetical work and his refusal to be confined to one context, has prompted him to enter into dialogue with a variety of partners in the field of New Testament studies, but also further afield. By taking up the controversial challenge to work towards a New Testament theology, he is responding in part to the need often expressed by colleagues in systematic theology: that biblical exegetes should work not only in an analytical, but also in a synthetic work.³ His teaching at a state university has inevitably led him to consider the wider humanistic dimensions of theology in interaction with non-theologians.⁴ His interest in and concern for the struggle of emerging and exploited societies, to make them "realized" rather than "imagined" by

¹ Hartman 1986, 141 and item 1993, 183.

² Hartman 1990, 187.

³ Hartman 1990.

⁴ Cf. ibid. 189.

⁵ Cf. Hartman 1990, 187.