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Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*

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CREATOR: PAUL'S ROOT METAPHOR FOR GOD

Part one examines how Paul's different forms of language converge to emphasize God's identity as creator. The present and next chapter focus on Paul's metaphors, a subject usually not even included in the study of his rhetoric. Why devote so much attention to the apostle's imagery? Because imagery (metaphor) allowed Paul to transcend both his former ideas about God and the limited early Christian understanding of Christ's resurrection. In order to grasp what is most important to him, we must work through his metaphors and not around them. They express his deepest convictions and are not mere ornamental trappings.

In contrast to the importance of analogy and imagery proposed here, Judaism and Christianity usually emphasize that God revealed salvation directly, through specific historical events. Thus, Jews confessed (and still confess) that God liberated them from Egyptian bondage at a critical moment in their history. Christians say that the same God effected comparable salvation through Christ's death and resurrection. Nor were Christians and Jews the only people in antiquity who believed in the direct intervention of the divine in human affairs. Greeks in the early fifth century BCE regarded the expulsion of the Persians from their country as divine confirmation of their special destiny. Similarly, the Romans regarded Scipio's legendary defeat of Carthage in the late third century BCE as a manifestation of divine intervention.

Although many ancient peoples defined themselves by means of particular events effected on their behalf, none of them did so exclusively in these terms. No event was totally self-contained in its meaning. Historical and mythical precedents helped interpret the significance of past events. For example, the Hebrew liberation from Egypt was explained by means of God's earlier relationship with Jacob and Abraham. Similarly, the Greeks' expulsion of Persian barbarism was likened to the mythical defeat of chaos by the gods' conquest of the giants and to the mythical defeat of centaurs and Amazons.

Therefore, when we differentiate revelational and analogical forms of religion, we are describing only lesser and greater gradations of analogical relationship to salvific events. A greater dependence on historical particularity is said to reflect revelational religion, and greater freedom from historical particularity, analogical religion. I propose that Paul's interpretation of God's salvation is more analogical than scholars usually assume. Specifically, Paul evidences little concern that Gentiles appropriate God's salvation in strictly Jewish categories. His way of broadening salvation may be clarified by the similar way Second Isaiah presented Jewish liberation from Babylon.

On the one hand, Second Isaiah modeled the anticipated liberation of Jews from Babylon in terms of his ancestors' exodus from Egypt.¹ On the other hand, he exceeded what could be considered the historical when he identified the God who separated the waters of the Red Sea with God's mythological division of the watery monster of chaos at the beginning of creation:

Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD!
 Awake, as in the days of old, the generations of long ago!
 Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon?
 Was it not you who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep;
 who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over?
 (Isa 51:9–10)

The prophet not only reassures his people of the correspondence between God's present action and an earlier exodus event; he also juxtaposes the separation of the historical waters of the exodus with the mythological division of the chaos monster. With this he enlarges the idea of a national God into the notion of a universal redeemer and world creator.

¹E.g., see Isa 43:1–7, 16–21; 51:10.

Analogy and typology play a comparable role in Paul's interpretation of God's salvation in Christ. Like Second Isaiah, Paul imagined God's salvation typologically in terms of previous historical acts. Correspondingly, however, he exceeded national models by arguing analogically that the salvation effected in Christ reveals God's character as universal creator and savior. Thus, Paul not only expanded God's procreative act of fathering Jews to include Gentiles but, like Second Isaiah, enlarged God's powers of procreation to include all creation:

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Rom 8:18–23)

Up to this point only one reason for Paul's use of metaphor has been mentioned: the power of analogy to expand an earlier experience of God to an equivalent experience of meaning in a later or another context. Metaphors serve Paul well for a second reason: the power of metaphor to communicate its subject in an affective and persuasive way. Granted, early Christians such as Hippolytus and Tertullian ridiculed the mystery cults' use of affective symbols. Tertullian reports that what was revealed at the highest grade of initiation (ἐποπτεία) in cult ritual was nothing but an image of male genitalia.² In turn, Hippolytus reports that one of the things revealed was nothing but a grain of wheat.³ Nonetheless, what was a commonplace image for Hippolytus and an object of disgust for Tertullian was a potent symbol for initiates participating in the mysteries.⁴

²Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 1.

³Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 5.8.39. Initiation into the mysteries was divided into four stages: (1) preliminary fasting, sacrifice, and purification (καθαρισμός); (2) communication of mystic knowledge (τελετῆς παράδοσις) (*myesis*), which included some sort of instruction or exhortation; (3) revelation of the holy things (ἐποπτεία), which was the central point of the rite; and (4) crowning/garlanding of the initiate, who was thereby acknowledged to be a privileged person. The central revelation (ἐποπτεία) was something enacted or represented (seen) and not something spoken (or at least not merely spoken). See the comments by Farnell and Rose, "Mystery." See also Cole, "Greek Cults," 904–7.

⁴See the comments on the mysteries by Cole, "Greek Cults," 904–7.

Like the mysteries, Paul did not limit his program of persuasion to rational argumentation. For example, he reminded the Galatians that Christ's crucifixion was displayed before their very eyes. Thus Paul comfortably uses metaphor in an affective and persuasive manner. Nor is it accidental that Paul's spiritual brother, Jonathan Edwards, later emphasized the *affective* nature of Christian worship and insisted that God's liberation be celebrated with song and *sensible* sacraments.⁵

A third reason Paul enlisted metaphors to represent God concerns their ability to help people conceive reality in new ways. Metaphors function as a language of discovery.

THE ROLE OF METAPHOR IN HUMAN COMPREHENSION

The Foundational Nature of Figurative Language

Largely because of the printing press, scholars now tend to think in terms of the linear logic (the sequential order) of the printed page. Accordingly, modern argumentation engages in greater abstraction than was the case in antiquity. Thus, even when scholars use graphic images, they are careful to take them from the same metaphorical domain. By contrast, when ancient scholars engaged in rhetoric, whether orally or in writing, they thought of the spoken word's effect on the ear. They often interrupted the argument's flow with asides, they drew upon many more colorful and concrete images, and they often mixed metaphors.⁶

Unfortunately, there is a modern myth about "objectivity," which equates rational argumentation and the formal language of the scientific

⁵In Edwards's work, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, the following statements illustrate his emphasis on the affective nature of worship:

. . . the duty of singing praises to God seems to be appointed wholly to excite and express religious affections. No other reason can be assigned why we should express ourselves to God in verse, rather than in prose, and do it with music, but only, that such is our nature and frame, that these things have a tendency to move our affections.

The same thing appears in the nature and designs of the sacraments. . . . God, considering our frame, hath not only appointed that we should be told of the great things of the gospel, and of the redemption of Christ, and instructed in them by his Word; but also that they should be, as it were, exhibited to our view, in sensible representations, in the sacrament, the more to affect us with them. (*A Treatise*, 115)

⁶Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances*, vii–xiv (see esp. viii).

theorem with the idea of reality. By contrast, figurative language is obviously more imprecise and approximate in the way it describes things. Nonetheless, this informal language allows us to make sense of our experiences initially and also permits us to alter our overly ossified ideas of reality. To illustrate the need for revising the “objective language” viewpoint, Owen Barfield once observed that, contrary to the widespread belief in the objectivity of science, hard sciences such as physics willingly admit that they engage in “language games” and that their theorems are only provisional.⁷

Barfield did not assume that the scientific viewpoint was made up of whole cloth. He admitted that we could not have sent men to the moon if there were nothing to it. Nonetheless, he observed that we need to remind ourselves that our language, as well as our knowledge, is never exact but always approximate.

In the same vein, James Fernandez suggests that our very perception of reality derives from the analogies that jump out at us as applicable to our experiences of it. In turn, the analogies that we choose to describe our experiences color the ongoing meaning we give them.⁸ Consequently, metaphors are both essential to our comprehension of reality and revealing of our understanding of it. With such ideas in mind, we now turn to a more detailed explanation of how metaphor informs the human conception of reality.

Lakoff and Johnson's View of Metaphor

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson describe the metaphorical nature of human comprehension.⁹ First of all, they note that the properties that we attribute to our experiences derive from what is most familiar to us. Although abstract concepts such as love, time, happiness, health, morality, arguments, and labor are common experiences, they are not delineated clearly enough in their own terms to satisfy the needs of ordinary communication. Thus, they need to be grounded metaphorically in more concrete experiences.¹⁰

⁷Barfield made his observations in an essay called “Language and Discovery,” which he presented at the University of Missouri–Columbia about twenty-five years ago. Apparently, Barfield never published this essay, but his published works assume the same kind of perspective on language.

⁸See Fernandez, *Persuasions and Performances*, viii–x, 5–8.

⁹Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 118.

Lakoff and Johnson identify three broad types of conventional metaphors: structural, ontological, and orientational. Orientational metaphors derive from the orientational experiences we have with the world as beings with physical bodies.¹¹ Because of our own front-back orientation, we attribute like characteristics to inanimate things that have no intrinsic fronts or backs. For example, we speak metaphorically of fog being in front of a mountain. The mountain's "front" is determined relationally by the fact that it is the part of the mountain facing us as we look at it. Its "back" is that part behind the area we "face."¹²

Spatial orientations such as front-back, up-down, and near-far are useful in understanding concepts in orientational terms. But we can do only so much with spatial orientation. The circumscribed boundaries of objects and substances offer a further basis of understanding, one Lakoff and Johnson call ontological. When things are not identifiably discrete, we nonetheless describe them as if they had intrinsic, physical boundaries like ourselves.¹³

To illustrate, "*rising prices*" are often viewed as a concrete entity via the noun "*inflation*." Viewing inflation as an entity, we quantify it, see it as a cause, act in conformity to it, etc. We say such things as, "*Inflation is lowering our standard of living*"; "*We need to combat inflation*"; "*Inflation is backing us into a corner*."¹⁴ Correspondingly, as physical beings who are set off from each other by the surface of our skin, we experience ourselves as containers, with a bounding surface and with an in-out orientation. Thus, we project our container-like orientation onto other physical objects. For example, the rooms of our homes are perceived as containers, with the result that we move, container-like, *out* of one room *into* another.¹⁵

¹¹Ibid., 115–22.

¹²Ibid., 182–83. Regarding our own bodies, the human "front" is that part containing the physical receptors for the senses (the eyes, the nose, the ears, and the mouth). Accordingly, when we say we "face" in a certain direction, we are referring to what is in front of us, as this is determined relationally by the direction in which the face is oriented. When we say something is "behind" us, we mean it is opposite to where the face is oriented. Although our body is the most concrete means of conceptualizing orientation, the idea that a person's life has a direction is also a common experience in our culture and a source of orientational metaphor. We assume that life is structured like a story that has causal connections with a meaningful "narrative" direction.

¹³Ibid., 25–32.

¹⁴Ibid., 26.

¹⁵Ibid., 29–30.

Like ontological and orientational metaphors, so too structural metaphors are grounded in human experience. They have even greater potential for using one field of meaning to structure another experience.¹⁶ For example, arguments are often talked about in terms of war.

He attacked *every weak point* in my argument.
His criticisms were *right on target*.
I *demolished* his argument.
If you use that *strategy*, he'll *wipe you out*.
He *shot down* all of my arguments.¹⁷

Lakoff and Johnson contend that we not only talk about arguments in terms of war, we think we actually win or lose arguments. We attack our opponent's positions and defend our own:

We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. . . . Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument—attack, defense, counterattack, etc.—reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture.¹⁸

On the other hand, the very systematization that allows us to comprehend one element of arguing, the “battling” aspect, hides and prohibits elements that are inconsistent with that metaphorical field of meaning. In the midst of heated argumentation, we lose sight of the cooperative aspects of arguing. For example, we lose sight of the fact that the “opponent” is giving us his/her time, a valuable commodity. In the same way, our use of elements from the other domain of experience is selective. For if correspondences were total, one concept would *be* the other and not merely understandable in terms of it.¹⁹

Although our choice of elements from one domain of experience (in this case “war”) is partial, understanding does not occur strictly in terms of the isolated concepts taken from that realm of experience. To the extent that it is possible, the larger domain that we use for comparison colors our comprehension. The fact that we use metaphors such as

¹⁶Lakoff and Johnson suggest that structural metaphors have greater potential for elasticity than either orientational or ontological metaphors (*ibid.*, 61–68).

¹⁷These quotations are used by Lakoff and Johnson, *ibid.*, 4. Regarding the fuller illustration of the “Argument is war” metaphor, see *ibid.*, 4–6, 61–65.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 10–13.

“ARGUMENT IS WAR” suggests that the definitional emphasis is on the domain in general. This is the case because we experience domains as a coherent whole.²⁰ Even though we tend to use certain stock elements of an idea, their emotional and conceptual associations nonetheless color their usage. Thus, although we tend to use only the foundation and the outer shell (the walls) when we use a building as a metaphor, more general nuances are at work in the particular choice of an image. If the building is a family dwelling, emotional associations from the experience of the household are at work. If the building is a temple, other associations color the usage.

Metaphor and the Creation of New Meaning

So far we have considered how metaphors structure conventional experience. Indeed, people usually think metaphors only enhance ideas, and they resist the idea that metaphors change the way they think about reality. But Lakoff and Johnson also discuss how metaphors can cause us to *reconceive* experience.²¹ If a new idea is convincing enough that we begin to act in conformity to it, then it alters the conceptual system that gave rise to it in the first place.

Although words themselves do not create reality, the change in perception evoked by metaphors can alter our understanding of experience. In turn, a change in comprehension can alter our conviction about what is real. Correspondingly, we cannot literally say Paul created a *new* metaphor for God when he called him creator and Father. Such ideas were already present in antiquity. Nonetheless, the priority of “creator” to other ideas in Paul’s own system of belief, as well as the way he modified existing cultural ideas about God as creator, resulted in a distinctive use of such imagery.

PAUL’S ROOT METAPHOR FOR GOD

Despite the individuality of Paul’s letters and the diversity of imagery that characterizes them, all of his major metaphors belong to the same overarching field of meaning. As suggested in the introduction, Paul derived this symbolic field from an earth-shaking experience giving rise to the “master metaphor” that caused him to reconceive God as he

²⁰Therefore, Lakoff and Johnson describe the influence of broader domains on our experience as experiential gestalts (ibid., 117–19).

²¹Ibid., 139–58.

did. To be sure, the images Paul derived from this experience are not unique. For example, "father" was a relatively common way of referring to a god's creativity in antiquity. Nonetheless, Paul's overall network of images derived from his personal experience that God was making Gentile converts his offspring by means of Christ's resurrection.

Lakoff and Johnson discuss this model of analogy under the rubric of new metaphors. In the case of Paul, as well as in Lakoff and Johnson's examples, this does not mean totally new ideas. Rather, the designation "new" refers to an unexpected adaptation of an analogy or, even more strikingly, to the juxtaposition of paradoxical correlations.²² For example, in the case of Paul, it was unexpected, from the Jewish perspective, for him to describe Gentiles as Abraham's offspring, especially when he did not require them to be circumcised or to observe certain other major Jewish practices.²³

Convergence in the Interpretation of Paul

Christiaan Beker, Daniel Patte and Norman Petersen agree that Paul's rhetoric was determined by his theological convictions. These internal convictions, *not* some recurring external problem such as "Judaizers," give an underlying coherence to his language.²⁴ Petersen proposes that an underlying symbolic world view, or "master-narrative," has to be assumed in order to make sense of Paul's use of metaphor. For example, in the case of Paul's letter to Philemon, Petersen suggests that Paul colored what happened between Philemon and his slave Onesimus by the way he reconstructed the order of events. In turn, Paul's creative editing of the individual story of Philemon reflects the theological convictions of his wider symbolic viewpoint (master narrative).²⁵

Lest we fault Paul for his creative arbitrariness in reordering causal relations and conventional social structures, Petersen points out that "real" stories also construct coherence out of events that, in themselves, do not possess the specific causal relationship that historians attribute to them.²⁶ In any case, Paul manipulates the order of events as well as his

²²See "The Creation of Similarity," in *ibid.*, 147–55.

²³Because of Jewish assumptions about the immorality of Gentiles, it is equally startling that Paul would describe his converts as God's temple and call them "saints" and the "sanctified."

²⁴In this connection, see the comments by Petersen, *Rediscovering Paul*, 5–6.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 8–9, 14–16.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 10–11.

depiction of social relationships in order to secure a specific response from his recipients. Thus Paul believed that the fictive relationship between Philemon and Onesimus as spiritual brothers took precedence over their actual master-slave relationship.

In most cases, interpreting social relationships in Paul's letters is not a linguistic problem. In the case of Philemon, with the exception of Paul's reference to himself as ambassador, the social categories are quite conventional: fathers, children, brothers, sisters, masters, and slaves. Sociologically, the language refers to the institutions of family and slavery. Nonetheless, the interpretation of these social relationships is complicated by the fact that Paul's most important uses are symbolic rather than literal. When he transfers conventional social categories figuratively to social relationships in the church, they are no longer governed by their ordinary meaning. To complicate the situation further, Paul sometimes attributes a contradictory array of social roles to the same people. Jesus is not only Lord, Christ, Master, and Son; he is also a slave. Correspondingly, Paul is not only the father and authoritative head of the communities that he has founded; he is also a fellow sibling, and in his relationship to God (the community's definitive head) he is a slave. Although there is no lexical difference between Paul and God as fathers, between Philemon and Christ as masters, and between Jesus and other believers as slaves and sons, there are significant levels of distinction.²⁷

Because of the symbolic character of Paul's rhetoric, Petersen says that the interpreter should be concerned less with the literal lineaments of Paul's theology than with the presuppositions underlying his letters. Accordingly, theology is a kind of secondary knowledge that Paul produced in order to defend and maintain the prereflective commitments of his symbolic universe.²⁸

Although Patte's language describing Paul's theological perspective differs from that of Petersen, his understanding is similar. Patte also stresses the priority of Paul's convictions to the "argumentative" logic that the apostle uses to justify his viewpoint. Thus, whereas Petersen says Paul's symbolic universe take precedence over any individual articulation of that worldview, Patte says Paul's undergirding system of convictions takes precedence over any specific justification of his belief. Conse-

²⁷E.g., in Paul's mind, there is a significant difference between his own role as father and God's paternity, just as there is a considerable distinction between Philemon's status as master and benefactor and Christ's household mastery. See *ibid.*, 17–30.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 28–30.

quently, without attending to Paul's theological presuppositions, we will not comprehend his intention very well.²⁹

According to Patte, Paul's most fundamental convictions may be described by three adjectives: charismatic, eschatological, and typological.³⁰ By *charismatic*, Patte means Paul's converts actually experienced God's saving power in ways that changed their present circumstances. Salvation was *not* a mere possibility. Moreover, the reality of salvation was not limited only to Paul's converts, but its truth was confirmed *typologically* in what God effected in the lives of other believers. Converts' salvation was analogous to what believers like Paul had experienced, to what tradition reports about biblical figures like Abraham and, above all, it corresponded to what God effected in Christ's resurrection. Nonetheless, God's salvation will be effected fully only in the *future*. Present and past manifestations of power lead believers to trust in God's final ("eschatological") restoration of creation.³¹

In summary, Patte and Petersen suggest that comprehending Paul's theology depends on grasping his system of convictions. Both show that Paul adapted his convictions to the individual circumstances of each letter. Beker's emphasis on the interaction between "coherence" and "contingency" in Paul's interpretation of the gospel corresponds to Patte's and Petersen's perspectives. Although Paul had unchanging convictions about the gospel's abiding truth, the contingencies of each unique situation required specific adaptations of his gospel's coherence.³²

Beker prefers the word *coherence* to *core* as a way of signaling the symbolic and fluid character of Paul's thought. Paul expresses his convictions as a "network of interlocking parts" rather than as inflexible doctrinal concepts. Similarly, *contingency* communicates the flexibility in how Paul adapted his convictions to the circumstances of his individual letters. Thus, the differing contours of the letters are not to be explained as Paul's arbitrary accommodation of theology to his audience.³³ Although Beker does not use Petersen's language of master-narrative, he nonetheless assumes a comparable perspective in the importance he attaches to the symbolic character of Paul's system of belief and to the

²⁹See Daniel Patte, *Paul's Faith*, 3–27.

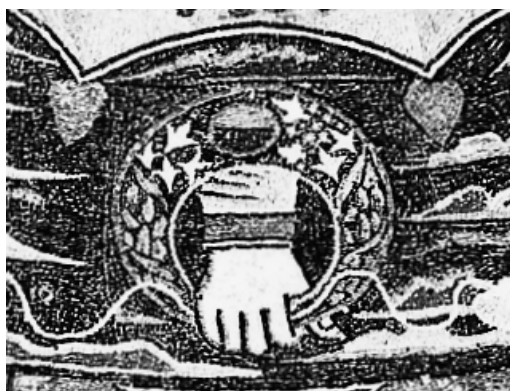
³⁰*Ibid.*, 233–41.

³¹Patte takes up these essential characteristics of Paul's faith under separate headings: "A Radical Charismatic Faith" (*ibid.*, 233–36); "An Eschatological Faith" (236–38); and "A Typological Faith" (238–41).

³²Beker, *The Triumph of God*, x–xi.

³³*Ibid.*, xi–xii.

network of connections within it. He argues that so long as we examine key concepts only in isolation from one another, we cannot understand Paul's real intention. Such concepts as righteousness, justification, reconciliation, and salvation cannot be played off against each other, as if any one were decisive for explaining the meaning of the others. All serve, metaphorically, to make the gospel applicable to particular situations. Therefore, Paul's theology is best comprehended by grasping the coherent center that creates the field of interlocking connections among key concepts.³⁴



Detail of apse mosaic with God's hand stretching a wreath toward the crucified Christ, who has won the victor's crown. San Clemente apse mosaic (Rome, Italy). Photo courtesy of Alinari/Art Resource, N.Y.

Root Metaphor and Paul's Idea of God

Taking Beker's idea of the fluidity of coherence in Paul's letters as a basis, along with Patte's and Petersen's comparable emphases on Paul's system of convictions, I examine below how Paul's root idea of God as creator provides a means of connecting his diverse metaphors. Several aspects of Paul's idea of God as creator have already been mentioned. God is the benevolent founder and savior of a worldwide empire. God is creator of the physical universe and of a new spiritual creation that is groaning in labor pains as it gives birth to a new order.

³⁴Ibid., 18–19.

The representation of God's universal powers of creativity is less developed in Paul's letters, however, than racial and familial images of procreativity. Why the apostle concentrates on more familial forms of God's creativity will be explained shortly. For the present and for the sake of comparison, though, we note how boldly this idea of universal creativity is emphasized in Philo's writings. Indeed, Philo identifies God's two most essential potencies as the creative and the kingly (ἡ μὲν ποιητική, ἡ δ' αὖ βασιλική).³⁵ Because God was the creator of everything, Philo says, he had the right to rule what he brought into being:

Rather, as anyone who has approached nearest to the truth would say, the central place is held by the Father of the Universe, Who in the sacred scriptures is called "He that is" as His proper name, while on either side of Him are the senior potencies, the nearest to Him, the creative and the kingly. The title of the former is God, since it made and ordered the All; the title of the latter is Lord, since it is the fundamental right of the maker to rule and control what He has brought into being. (*Abr.* 121)³⁶

Most Jewish authors, including Paul, shared with Philo the idea that God was the personal agent who created the rationality of the universe. Judaism differed in this respect from Stoicism and certain other philosophical representatives, who located rationality more impersonally in the natural processes (laws) themselves.³⁷

Sometimes Philo describes God's identity as world creator (maker) with the personal designation "father." This personal idea of fathering is the emphasis that pervades and colors Paul's images of God. As already suggested, however, Paul focuses not so much on God's generation of a

³⁵E.g., see "maker [ποιητής] and ruler [ἡγεμών]" in Philo, *Abr.* 88; "father [πατήρ] and ruler [ἡγεμών] of all" in *Mos.* 2.88. It is more common for Philo to refer to maker (creator, father) and ruler separately than to join the two, but since both are connected to God's relationship to the whole universe, it is clear that Philo thinks of the two aspects as related integrally to God's identity as the absolute sovereign of the created order. See "Father and Maker of all [the whole/the world]" in *Abr.* 9, 58; *Mos.* 1.158; *Mos.* 2.99. See also "Father of all [the whole, i.e., the universe]" in *Abr.* 75, 121, 204; "Begetter (Parent) of all [the whole]" in *Mos.* 2.205, 209; and "uncreated Father" in *Ios.* 265. The equivalent designation, "ruler of the all [the whole/the world]" appears in *Mos.* 1.284; 2.168.

³⁶Cf. Philo, *Mos.* 2.99. Philo explains that the title of the former potency is "God," since θεός ("God") derives from the verb τίθημι, which means "make" or "order" (i.e., "create"). The title of the latter potency is "Lord" (κύριος), which designates the creator's right to be master of what he brought into being.

³⁷By the early Roman imperial period, however, even Stoic sources had begun to identify Zeus or some other divine agent as the personal cause of the world's universal order.

new physical order as on his procreation of a spiritual race and family. God adopted Abraham, metaphorically speaking, to father a people. But as with Paul's picture of God as creator of the universe, so too with Abraham's race, the full potential of God's creativity did not realize itself in Abraham's physical descendants, the Jews. Rather, it was only with Christ, the *true* seed and heir, that both the Jewish race and Gentile nations were able to actualize their full potential as God's people.

Despite the emphasis in Galatians on Gentile converts' superiority to Abraham's physical descendants, Paul did not really think Gentiles had preferred racial status with God. He could attribute inferior status to Jews only when they emphasized ethnic birth status and personal accomplishments in place of the status derived from dependence on God's creativity.

For a person is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart—it is spiritual and not literal. Such a person receives praise not from others but from God. (Rom 2:28–29)

We should not take offense at Paul's positive comparison of Gentiles with Jews, without attending to his larger system. Philo, too, made a similar-sounding commendation of Gentile converts describing proselytes not only as equal to Jews but also as special recipients of God's affection:

For when the Revealer [Moses] has hymned the excellences of the Self-existent [God] in this manner "God the great and powerful, who has no respect to persons, will receive no gifts and executes judgement" [cf. Deut 10:17–18], he proceeds to say for whom the judgement is executed—not for satraps and despots and men invested with power by land and sea, but for the "incomer [proselyte], for orphan and widow." For the incomer, because he has turned his kinsfolk, who in the ordinary course of things would be his sole confederates, into mortal enemies, by coming as a pilgrim to truth and the honoring of One who alone is worthy of honour, and by leaving the mythical fables and multiplicity of sovereigns, so highly honoured by the parents and grand-parents and ancestors and blood relations of this immigrant to a better home. (*Spec.* 4.177–178)³⁸

Nor was Paul unique in emphasizing the importance of something other than physical birth as a basis of racial identity. Philo argued for an alternative basis of nobility:

³⁸See also Philo, *Virt.* 103.

The proselyte . . . will be gazed at from all sides, marvelled at and held blessed by all for two things of highest excellence, that he came over to the camp of God and that he has won a prize best suited to his merits, a place in heaven firmly fixed, greater than words dare describe, while the nobly born who has falsified the sterling of his high lineage will be dragged right down and carried into Tartarus itself and profound darkness. Thus may all men seeing these examples be brought to a wiser mind and learn that God welcomes the virtue which springs from ignoble birth, that he takes no account of the roots but accepts the full-grown stem, because it has been changed from a weed into fruitfulness. (*Praem.* 152)

Although Paul can describe Christ as “the new Adam,” through whose resurrection God creates a whole new creation, or “the true seed” of Abraham, through whom God fathers a spiritual race, Christ as head (heir) of the individual household is his most common emphasis. With the possible exception of Romans, where God’s identity as universal creator may be the primary theme, all of Paul’s letters emphasize God’s character as the Father of the individual congregation. Why is this familial aspect so dominant? Paul was writing to individual congregations for whom the primary experience of God was personal and familial. The same idea was probably the most appealing to Paul as well because of his own experience of the resurrected Christ.

Moreover, it is not simply the initial act of procreating offspring that characterizes Paul’s conception of God, for he is just as concerned with the nourishing and educative roles of the Father, whose headship creates a fertile environment in which family members’ growth to full maturation is expected. Therefore, many of Paul’s images embody not only the idea of life’s generation in an initial sense but also the added idea of growth and maturation. Accordingly, Paul uses such subjects as agriculture, athletic competition, building, cultic sacrifice, and family maturation as images for growth, progress, perfection, and maturation. All share the idea of wholeness or completion. The root metaphor for all of these is Paul’s idea of God as the creator.

Granted, when Paul employs images of fertility, building, and related forms of growth/completion, it is mostly in connection with the need of individual congregations to mature into the character of their life-giving Father. On the other hand, such ideas pervade all levels of Paul’s idea of God as creator, and in each case Christ is the ideal paradigm of maturation and perfection. Thus, at the uppermost level, Christ is “the new Adam,” through whom God creates a superior form of civilization. At the level of race, Christ is the ideal descendant and “heir” of Abraham.

In addition to these levels and types of maturation, there are other kinds of communal association. For example, Christ is depicted not only as “Lord” (κύριος) of the individual household and as political head of a vast empire, but also as priestly “Lord” of the family cult, whose members are required to be holy, pure, and perfect in their conduct toward one another and the divinity.

Moreover, the society of believers is likened politically not only to subjects of an empire but also to citizens of the city-state. Thus, when Paul compares members of the church to the different parts of the human body, he is appropriating the well-known political image of the ideal relationship among city-state citizens. For Greek political theorists, the image underscored the necessity of interdependence, respect, and mutual support for each civic and social unit within the state. The corresponding Roman idea in the late republic and the early empire is *concordia*, the social harmony that constituted the basis of an ideal state.

Because of Paul’s emphasis on an enlivening form of increase, his images of progress are almost always biological rather than inanimate. His construction image is one of the few exceptions, and even in this case, the focus is more on edifying (“building up”) than on the static state of a completed edifice. Aristotle’s social thought included a comparable emphasis, since the teleological idea of maturation was fundamental to his conception of the political order.³⁹ Unlike Aristotle, however, Paul did not confine the cause of progress to natural possibilities in creation itself. Because of his experience of the resurrected Christ, he was convinced that an additional act of generativity had been required to complete creation’s potential. On the other hand, it is important to recognize that he shared with Aristotle the idea that maturation was social and not individualistic. Despite Paul’s emphasis on faith, he did not think of trust, as modern Westerners do, in an individualistic way.

³⁹Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1.3–12.