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Galatians and the “Orientalism” of Justification by Faith: Colonizing and Decolonizing Paul

Binaries are omnivores and ravenous. Once in place, they devour everything in their reach, fowl and fish and men and mice, metabolizing it into the one big polarity of *us* versus *them*. Vastly diverse identities are homogenized under the defining rubric of inferior, outlandish, evil; they become “same” in bizarre configurations as they are turned into Other by a dominant Self that has set out to order the world in its own image. Adolf Hitler managed to bundle up entities as heterogeneous as Jews, financial capitalism, bolshevism and Eastern/Asiatic barbarism into “the” enemy of the German people and the Occident, thus mobilizing a surprisingly broad spectrum of support for his total war that in the end left over 70 million dead. The pattern goes back to the very roots of our civilization. The ancients started with mythological abnormities of striking variety that eventually morphed into a long list of historical foes - Centaurs, Cyclopes, Giants, Titans, Amazons, Persians, Gauls/Galatians, Carthaginians, Egyptians, Orientals, in short: barbarians. War-making, power politics and colonialism are a driving force in these classification efforts from their onset. Othering as means of ideological colonization predates, accompanies and follows physical conquest of foreign territories and peoples.

Greeks against barbarians and West against East are two of the most influential antithetical stereotypes that have shaped the Self-definition of our civilization since its origins, a toxic presence even if seemingly dormant, always ready to re-appear in new mutations of the old pattern, anti-Judaism morphing into anti-Islamism, anti-communism into anti-terrorism, never without the latent possibility of sparking a new total war or total power claim where nothing counts other than *we* or *them*. *We* the civilized, the righteous, the advanced part of humanity – *they* the primitive, irrational, destructive others, the threat. *We* the victims justified by our innocence, they the culprits and perpetrators. At some point this hierarchical binary became Christianized. The Occident was Christian and stood against the non-Christian Orient populated by Muslims and other peoples or powers antithetical and inferior to *us*. The question at the heart of this essay is: In the global war-zone of the present-day encounter between the dominant Euro-American Self and the territory, religion, culture, economy, people other-than-ours, what are the spiritual and moral resources that Christianity has to offer towards new practices of peace-making and reconciliation ?

Paul at first sight seems an unlikely ally in this quest. Justification by faith, his signature doctrine in Galatians and Romans, and of Protestantism later on, undoubtedly is deeply implicated in the Western politics of othering. Irreconcilable polarities - faith versus law, grace versus works, justification by faith rather than by law or works - are the most pertinent feature of the theological argument all throughout Galatians, the most polemical letter Paul ever wrote. Already in the opening section he hurls a two-fold *Anathema* against his “opponents.” (Gal 1:8-9). As it turns out, these falsifiers and “perverters” of the gospel of Christ (Gal 1:6-9) advocated for circumcision among the Galatian *ekklesiai* (Gal 2:3.7-9; 5:1-12; 6:12). With this, their “Jewishness” seemed to be an established fact, although Paul himself never discloses their precise identity and hints at a much more complex background (6:12-13). But the simplifying power of the Occidental binaries didn't leave much space for nuance, and Paul's passionate plea against circumcision morphed with ghostly ease into the “big” antithesis of Christian faith versus Jewish work righteousness, making Galatians the Magna Charta of Christian (and specifically Protestant) anti-Judaism. And again the binary core-construct could assimilate a long list of the most diverse “adversaries” of faith and grace justification. Martin Luther, for example, in the introduction to his commentary on Galatians names no less than six groups of enemies that are aligned with law, works, work righteousness, and

Satan: Jews, Turks, Papists, sectarians, fanatical spirits, Mohammedans. In particular the seemingly natural coexistence of Jews and Muslims/Turks on this list of anti-Christian protagonists of “law” and “works” will require further consideration.

While the cooptation of Paul and his most influential theological concept for the master narrative of the Christian Occident is beyond doubt, the normativity of this reading is in urgent need of being re-examined. From a post-colonial and empire-critical perspective, the theology of justification by faith has to be scrutinized through a bifurcated lens: on the one hand, throughout the centuries of Christian empire-building and colonization, as a powerful source for the binary Western construct of Self and Other, on the other hand as its even more powerful antidote and contestant that has been widely suppressed in its original thrust towards justice-seeking, peace-building, de-polarization and conflict-resolution .

Edward Said: Decolonizing Orientals and Occidentals, Muslims and Jews

Edward Said’s “Orientalism”, published in 1978, counts as a major foundational text of Postcolonial Studies. It analyzes how the Occident has systematically fabricated and produced the Orient as its inferior Other that it was entitled to colonize and rule; Orientalism as the deep-rooted essentialist and stereotyped dichotomy in Western-centric perceptions of the Oriental Other is profoundly linked to imperial and colonial power politics. Taking up impulses from the early Michel Foucault, Said demonstrated to what extent these power relations are inscribed into the very fabric of Western knowledge in all its dimensions, even where it seems most objective and neutral. Among the inferior characteristics attributed to the Oriental that constituted an allegedly coherent body of information about the “Orient” are degeneration, lack of logic and accuracy, lethargy devoid of energy and malleability, fatalism and indifference, sensuality, splendor and eccentricity, but also cruelty and despotism. To a large extent intersecting with the classic features attributed to barbarians in antiquity, all of these are markers of backwardness that establish the binary typology of an advanced Occidental civilization facing a retarded and uncivilized East ready to be educated, developed, and dominated: ”Since the Oriental was the member of a subject race, he had to be subjected: it was that simple.”

When Postcolonialism, somewhat belatedly crossed over from Literary Criticism and Cultural Studies into the departments of Religion and Bible, it boosted a prolific inquiry into the history and constructs of Western biblical interpretation in its complicity with colonialism and imperialism, most prominently, but not exclusively, with regard to Christian missionary endeavors. To a large extent intersecting with Empire-Critical Studies, Postcolonial Criticism re-examines biblical texts in their synchronicity as well as entanglement with imperial and colonial contexts in the ancient biblical worlds and throughout church history until the present day. This approach constitutes an indispensable dimension of critical biblical scholarship.

At the same time, the concept of scripture and scriptural authority has become a highly contested territory. The “innocence” of the biblical texts vis-à-vis their colonial and imperial interpretations is often vehemently disputed by postcolonial and postmodern interpreters, marking a fine line of distinction towards the allegedly less critical approaches of empire-critical and liberationist paradigms. In a paradoxical twist, however, a categorical rejection of critical biblical *re-lectura* inevitably affirms and re-inscribes the established conservative readings of scripture. Needless to say that Paul, long proclaimed as a bastion of theological and social conservatism, and of all biblical authors most intensely implicated in the missionary enterprise with all its imperial and colonial ramifications, is at the center of these debates and emerges with some predictability as a most obvious target of postcolonial scriptural criticism.

The present essay is choosing a path that seeks to avoid the self-defeating alternative of either

postcolonial criticism as denial of scriptural authority, or of scriptural authority as denial of postcolonial criticism. Taking up the core concept of Pauline theology, the doctrine of justification by faith in its historical Galatian setting on the one hand, Said's category of Orientalism on the other, it is trying to demonstrate the analytical fecundity of postcolonial/empire-critical tools for scrutinizing the "orientalizing" effects of the established (Protestant) interpretations of justification theology. In a next step, however, these same tools will be used to deconstruct the dominant reading paradigm, showing that the "colonizing text" of Paul is a "colonized text" itself that has been domesticated and co-opted by Western exegetes and is in need of de-colonization. "Scripture" has to be read against "tradition", Paul against established modes of Pauline interpretation, without however postulating the "innocent text" as a given. Claiming Paul's justification theology as a radically de-colonizing and empire-critical concept does not imply that Paul himself was in no way shaped by dominant thought patterns, e.g. with regard to gender constructs. At the same time "colonizing" readings of Paul within the New Testament canon itself need to be critically considered, e.g. with regard to Luke's Acts and the Pastoral Epistles.

Interestingly, the concept of "Orientalism" itself so far has received relatively little attention in Pauline post-colonial and empire-critical scholarship. From his perspective as a Palestinian-American Edward Said himself was particularly concerned about the anti-Muslim implications of Occidental thinking that he saw closely connected to anti-Judaism as the twin-concept of anti-Islamism. In the 1994 edition of *Orientalism* he expressed his most serious concern not only about the murderous escalation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict but also the growing dichotomization in the global political landscape after Sept 11, 2001 that pitted Western Christian civilization against an "Orientalized Islam (as) a new empire of evil," thereby lumping together "Islam and terrorism, or Arabs and violence, or the Orient and tyranny" and replacing the "Cold War bipolarism" by Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilizations." This requires a critical look at the history of Pauline interpretation. While the "New Perspective" over the past decades has done invaluable ground-work to establish the critique of traditional anti-Judaism in Pauline studies, the complicity between Anti-Judaism and Anti-Islamism so far has not received much attention. As an introduction to the orientalizing pattern of Pauline interpretation, simultaneously anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim, Sir William M. Ramsay's work on Galatians appears like a model example.

Galatians colonizing Phrygians, Turks, Jews, Muslims: William M. Ramsay

William Ramsay (1851-1939), more than any other scholar, was knowledgeable about the historical context of the Galatian correspondence, including its imperial and colonial ramifications. An explorer, archeologist, and professor of Humanities at Scottish Aberdeen, he did extensive travels in Asia Minor and became an eminent expert in the history and archeology of the region who made a significant contribution to the study of the New Testament and Christian origins, as well as to the history of the Roman empire. Once the ideological underpinnings of his approach are understood, his work is still an invaluable source of information about first century Roman Galatia and its inhabitants with whom Paul had his most dramatic and theologically consequential disagreement about the need of circumcision.

Ramsay is well aware that the Galatians, who entered Asia minor in 278 B.C.E., were part of the vast Celtic migrations of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. that originated from central Europe - already by the 5th century Celts inhabited parts of today's Austria, Germany, Switzerland, France, Britain, Spain - and affected Northern Italy, the Balkans, Greece, and Turkey. Ramsay thus asserts categorically that the Galatians are Occidentals, i.e. "still a western people at heart, essentially unlike the Greek and Asiatic peoples around them," as "a deep gulf still separated these Occidentals from the Asiatics." Their inherently "Occidental" traits for Ramsay essentially are defined as the power to conquer and rule. The Galatians had the "qualities of an aristocracy, proud of their own individual superiority" that they preserved as long as they "continued to be a nation of warriors"

who kept themselves away from the manners of their subjects. Some loss in their occidental superiority occurred, however, when the Galatians took over the religion of their Phrygian subjects and became a “mixed race”.

Originally, the Phrygians themselves had entered the country as a noble warrior race (Phryges) of European origin that brought “a love of war and a love of freedom, an energy and pertinacity and self-assertiveness which always seems to be stronger and more deep-rooted in the north and west than in the south and east.” Later, however, they amalgamated with the “peaceful and unenterprising” indigenous people and “sank to that placid level of character which belonged to the older subject population.”

As they no longer stayed different and dominant, they degenerated into slavishness. The Phrygian, entirely unfit for war, in antiquity was seen as “the slave *par excellence*” and together with Thracians perceived as the “least honoured of mankind.” It is noteworthy, that “peace” in this taxonomy marks inferiority; what we ourselves might see as a desirable de-militarization of the Occidental Self, in Ramsay’s view only made the ex-conquerors prone to be righteously subjugated by the invading Galatians.

Gendered and racial stereotypes are intensely interwoven in Ramsay’s orientaling discourse of conquest and colonization, and not surprisingly the inferior Other to be conquered and colonized is closely tied to the Other of Earth and nature as well. The Phrygians’ slave-like nature is manifested in their effeminacy. They wear ear-rings like women and worship the mother goddess Cybele who among other things is a manifestation of the Earth mother and the life of nature. The Phrygians thus adhered to a religion that was “a glorification of the female element in human life.” This lack of masculinity corresponds to their national character as “receptive and passive, not self-assertive and active.” While the ancient Phryges as warriors adhered to a masculine religion, they eventually surrendered to “genius of the land on which they lived” and to the lure of “Anatolian religion.” Cybele worship represented

“the female element as the nobler development of humanity, while the male is secondary and on a lower plane. The Goddess-Mother was represented in the mystic ritual as the prominent figure; the God comes in only to cause the crisis in her life...”

This is the essence of the Orient destined to be ruled by the Occident. For, as Ramsay emphatically states: “Among the peoples of the west it was very different.” He seems to be sure that he has given an adequate and self-evident description of Oriental inferiority that he on his own travels sees confirmed in his encounters with the “slow, dull, contended Turk,” the famous “Mevlevi or dancing Derwishes of modern Turkey” that echo Cybele-worship, or the feminine and thus “Phrygian” art of embroidery still skillfully practiced in contemporary Anatolia.

Next to Galatians and Phrygians, the Jews are the third player in Ramsay’s scenario. An outspoken proponent of the so-called South Galatian hypothesis, he states a strong affinity between Jews and Phrygians/Lycaonians, that is Semites, Orientals and Asiatics. The people of Lycaonian Lystra and Derbe to the South of the Roman province of Galatia where Paul according to Acts 14:5-20 is first hailed as Hermes and then stoned at the instigation of hostile Jews, for Ramsay are not only “much more Oriental in type than Greek” (like the Phrygians), but also depict their God in a way that looks like an “almost typical Semite.” There is “no natural antipathy” or “no strong racial antipathy” between the Oriental/Asiatic type and “the Semite”, which also explains why “the Jew” in modern times has been “better treated before Turkish law than before the law and government of most European countries.” Within this setting, it is self-evident that Paul’s non-Semitic (i.e. circumcision-free) form of Christianity was highly contested in Phrygian South Galatia that had a natural preference for the more Semitic version propagated by Paul’s opponents.

The Galatian conflict thus in Ramsay’s reading becomes the grand clash between Orient and Occident as the defining moment at the root of Christianity:

“Asia Minor is the Debatable Land, in which Orientalism and Occidentalism have often striven for mastery.

Under the early Roman Empire, and again at the present day, a vigorous Occidentalism is striving, apparently with every prospect of success, to subdue the plateau.(...) The deep lying Orientalism always recurs. The Western conqueror triumphs, and before he is aware, when he turns his back for a moment, his results have melted into the old type.(...)

Such was Paul's experience. (...)

Such was the experience of every century in the Christian time. Every heresy in Anatolia recurred to a more Oriental and specially Judaistic type; and at last Phrygia and Galatia reverted to Semitic Mohammedanism."

Paul's battle against Phrygian, Lycaonian and Asiatic Orientalism, all of it embodied in Judaism, for Ramsay finally merges with its contemporary counterpart, namely "Semitic Mohammedanism." The ease with which Ramsay transitions from Pauline anti-Judaism to Anti-Islamism is striking and confirms Said's observation that both Jews and Muslims are at the core of the Occidental construct of the Oriental enemy and Other.

The superior forces of the West in this case are represented by Paul – and by imperial Rome. Already when he had stated the indelibly Occidental character of the Galatians as "still a western people at heart," Ramsay had used this as evidence for their natural inclination to align themselves with Rome. The Galatians are in a tug-of-war between Orient and Occident; they have to make a decision between Phrygia and Rome, past and future, Western progress or Eastern-Jewish-Asiatic backwardness:

"The fundamental fact in central Asia minor at that time was this: to be educated, to be progressive, to think, to learn, was to become Romanised or Hellenised. To be a Phrygian, was to be rude, ignorant, unintelligent, slavish."

We are reminded of Said's statement that the inferiority of the conquered justifies their conquest by the superior and makes colonization a most benign and beneficial act of education and social advancement. Paul as a Christian missionary in this reading would be the advocate of Romanization as self-submission of the East to the superior Occidental culture, advocating a decision against the complacent, earthly and effeminate "spirit of Orientalism, of stagnation, of contended and happy ignorance, of deep-rooted superstition" embodied in Judaism and circumcision. When he addresses them as "Galatians" (Gal 3:1), Paul challenges their old Oriental, Asiatic and pro-semitic identity as Phrygians or Lycaonians and tries to remind them of their newly won Romanness as "men of the Roman province of Galatia." It is as if somebody at Ramsay's time would address people as "British" rather than "English". Paul for Ramsay thus speaks as "the Roman", in the same way as Ramsay himself speaks as a proponent of the British Empire: Paul's "Roman point of view and his imperial statesmanship" must be fully taken into account. Not surprisingly, the new Christ-religion from Ramsay's perspective thus is ideally suited as the new religion of the Roman empire, superior to Judaism, the "emasculated" religion of Anatolia, all other existing religions and even the emperor cult in its capacity to transcend national boundaries and become a unifying imperial world religion.

Ramsay has inscribed the Battle of Occident versus Orient into the Galatian conflict of foreskin versus circumcision. Though he candidly states at the outset of his commentary that he is not concerned with the "dogmatic or doctrinal value" of the letter, he has made Paul's plea for faith justification at least implicitly a justification of Roman imperial conquest and colonization. The Pauline mission among the nations becomes submission to Rome. It enables its newly converted subjects, however, to pride themselves as members of the conquering Western civilization that rightly subdues and enslaves its Eastern Others. Ramsay mobilizes the full spectrum of sexist, racist, militaristic, imperialist, and colonialist dichotomies that are deposited in the conscious and sub-conscious of the Western Self to construct the epistemology of "Christian faith righteousness" versus "Jewish work righteousness": masculinity versus effeminization, active versus passive, civilized versus barbarian, aristocratic versus slavish, warlike versus peaceful, educated and enterprising versus ignorant, superstitious, complacent. Paul is the Christian protagonist of the "Self-assertive" Western warrior who represents Roman law of conquest and stands in triumph over inferior Easterners, Jews, Muslims, Turks, Asiatics, non-men, and ultimately Earth/Nature.

The *Dying Galatian* and the justification of the Occidental Self: Critical Re-imagination I

Ramsay's unabashedly colonial reading of Justification by Faith with its explicit focus on the Orient-Occident binary might be peculiar to his stance as an advocate of the British Empire in the late 19th/early 20th century, but within the broader pattern of Protestant Pauline interpretation with its intrinsically dichotomous structure he is not exactly an anomaly. The question that presently marks the cutting edge of Pauline scholarship, however, is whether this justification of the colonizing Roman Self indeed renders the original thrust of Paul's Galatian controversy – or on the contrary, its irredeemable distortion. Recent work on Paul that has integrated the focus on his Jewishness with an exploration of the Roman imperial context as defining hermeneutical framework has unearthed a profoundly empire-critical (rather than Torah-critical) and anti-colonial setting in the way the apostle conceptualizes core terms of his justification theology such as Jews and Gentiles/nations, righteousness and justification, boasting, law, faith and grace. A different image of Paul is emerging that shows him laboring in the birth process of a new human being (cf. Gal 4:19) that is shedding the deeply ingrained habits of the old Self to establish an inferior and unjustifiable Other in order to construct its own superiority and justification – a new creation of humanity “in Christ” where the Other is no longer condemned to justify the status, distinction, privileges and power claims of the dominant Self.

An image might offer some visual help to understand this far-reaching subversion of the dominant logic of Self and Other that is encapsulated in Paul's antithesis of faith versus law/works. The sculpture of the *Dying Gaul* (see image below) is not only one of the most famous pieces of Self-assertive Occidental victory art that in countless copies and numerous variations has captivated European imagination for centuries, but also an invaluable “time capsule” that has preserved the normative perception of “Galatians” as Others in the 1st century world where Paul, Rome, Jews and non-Jews interacted. Showing a Celtic warrior in the moment of his defeat, the sculpture, however, tells a different story about the Galatians than the one told by William Ramsay, and by the majority of interpreters of Paul's Galatian correspondence. *Critical Re-imagination* is an approach that draws on the “power of images” – to borrow the title of Paul Zanker's greatly influential book - in order to grasp the “un-seen” and un-read (or mis-read) of a New Testament text. It uses visual sources like images, spaces, architecture, performances and rituals to deconstruct and reconstruct our perception of the ancient world in its interaction with the “word(s)”, and to open up new dimensions of understanding by making specific aspects of the vanished everyday realities behind texts visible again.

<Place Image *Dying Gaul* here>

The *Dying Gaul* is at home in many places of the ancient Mediterranean – he is Roman, Greek, Pergamene. And he is also a Galatian, an inhabitant of the New Testament and of Paul's letter, although scholarship has rarely noticed this. The oval shield with the protruding central boss on which he has fallen, the torque around his neck, the moustache and spiky hair, the nakedness and whiteness of his wounded body, the broken war trumpet, all these are, in the commonly understood *koinē* of the images, clearly legible markers of Gaul, Galatians, Celts. We might as well call him a *Dying Galatian*, especially if we keep in mind that the ancient languages usually don't make any significant difference between Gauls and Galatians: Latin *Galli* (Gauls) are *Galatai* (Galatians) in Greek. In order to “read” this sculpture we have to understand some of the history behind it; a most dramatic history that reaches over many centuries and practically the whole Greco-Roman world where Gauls/Galatians had an ubiquitous presence as settlers or soldiers, migrants or mercenaries, and, if we trust the ancient sources, as most vicious enemies of civilization.

Although the *Dying Galatian* is supposed to be the Roman copy of a lost 3rd century B.C.E.

Pergamene original, he is first and foremost an “originally” Roman creation. In 387 B.C.E. Gauls had attacked, conquered and burnt down the city of Rome. This was a disastrous defeat that Rome would never forgive, yet that it was eventually able to convert into a doctrine of justified preventive strikes on a global scale. Foreshadowing Julius Caesar’s most brutal campaign in Gaul (58-52 B.C.E.), for example, Manlius Vulso in 189 B.C.E. carried out a wholesale massacre among the three Galatian tribes of Asia minor at Mount Olympus (near Gordium) and Mount Magaba (near Ancyra), the direct ancestors of the New Testament Galatians. They had done nothing against Rome at this point and were unprepared for the onslaught. 40 000 victims are recorded as a result of Manlius’ murderous campaign that, according to Livy (*Ab urbe condita*, 38-39), however was justified as a legitimate pre-emptive act of Self-defense against the notorious enemies not only of Rome, but also of divine order and of humanity as a whole.

The *Dying Galatian* is also Greek. The Gauls had not only conquered Rome, but a hundred years later during their huge migration movements appeared before Delphi in 279 B.C. E. They tried to raid the sanctuary of Apollon with its proverbial treasures, the most sacred center and “navel” of the Greek world. This was another unforgivable act that solidified their image as blasphemous barbarian raiders and robbers. Galatians/Gauls in a way became “universal barbarians” that started to unite the Greco-Roman civilization as the “common enemy” –a lawless and relentless foe of truly terrifying nature. In fact, the term “terror” is frequently used when ancient authors talk about Galatians. Their depravity made the violence used against them moral and righteous. Defeating them was not simply a victory somewhere but an act of salvation for humanity everywhere.

Nobody was able to exploit this ideology as masterfully as the Pergamenes who around 240 B.C.E. defeated the three Anatolian tribes of the Galatians in a series of violent clashes at the sources of the river Caicus. One of the smaller Diadoch states, Pergamon nevertheless was able to use the “power of the images” in order to communicate its victory over the Gauls as a major world-saving triumph of cosmogonic dimensions. This moment is the birth hour of the *Dying Galatian*. He is the forerunner of a visual program that later on a much larger scale was exhibited at the Great Altar of Pergamon (ca. 180-160 B.C.E.). An artistic and intellectual achievement of unprecedented dimension and beauty, the Great Altar shows the Galatians, mythologically disguised as Giants and sons of the Earth mother Gaia, in rebellion against the Olympic gods. Their defeat is the archetype of the foundational world battle against chaos, lawlessness and barbarism at the core of Western civilization and the Occidental Self-construct.

As we know from the Karl Strobel’s ground-breaking work in re-evaluating the stereotype of the “Galatian barbarian”, not only Pergamon but all the successor states of Alexander’s empire – Macedonians, Seleucids, Ptolemies – exploited the image of the Galatians as notorious invaders and enemies of civilization, an image still widely present in scholarship until today, for their own ends. It is not at all clear whether the Galatians/Gauls indeed were so much more rapacious and predatory than the civilization that needed to stigmatize them as evil Other in order to justify its own violence and power claims. Conquering the world was not an act of imperial expansion, rather a meritorious deed on behalf of civilized humanity, as long as it was presentable as a triumph over lawless Galatians. In the post-Alexander world of would-be empire-builders, every victory in an anti-Galatian campaign could be presented as an act of euergetism and salvation on a universal scale, an achievement of cosmic dimensions that held the secret promise and entitlement to rule the world. With his bent back, the *Dying Galatian* thus appears as a stepping stone to world power.

The winner in the competition for world power was not Pergamon, nor the Antigonids, Seleucids or Ptolemies, but Rome. Already in 133 B.C.E. Rome had “inherited” the kingdom of Pergamon, including all its images, and turned it into the Roman province of Asia. A hundred years later, shortly after Augustus at Actium had defeated Antony and the Ptolemaic queen Cleopatra as his

last remaining competitors in the race for world rule, he in a similar move took over the kingdom of the last Galatian ruler Amyntas and founded the Roman province of Galatia (25 B.C.E.). At Paul's time the *Dying Galatian* thus is a profoundly and entirely Roman image that communicates the world view and triumph of the colonizers-conquerors of the world.

The *Dying Galatian* is a vanquished warrior. Blood is dripping from a gash on his right side, his arm can barely uphold his sunken body. The victorious antagonist who dealt the deadly blow stays out of the picture. What made this sculpture so appealing? Maybe it is the silent invitation it conveys to the spectator to step into the role of the invisible victor and to imagine himself in the moment of triumph over an enemy of such fortitude. Maybe it is the lure of an aesthetics of violence that turns the pain of the Other into an art object of supreme beauty. What seems to be noteworthy in particular, however, is the apparent compliance of the dying warrior with his destiny. He doesn't indict the victorious, nor plea for mercy, compassion or solidarity. His gaze is not meeting ours, rather he dies all by himself, totally confined to his own space and the heroic solitude of his dying. As he has detached himself from our space, we can stay detached from the space of his Otherness. His suffering, bloodshed, and death all stay at the Outside of what we have demarcated as our Inside. He doesn't make any effort to challenge our Self-detachment, as if he were sure that his time had run out and his cause was lost - that he indeed had to give way to the superior.

Images are not merely depictions of the world as it is, in particular an image like the *Dying Gaul/Galatian* that were a prominent subject of public art and a hard to miss visual paradigm in the world of Paul. Rather they show the world as it is meant to be seen. Especially in widely illiterate cultures like the ancient Mediterranean one, visual representation of any kind is "perception management" and communication of the desirable world view. Images often talk much more plainly about the dominant ideology and proper order of things than written sources. Representing the ideology of the conquerors and colonizers of Gaul and Galatia, the *Dying Gaul/Galatian* reassures his victors that they are justified in their victory and righteous in their warfare with all ensuing casualties, pain, suffering. Violence and even extreme brutality that were the signature both of Julius Caesar's Gallic War and Manlius Vulso's campaign against the Galatians are justifiable as means towards the higher end of establishing Law among the barbarians, as much as enslavement, exploitation, oppression are the lawful and legitimate results of each barbarian defeat.

In a way, the *Dying Galatian* himself represents a "work of Law". Law, *nomos*, is written in large letters all over his body, invisible yet clearly readable for everyone in the ancient world. He is dying for his transgressions against the law of the cosmos, the laws of heaven, the laws of civilization, the law of Rome. Lawlessness (*anomia*) as opposed to Greek righteousness and justice (*dikaioσύνη*) was one of the fundamental barbarian vices. He dies as a sinner, and whoever conquered him can boast of the righteousness at display in his "works of Law" - works of conquest and colonization. Wherever this sculpture was on display, it was the justification of the victorious Self as superior and therefore entitled to subjugate the inferior and lawless Other. This is the message communicated in the language of the victors about the Law and order of Western civilization; it made the *Dying Gaul* an immortal presence in the imagination of the Occident.

Christ Crucified and the Justification of the Other : Critical Re-Imagination II

"O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was openly portrayed (*proegrafē*) as crucified." (Gal 3:1)

Paul, in his passionate polemics with the first-century Galatians of Asia minor, uses a powerful counter-image that fundamentally subverts and contradicts the ideological effects of the *Dying Gaul*. Undeniably, the image of *Christ crucified*, which, he reminds them, he has publicly painted or portrayed before their eyes, is at the core of his justification theology (Gal 2:19-21) as he has just outlined it in the immediately preceding passage Gal 2:15-21. In a way, one could describe Paul's

entire theology of faith justification as an act of irreverent non-compliance with the established imperial and colonial perception rules for dying Gauls, dying Galatians, dying Jews and dying Others in general.

Dying Galatian versus *Christ Crucified*: The antithetical correspondence of these two images, first observed by David Balch, needs some further exploration. In the imagination of empire and imperial colonization, the image of a crucified, of whatever ethnicity, is a twin-image of the *Dying Gaul*, yet not in the sanitized and aestheticized rendering of an art object, but in the raw and unrefined real-life version of a most brutal and dehumanizing form of capital punishment. Crucifixion was used by Rome on a large scale to keep "the lower classes, i.e. slaves, violent criminals and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces" at bay. Crucifixion doesn't hide the gruesome details of the Other's body being destroyed minute by minute, hour after hour under unspeakable torture and pain, visibly staged before everybody's eyes for public entertainment, political education, humiliation and deterrence. Crucifixion was imposed on the rebellious territories of vanquished Otherness on the underside of empire as a draconian restatement of Roman Law, i.e. the re-inscription of the colonizers' *nomos* into the colonized provincial and slave body, be it in Gaul or Judea or elsewhere. For the spectators, the "show" or "spectacle" (*theōria*) of crucifixion, as Luke calls it in Lk 23:48, is a visual lesson in subordination and Self-distancing from the transgressive Other.

Paul radically breaks these rules of perception; he doesn't comply with the normative way of seeing a *Dying Jew*, or a *Dying Galatian* for that matter. His presentation of Christ crucified turns the hierarchical binaries of superior versus inferior, Self versus Other, Law versus lawlessness, justification versus un-righteousness upside down. Firstly, the image of *Christ crucified* closes up any escape route for the Self to stay distanced from the suffering of the Other. In a powerful inversion, the transgression that causes the lawful punishment and death of the Other is no more "seen" as the Other's transgression, but OUR transgression, the sin of the Self. Jesus doesn't die for himself and for his own sins, but for our sake (Gal 1:4; 2:20). The polar construct of a superior righteous, law-abiding, justified Self in juxtaposition to its inferior unrighteous, lawless, sinful Other collapses, and with it the Law of the dominant order that justifies crucifixion, imperial warfare and colonial subjugation. The Self can be only justified if it accepts its unjustifiable complicity with the Other's death and thus its own status as sinner.

Secondly: With the collapse of the established binary, the image of God is undergoing a profound transformation as well. While the dominant order always aligns God(s) with the superior Self and its Law, making the Other by implication godless and lawless, as the construct of the "blasphemous" Galatian barbarian vividly demonstrates, Paul shows that GodSelf has stepped up in solidarity with the lawless crucified Other and justified him as God's son. God thus is re-imagined on the side of the *Dying Galatian* as well, that is on the side of the enemy-Other, subverting any notion of God-willed and lawful violence that the Self can impose on the Other for God's sake and in alliance with God. With the justification of the Other, the sinner, the loser, the defeated, the justification of victory, conquest and colonization as "divine" provision falls apart. *Christ Crucified* as the image of God-with-the-Other is the scandalous challenge to the "natural" theological conviction of the Self that God must be on OUR side.

"God, I thank you that I am not like other people..." – the Pharisee's competitive effort in Lk 18:9-14 to demonstrate his own distinction and alliance with God by pointing to the clearly undeserving Other of lawless thieves, rogues, adulterers and tax collectors, sounds like a narrative explication of Paul's justification language "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not sinners from the Gentiles." (Gal 2:15) The declared sinfulness of the Other (Gentiles), in the established binary semiotics automatically and even without explicitly mentioning it, attributes righteousness to our-Selves (Jews). Yet this Self-justification through the degrading of an Other that Paul in Galatians and

especially in Romans addresses as “boasting” is not something specific to Jews alone, rather it is, as Robert Jewett has convincingly shown, an integral part of the whole Greco-Roman culture of honor and status competition, with Rome at the top of an all-compassing boasting culture. Justification by faith rather than by boasting (Rom 3:27-28, Gal 6:13) therefore means the renunciation of presentable “works” that distinguish the Self as superior from its less accomplished Other and thus pulls the carpet from under the whole edifice of hierarchical dichotomies. With this, the focus of Paul’s law-criticism irrevocably shifts from criticism of Jewish Torah – the still dominant interpretational paradigm - to a much more general criticism of Greco-Roman *nomos* and any subsequent law construct that justifies ourSelves as dominant and superior over and against *them*, the unjustified.

“Yet as we know that a human is not justified by works of the law, rather by faith in Jesus the messiah-Christ, we too have come to be faithful in Jesus the messiah-Christ so that we may be justified by faith and not by works of law...” (Gal 2:16)

Faith in the messiah Jesus means that the one who died as a sinner and Other is God’s son; he did not die for *his* sins, thus justifying *our* righteousness derived from our self-righteous law and its “works,” rather he dies for *our* sins, thereby de-masking our fake claims to righteousness. It is not *they* who are the demonstrable sinners, even if they are, but *we*. Shockingly, as in the parable of the Pharisee and tax collector in Lk 18, it is not *we* who can claim God’s righteousness for ourselves and go away justified but *he*, the Other, the tax collector who repents. (Lk 18:14) This is the challenge and scandal of faith-justification rooted in the cross. (cf. 1 Cor 1:18.23) Only if *we* put ourselves on the same level with *them* before God, and on the same level as Jesus who “otherized” himself, can we become justified, not over and against, but together with *them*. This points towards a new de-colonized community construct that entirely dismantles the combat order of the occidental binaries.

Galatian foreskin as sign of non-compliance and non-conformity: Critical Re-Imagination III

The *Dying Gaul* is the quintessential image of imperial and colonial control. His dying is under control. His Gallic/Galatian territory is under control, the territory of lawless barbarian Otherness with all its wealth and natural resources that his fallen body can no longer defend. His life, whatever is left of it after the disciplinary strikes of the master race, and whatever life means for the conquered and enslaved, is under control. The wound on the *Dying Galatian’s* right side shows how his body is bleeding out, perpetually donating its vital energy to the victorious Rome – e.g. in terms of taxes, tributes, slaves, warriors. Economically, he and his kin provide the lifeblood that circulates in the veins of Rome’s colonial empire. And if his 1st-century C.E. descendants in Roman Gaul or Roman Galatia are allowed to live, it is clear that they have to live in accordance with Roman law. As regards the Galatians of Asia minor, they were step by step co-opted as subjects and soldiers of Rome after the devastating onslaught of Manlius Vulso in 189 B.C.E. This includes all the required “works” of subordination to the Roman world order and to Roman religion, and perpetual mindfulness that it is the divine Caesar alone who by his grace and righteousness justifies their right to live or their condemnation to death.

Christ crucified, in its plain historical setting is an image of imperial control as well, not much different from the *Dying Galatian*. The resurrection of Christ, however, turns this image upside down. Pointing to an alternative divine ruler who can justify the lawless Other and bring the dead and dying back to life, undoing the works of Roman law enforcement, it entirely ridicules all of the colonial masters’ control fantasies. As Paul started to “see” after Damascus, this subversion cannot be confined to the image of a dying Jew alone; rather it transforms the dying of the other vanquished nations (*ethnē*) as well, the so-called Gentiles. The body of the resurrected Christ crucified for Paul becomes a new social sphere where both Self and Other are reborn, rectified, resurrected. Jews and non-Jews become “one” in Christ as they are being collectively drawn into

the transformative process of co-dying and co-living with the crucified Other (Gal 2:19-20). A deep structure of solidarity within the collective body of the conquered is established that challenges colonial and imperial law in all its variations: the law of Self versus Other as the order of Jews being superior to Gentiles/Galatians, Greeks higher than barbarians, free on top of slave, male in charge of female (Gal 3:28, Rom 1:14).

Paul points to this new order of solidarity when he reminds the Galatians of their earlier encounter where he himself was in a position of extreme weakness and vulnerability, a Jewish Other in precarious circumstances that would have given the Galatians every reason to distance themselves from the foreigner. Yet, as he states, they acted differently:

“You did not scorn or despise me, but welcomed me as an angel of God, as the messiah/Christ Jesus.” (Gal 4:14)

For Paul this is the decisive boundary they crossed towards a new commonality and solidarity between Self and Other, Jews and nations/Gentiles “in Christ” that no longer is defined by the colonizing conquest Law and its works of Self-justification that rely on the binary mechanisms of “othering.” In stark contrast to William Ramsay’s colonial imagination, it was “through the weakness of the flesh” and the peaceful force of solidarity, not through the strength of a powerful and conquering Self that Paul first proclaimed and successfully rooted the gospel in Galatia (Gal 4:13).

Yet as the Galatians obviously have come to understand in the meantime, Paul’s Jewish-ecumenical practice of an inclusive and non-hierarchical “body of Christ” that incorporated, and re-corporated, both Jews and Galatians was irreconcilable with the body politics of Caesar that is so vividly monumentalized in the sculpture of the *Dying Galatian*. Claiming the Galatians as Abraham’s children and children of the Jewish god (Gal 3:29; 4:7), declaring them as adopted or reborn into a new mode of being Self and Other in mutual support rather than incessant competition (Gal 4:5.19), submitting them to the Law of Christ (Gal 6:2) and the Law of love (Gal 5:14), calling a fulfillment of Torah what essentially was the law of a crucified outlaw, all of this had to clash with Caesar’s exclusive and inalienable property rights. For this very reason it would also raise concerns on the side of Jews not affiliated with the Pauline Jesus movement. The Galatian body was already and permanently marked by Roman *nomos*, a branding that was not negotiable and could not be replaced by the tattoos of an Other Law like Paul’s *stigmata tou Iēsou* (cf. Gal 6:17). The Galatians were not free to live by the grace of another God than Caesar, especially if this God required sole allegiance in a way that clashed with the expectations and requirements of emperor religion. Paul claimed for the Jewish God what belonged to Roman Caesar.

This is probably the point where the circumcision debate enters the scene. Of all the vanquished nations of the Roman empire only the Jews had the precarious privilege of an exemption status from certain practices of Roman religion and law that allowed them to be Other within the established civic order with regard to food laws, Sabbath regulations, table community, and worship of civic or imperial gods. Paul, however, had created a social, political and religious anomaly: uncircumcised Galatians who lived as if they were circumcised Jews (Gal 4:8-9). As Paula Fredriksen states:

“By insisting both that they not convert to Judaism (thus maintaining their public and legal status as pagans) and that they nonetheless not worship the gods (a protected right only of Jews), Paul walked these Gentiles-in-Christ into a social and religious no-man’s-land.”

They subscribed to Israel’s One God alone and no longer worshiped the gods of the city and God Caesar as they used to, and they formed communities where they followed the law of love rather than the law of competition and Self-distinction. This couldn’t be tolerated because it was an open declaration of non-allegiance to the gods and the order of the Roman empire on the part of the colonized nations. It was an act of civil disobedience that had the Galatians re-mutate into their old,

rebellious barbarian Otherness. The image of the *Dying Galatian* vividly reminded them what the consequences of their foolish involvement with *Christ Crucified* would be.

In this context the suggestion to have the Christ-Galatians circumcised makes sense. Presenting them as proselytes would restore at least a minimal appearance of normalcy and conformity, for the sake of both the Galatian and the Jewish communities – an “evasive action” as Bruce Winter, followed by Mark Nanos, has proposed. Paul himself indicates very clearly that his “opponents” are not driven by any specifically “Jewish” concerns for a strict interpretation of Torah per se, but by fear of persecution from an outside party:

“It is those who want to make a good showing (*euprosopētai*) in the flesh who force you to be circumcised, only that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” (Gal 6:12)

Paul, however, fiercely refused this kind of pragmatic realism and developed his theology of justification by faith to state the righteousness of Galatians and Jews co-resurrected into the body of Christ and living a new commonality of Self and Other that transformed the old binaries in a continuous negotiation of conflicts, hierarchies and competitions towards horizontal mutuality “in Christ”: bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), practicing freedom as slave service towards one another (Gal 5:13), fulfilling Torah in the one commandment of loving one’s neighbor and (br)Other as oneSelf (Gal 5:14).

From a Roman viewpoint, this border-transgressive, trans-national community among members of the colonized nations looked dangerously close to a worldwide insurrection against Roman law and order, especially as Galatians were involved. Paul had made the Galatians’ foreskin the sign of their non-conformity, not primarily with Jewish Torah but with Roman *nomos* and its works. Justification by faith in this reading is the most radical intervention into the order of Occidental binaries thinkable, a theology that anathematizes not the Other of Judaism but the colonial and imperial order itself, specifically its inherent Self-Other polarity (Gal 1:8-9).

In the crisis- and war-ridden world of today Paul’s de-polarization of Self and Other is a potent spiritual resource of transformation and renewal that needs to be re-vitalized. One of the most burning theological questions is whether at the beginning of the third millennium the Christian Occident will recognize and renounce its complicity with the colonial and neo-colonial enterprise and allow this transformative power to re-emerge and interfere with the deadly and ultimately self-destructive logic of warfare, revenge, and power-politics. The confession of guilt that German Christians formulated at Darmstadt in 1947, responding to 12 years of tacit or explicit church complicity with Hitler’s regime, still seems timely: “Not the slogan: Christianity and Occidental culture, but turning back to God and turning towards the neighbor through the power of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the one thing which we as Christians need.”