

# The *Status Questionis* of the Adam Typology in Paul

Modern scholars have sought to elucidate the Adam typology in Paul in light of his religious, cultural, and literary backgrounds. Among them, under the influence of the History-of-Religions School, there have been scholars who propose Gnosticism as the background to explain Paul's use of the Adam figure in 1 Corinthians 15 and in Romans 5. Another trend has been to look to early Judaism for the sources of Paul's understanding of the Adam typology. Nevertheless, in the end all agree that it is the stories of the creation and fall in Genesis 1–3 that influenced Paul's Adam typology most of all, as well as the later Hellenistic or Palestinian Jewish interpretations of the Genesis narratives. However, as we shall see, these studies have not identified two important aspects of the Adam typology in Paul. First, they have not explained adequately how the figure of Adam functions within the larger literary contexts of 1 Corinthians and Romans. Second, they have not noted the ethical and social implications that Paul may have drawn from the Adam motif.

## PROponents OF THE GNOSTIC HYPOTHESIS

Modern interpretations of the figure of Adam in Paul began with the theological debate between Rudolf Bultmann and Karl Barth.<sup>1</sup> Their exegetical and theological works reflect an anthropological concern. In his analysis of Romans 5, Barth states, "Man's essential and original nature is to be found, therefore, not in Adam but in Christ."<sup>2</sup> Bultmann replied that Paul "says

1. David Paul Henry captures this debate between Barth and Bultmann. The dialogue begins as early as 1922, when the two authors agree that "the intent of biblical interpretation is to confront and involve the reader in the 'subject matter' of the text," which for Bultmann was "authentic human existence," whereas for Barth it was "the relationship between humanity and the transcendent God." See David Paul Henry, *The Early Development of the Hermeneutic of Karl Barth as Evidenced by his Appropriation of Romans 5:12-21* (NABPR Dissertation Series 5; Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985), 203.

nothing about the possibility of our recognizing in retrospect the ordering principle of the kingdom of Christ also in the world of Adam.”<sup>3</sup> Although the former may emphasize the christological dimension and the latter the anthropological dimension of Paul’s Adam typology, in the end both Barth and Bultmann agree that Paul’s Adam typology is necessarily both christological and anthropological.

The more influential study for the Adam typology has been Bultmann’s analysis of Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21 and 47-49. Bultmann argues that these texts reflect Gnostic influence: “The Adam Christ parallel, i.e. the thought of two mankind (or two epochs of mankind) and their determination each by its originator, is a Gnostic idea which is conceived cosmologically and not in terms of salvation history.”<sup>4</sup> In *The Old and the New Adam in the Letters of Paul*, Bultmann identifies “genuine analogies” between Paul and “the Hellenistic mystery religions and . . . Hellenistic mysticism.”<sup>5</sup> Similarly, in his *Theology of the New Testament*, Bultmann finds what he calls “Gnostic mythology” speculation in Rom 5:12-21 and 1 Cor 15:21, 44-49: “The contrast ‘psychic-pneumatic’ (‘man of soul’- ‘man of Spirit’) to designate two basically different classes of men . . . is an especially clear indication that Paul’s anthropological concepts had already been formed under the influence of Gnosticism.”<sup>6</sup> Indeed, taken together, the language, the myth of the fallen world, the descent of a redeemer into the material realm, and the dualistic view between the material and the spiritual world were particularly persuasive and led Bultmann to conclude that Paul and other texts of the NT were influenced by Gnostic material and mystery religions. As we shall see with other scholars who followed Bultmann’s hypothesis, reliance on literary material that in fact postdated the New Testament documents makes this thesis methodologically untenable.

2. Karl Barth, *Christ and Adam: Man and Humanity in Romans 5* (New York: Collier Books, 1962), 39-40. He states, “Jesus Christ is the secret truth about the essential nature of man, and even sinful man is still essentially related to Him. That is what we have learned from Rom. 5:12-21” (pp. 107-8; emphasis in original translation)

3. Rudolf Bultmann, “Adam and Christ According to Romans 5,” in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Otto A. Piper*, ed. William Klassen and Graydon F. Snyder (London: SCM, 1962), 163.

4. Bultmann, “Adam and Christ,” 154; see also 160.

5. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Old and the New Adam in the Letters of Paul*, trans. Keith R. Crim (Richmond: John Knox, 1967), 18; see also 21.

6. Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1951, 1955), 1:174.

In a similar approach, Walter Schmithals argues that with the expression ἀνάθεμα Ἰησοῦς (“cursed be Jesus”) found in 1 Cor 12:1–3 Paul is responding to some Christians in Corinth who, under the influence of Gnosticism, despised Jesus according to the flesh, but confessed the Christ according to the Spirit: “Thus the Christology of the Corinthian ‘Christians’ which is expressed in the ἀνάθεμα in 1 Cor 12.3 is the genuinely Gnostic Christology,”<sup>7</sup> Schmithals concludes. However, the distinction between “Jesus” and “Christ” in Paul seems rather artificial. Paul uses these terms interchangeably, and even preferably “Jesus Christ” together (Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 3:1; 8:6; 2 Cor 1:19; 13:5; Gal 3:1; Phil; 2:11). Furthermore, in his argument of 1 Corinthians 12 Paul is arguing about the spiritual gifts and not about spiritual people, spiritual gifts that each member should use to build up the unity of the community.

In her critique of Schmithals’s thesis, Margaret M. Mitchell aptly summarizes the problems scholars found regarding the identity of Gnosticism or pre-Christian Gnosticism, as well as terminological inaccuracy and anachronistic “Christian heresiological designations of ‘Gnostics’ for a mid-first century Christian group.”<sup>8</sup> Although the origins and nature of Gnosticism are still under debate,<sup>9</sup> we can conclude that the major difficulty is the reliance on documents that postdate the New Testament texts.

One of the most comprehensive modern works among the proponents of the “Gnostic hypothesis” for the Adam motif in Paul, particularly in Romans 5, is that of Egon Brandenburger.<sup>10</sup> In chapter 1 of *Adam und Christus*, he surveys the religious backgrounds of Rom 5:12–21. In chapter 2, he undertakes the exegetical analysis of Rom 5:12–21. Section A of chapter 1 is devoted to analyzing the Jewish understanding of sin and seath, and section B, to understanding the “two Adam–Anthropoi” in Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism. Brandenburger claims that Paul’s opponents in 1 Corinthians 15 are identified with those represented in 2 Tim 2:18 who supposedly espoused a realized eschatology.<sup>11</sup> After his analysis of Jewish and Hellenistic Jewish

7. See Walter Schmithals, “The Corinthian Christology,” in *Christianity at Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church*, ed. Edward Adams and David G. Horrell (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 77 (extracted from Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism in Corinth: An Investigation of the Letters to the Corinthians*, trans. John E. Steely (Nashville, Abingdon, 1971), 124–30).

8. Margaret M. Mitchell, “Paul’s Letters to Corinth: The Interpretive Intertwining of Literary and Historical Reconstruction,” in *Urban Religion in Roman Corinth: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. Daniel N. Schowalter and Steven J. Friesen (HTS 53; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 312–13.

9. See PHEME PERKINS, *Gnosticism and the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Birger A. Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism: Traditions and Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007).

10. Egon Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus: Exegetisch-religionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Rom. 5, 12–21 (1 Kor 15)* (WMANT 7; Neukirchen: Kreis Moers, 1962).

literature,<sup>12</sup> including of Philo's interpretation of the creation of the human beings in Genesis 1–2,<sup>13</sup> Brandenburger concludes that “the scheme and basic underlying idea of the parallelism of Adam and Christ-Anthropos in 1 Cor 15:21f. 45ff and herewith also in Rom 5:12–21—alongside distinct motifs of the ancient Jewish tradition in Rom 5:12ff- becomes evident in the light of the Gnostic (*christlich*) Adam-Anthropos speculation background.”<sup>14</sup> According to Brandenburger's hypothesis, the descent and ascension of the heavenly redeemer to save the physical man from his dreadful situation perfectly suited Paul's Christology and soteriology.<sup>15</sup>

Several scholars have extensively analyzed and criticized Brandenburger's thesis,<sup>16</sup> noting in particular three major difficulties. The first difficulty is the identification of Paul's opponents in Corinth as a Gnostic group. Apparently, in 1 Cor 15:12 Paul replied to some who denied the resurrection of the dead or questioned a bodily resurrection (15:35). However, the identity of Paul's opponents in Corinth is a matter of debate,<sup>17</sup> for Corinth's cultural and

11. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus*, 69–77.

12. He surveyed the Adam motif in several Gnostic texts such as the Jewish-Gnostic prayers, the tradition of Zosimus, the Naassene reflections, the Apocryphon of John, *Poimandres* (*Corp Herm. I*), and the Mandaean texts, Adam, 77–109. Under the heading of “‘Pre, Early, and Late Jewish’ texts,” he analyzes 1QS 4.7–8, 23; 11.7–8; 1QH 17.15; CD 3.20. He also studies *Apoc. Mos.* and *Vit. Ad.*; 1–2 *Enoch*; 4 *Ezra* (syr.); Baruch; and rabbinic testimonies (*Adam und Christus*, 110–17).

13. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus*, 117–31.

14. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus*, 157 (my translation).

15. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus*, 157: “In dem einen sarkisch-psychischen Anthropos ist die Menschheit insgesamt schicksalhaft dem verderblich-minderwertigen Seinsbereich, dem Herrschaftsbereich des Todes und versklavender Mächte verhaftet; aber durch Ab- und Aufstieg des himmlischen Erlöser-Anthropos ist ein Geschehen in Gang gekommen, durch das die Gesamtheit der nach Ursprung und Wesen pneumatischen Menschen in den himmlisch-pneumatischen Anthropos hinein erlöst wird.”

16. A. J. M. Wedderburn, “Adam and Christ: An Investigation into the Background of 1 Corinthians XV and Romans V. 12–21” (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1974), 22–34; Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch (Hermeneia, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 284–86; Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (WUNT 2/4; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1984), 164–78; John R. Levison, *Portraits of Adam in Early Judaism: From Sirach to 2 Baruch* (JSPSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 17–18; Sang-won (Aaron) Son, *Corporate Elements in Pauline Anthropology: A Study of Selected Terms, Idioms, and Concepts in the Light of Paul's Usage and Background* (AnBib 148; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2001), 66–70.

17. For instance, Robert Jewett (*Paul's Anthropological Terms: A Study of Their Use in Conflict Settings* [AGJU 10; Leiden: Brill, 1971]) argues that “the main opponents of Paul within the Corinthian congregation itself were radical enthusiasts who can be termed Gnostics because of their belief in salvation through σοφία/γνώσις and because of their consistently dualistic world view” (p. 40; see also

religious milieu was so heterogeneous that we cannot state with confidence that there was a single group or ideology that may have influenced the Christian community in this city.<sup>18</sup> Most important, the classification of Gnosticism and Gnostic groups is a rather conjectural construal of a phenomenon that appeared much later during the second century.

Related to the previous problem is Brandenburger's contention that Paul was using the language of his opponents. First, according to Brandenburger, the contrast between the heavenly and earthly man in 1 Cor 15:45-49 reflects the Gnostic myth of the "Primal man."<sup>19</sup> Yet in 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49 and Rom 5:12-21 Paul understands and interprets Adam and Christ as two antithetical historical figures and not as the abstract and ahistorical heavenly redeemer who evolves in two phases as proposed later in Gnosticism.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, as Hans Conzelmann has concisely put it, "The figure in question belongs not so much to myth as to mythological speculation."<sup>21</sup> Instead, it is more likely that the contrast between the first and second Adam in Paul reflects earlier or contemporary Hellenistic Jewish traditions about the story of the creation of humanity in Gen 1:27 and 2:7, which some Corinthians may have known. A thesis that will be discussed in chapter 2 is that some in Corinth knew Philo's commentaries on the story of the creation.<sup>22</sup>

28, 31, 34-40). On the other hand, Birger A. Pearson contends that Paul's adversaries were Hellenistic Jews in Corinth who, in interpreting Gen 2:7, "were espousing a doctrine of a-somatic immortality, and denying the bodily resurrection" (*The Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and Its Relation to Gnosticism* [SBLDS 12; Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1973], 24).

18. James D. G. Dunn aptly describes the Corinthian milieu as "a melting pot of religious ideas and philosophies, many of them Jewish in origin (the myth of Wisdom, as in Sir 24 and *1 En. 1* 42), others common in different religious systems" ("Reconstructions of Corinthian Christianity and the Interpretation of 1 Corinthians," in Adams and Horrell, *Christianity at Corinth*, 300).

19. See Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus*, 77-131.

20. As noted by Son, *Corporate Elements*, 69.

21. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 285. In his excursus, he noted the complexity of the origins and meaning of this concept: "the *one* concept primal man is applied to heterogeneous things: the macrocosmos, the protoplast, the prototype, the redeemer ('redeemed redeemer'), to the God 'Man' in Gnosticism, where 'Man' mostly means the highest God, but then also the revealing power of the deity" (p. 284).

22. Gregory E. Sterling, "Wisdom among the Perfect: Creation Traditions in Alexandrian Judaism and Corinthian Christianity," *NovT* 37 (1995): 366-67; Wedderburn, "Adam and Christ," 120, 129.

Furthermore, Wedderburn argues that Philo's interpretation of the man of Gen 1:26 "is described in the language of Plato's theory of forms," 157. "Philo is working here in a Hellenistic-Jewish tradition going back to Plato's doctrine of ideas." See also Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 286: Philo "distinguishes two types of man, the heavenly and the earthly, *Leg. all.1:31f* (on Gen 2:7) [Greek text and translation provided].

Second, Brandenburger also claims that the Corinthians borrowed the contrast between ψυχικόν and the πνευματικόν from a Gnostic group. Subsequent scholars have provided alternative solutions to this apparent dualism. Pearson argues that in 1 Cor 15:44-49 Paul was actually dealing not with Gnostic opponents but with competing Hellenistic-Jewish and rabbinic interpretations of Gen 2:7, to which Paul provided his own “eschatological ‘targum.’”<sup>23</sup> He concludes that Paul introduced an eschatological dualism between the present age and the age to come as opposed to his adversaries in Corinth, who “were operating on a non-eschatological plane in dividing man’s present existence into a duality of heavenly–earthly, spiritual–psychic, incorruptible–corruptible, immortal–mortal, level.”<sup>24</sup> Although Pearson’s critique of Brandenburger’s thesis is right on target, his reliance on post-New Testament rabbinic literature may undermine his thesis. A similar solution is provided by Seyoon Kim, who argues that Paul himself introduced the distinction between the ψυχικόν and the πνευματικόν to the Corinthians and that “subsequently they abused it, rather than Paul borrowed it from them.”<sup>25</sup> Whatever the case, what is at stake here is not really the identity of Paul’s opponents so much as what Paul meant by using this contrast. Paul responds to those who rejected a bodily resurrection (1 Cor 15:35), using an analogy of the different bodies (15:40) to state that the body with which the believers will be raised is not physical, but spiritual (15:44). Then in v. 45 he supports his argument with his own interpretation of Gen 2:7. The contrast in v. 46 that the spiritual follows the physical (body) is then the logical outcome of his argument, and not necessarily Paul’s reversal of his opponents’ thesis.

Finally, Brandenburger argued that Paul counteracted his opponents’ realized eschatology, as evidenced in 2 Tim 2:18.<sup>26</sup> However, 2 Timothy postdates both 1 Corinthians and Romans. Most important, the opponents of 2 Tim 2:18 claimed that the resurrection of the dead has already occurred, whereas in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul responds to those who claimed that “there is no resurrection of the dead” (vv. 12, 29) or who questioned the bodily

He distinguishes the idea[ ] man from the historical man, *Op. mund.* 134 (likewise on Gen 2:7) [Greek text and translation provided].”

23. Pearson, *Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology*, 15–24.

24. Pearson, *Pneumatikos-Psychikos Terminology*, 26.

25. Kim, *Origin of Paul’s Gospel*, 170–71, analyzing Gal 6:1 and 1 Cor 2:12–15. This is a verbatim expression from Wedderburn (“Adam and Christ,” 187), who is cited in n. 3 but not quoted. Kim’s contention (p. 266; cf. 267–68) that Paul himself derived the Adam Christology from the “Damascus Christophany,” where Christ revealed to Paul “as the εἶκων τοῦ Θεοῦ,” is less convincing.

26. Brandenburger, *Adam und Christus*, 70–71.

resurrection (v. 35). Thus, in 1 Corinthians 15 Paul addresses the question of the future and of bodily, although as spiritual body, resurrection of the believers, and not a realized eschatology.

In his effort to elucidate the backgrounds of Rom 5:12-21 Brandenburger thus diverted his attention to what was initially intended as only a parenthetical analysis of 1 Corinthians 15 (as is shown in the title of his work). Indeed, this would be the logical process, since the earliest explicit comparison between Adam and Christ in Paul appears in 1 Corinthians 15. Brandenburger's contribution to the study of the Adam typology in Paul has illustrated the complexity of the Adam figure in Paul. His analysis of extensive Palestinian and Hellenistic Jewish interpretations of the story of the creation and fall of Adam in Genesis 1-3 led Brandenburger to postulate Gnosticism as the background for the contrast between Adam and Christ in Paul. On the contrary, further research has demonstrated that it is more plausible that the language found in 1 Corinthians has influenced later forms of Christian Gnosticism.<sup>27</sup> It is likely that Paul and his audience were familiar with a tradition about Adam's sin and death that was passed on to his descendants (1 Cor 15:21-22; Rom 5:12 and 18), and possibly also of the contrast between the "heavenly man" and the "earthly man" (1 Cor 15:42-49).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Jewish speculations about Adam and the effects of his disobedience often enough conveyed ethical implications. Some of these authors did not simply speculate about the origins of humankind or the ancestors of Israel, but they inferred ethical and social consequences for the communities they addressed. Eventually Paul inherited these traditions and creatively interpreted and adapted them into his argument in 1 Corinthians 15 and Rom 5:12-21. In other words, the story of Genesis 1-3 and its subsequent traditions intend to elicit an ethical and social reconfiguration in the audience. Thus, Paul creatively adapted these traditions in his letters to convey ethical and social implications. Our task in chapter 2 will be to identify these traditions among the Palestinian and Diaspora Jews who interpreted the Scriptures in a heterogeneous religious and cultural context like Paul's. Then, in chapter 3

27. A. J. M. Wedderburn (*Baptism and Resurrection: Studies in Pauline Theology against Its Graeco-Roman Background* [WUNT 44; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1987], 21) argues that the conceptual similarities between 1 Corinthians and Gnosticism may possibly reflect "a type of Christianity *en route* to Gnosticism."

28. See Thomas H. Tobin, *Paul's Rhetoric in Its Contexts: The Arguments of Romans* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2004), 175-76. Tobin distinguishes two trends of traditions in 1 Corinthians 15, one that takes up Jewish traditions about Adam's sin and death (vv. 21-22) and the other (vv. 42-49) that reflects the Hellenistic Jewish speculations, as found in Philo, about the heavenly/earthly man of Gen 1:27 and 2:7, respectively.

we will analyze Paul's reworking of these traditions in his first letter to the Corinthians and that to the Romans.

### PROponents OF THE JEWISH HYPOTHESIS

Since Gnosticism did not explain Paul's Adam motif in 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5, other scholars have investigated the possible background for Paul's use of the figure of Adam among Hellenistic and Palestinian Jewish interpretations of the story of the creation and fall of Genesis 1–3 of the turn of the first century.

In his influential investigation *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, W. D. Davies analyzes the antithesis between the old and the new creation, and thus between the old and the new humanity, the first and the second Adam.<sup>29</sup> Davies asserts that, "whereas the Christian Dispensation as a new creation was pre-Pauline, the conception of Christ as the Second Adam was probably introduced into the Church by Paul himself."<sup>30</sup> He claims that in 1 Corinthians 15, "Paul reverses the order found in Philo and identifies the Heavenly Man . . . with Jesus, the Son of David, who was later than the Adam of Genesis in time and therefore might be called the Second Adam."<sup>31</sup> In regard to Rom 5:12–21, Davies argues that, in addition to the "Rabbinic doctrine that through the Fall of the First Man, Adam, all men fell into sin," Paul incorporates and underscores the "Rabbinic speculation about the creation of the physical body of Adam" to demonstrate the unity of all humankind.<sup>32</sup> Then Paul applies this doctrine and explains that God now reconstitutes "the essential oneness of mankind in Christ as a spiritual community, as it was one in Adam in a physical sense."<sup>33</sup>

Davies's contribution has redirected Pauline studies to focus on Paul's Jewish identity. It is apparent that Paul and his audiences in Corinth and Rome were familiar with some interpretations of the story of the creation and fall

29. W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (2nd ed.; New York: Harper & Row, 1955), 36–57.

30. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 44. He argues that the story of the creation and fall in Genesis 1–3 is ultimately the background for the concept of Jesus the Messiah who restored the entire creation (pp. 37–41).

31. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 52. He suggests that Christians in Corinth were acquainted with "Philo's distinction between the Heavenly and the earthly man," via Apollos, but he also points out that "it is improbable, though not impossible, that Paul was directly acquainted with Philo's works."

32. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 53–55. In a later study, Davies confirms that Paul "draws upon well-defined elements from Judaism" (*Jewish and Pauline Studies* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984], 194–95).

33. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, 57.