PAUL'S USE OF METAMORPHOSIS IN ITS GRAECO-ROMAN AND JEWISH CONTEXTS

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Resumen
De muchas maneras distintas, el concepto de cambio, que es un "problema filosófico fundamental" en el antiguo pensamiento griego,[1] también es una idea central en los escritos de Pablo. El apóstol no solo estaría familiarizado con las construcciones de cambio dentro de la cultura greco-romana, sino que también con aquellas ideas relacionadas dentro de su propia cultura judía. En este contexto, este estudio hará una exploración específica de cómo Pablo usó la idea de "metamorfosis" de manera comprensible para la cultura judía y helenística de su tiempo, y cómo logró subordinar la comprensión contemporánea de la metamorfosis al evangelio que predicaba.

Palabras clave
Metamorfosis – Pablo – Cultura greco-romana – Cultura judía – Cultura helenística

Abstrac
In many different ways, the concept of change, which is a "fundamental philosophical problem" in ancient Greek thought,[1] is also a central idea in the writings of Paul. The Apostle would not only have been familiar with the constructs of change within Graeco-Roman culture, since Paul would have also been familiar with related ideas within his own Jewish culture. In this context, this paper will specifically explore how Paul used the idea of "metamorphosis" in ways that were understandable within both the Jewish and Hellenistic cultures of his time, and how he subordinated the contemporary understandings of metamorphosis to the gospel that he preached.

Key words
Metamorphosis – Paul – Graeco-Roman culture – Jewish culture – Hellenistic culture

Metamorphoses and the *Golden Ass* in the First-Century Hellenistic World

Lehtipuu notes that it makes sense to try to take what Paul writes literally, "within the philosophical ways of thinking that were available to him in his

[1] Vigdis Songe-Møller, "'With What Kind of Body Will They Come?' Metamorphosis and the Concept of Change: From Platonic Thinking to Paul's Notion of the Resurrection of the Dead", in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. Turid Karlsen Seim and Jorunn Økland; Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2009), 109.

own world".[2] For this reason, this study will begin with how the Hellenistic world understood 'metamorphosis." Within the Greek philosophic tradition, the meaning of the word μορφή did change over time. Martin observes that "[w]ith Plato, the μορφή is the impress of the 'idea' on the individual".[3] Subsequently, Aristotle developed the philosophical sense of μορφή, so that it became much more pronounced, and μορφή came centrally to mean "the essence (οὐσία) of a thing."[4] However, in later Greek, the word came to have a far more vague and general meaning.

The related word μεταμορφόω is generally defined as "transform."[5] However, the word came to inhabit a very specific semantic field in antiquity. As Walde explains:

> Metamorphoses are specific types of myths, particularly widespread in ancient Greece, whence they found their way into Roman literature. Two types may be distinguished: (1) temporary transformations of gods… magicians, or tricksters for deceptive purposes, etc.; (2) lasting transformations of human beings into animals, plants, stones, water, landscape features, etc… The second type is metamorphosis in the significant sense.[6]

In Graeco-Roman popular culture, metamorphoses were closely associated with mythology and magic. They first appear in Homeric epic. In Book 4 of the *Odyssey*, for example, it is said of Proteus, "The Old Man of the Sea," that "[h]e will try all kinds of transformations [γινόμενος], and change himself [γίνονται] into every sort of beast on earth, and into water and blazing fire."[7] Although the word itself is not used, this is an example of how the ancient Greeks understood metamorphosis, and indeed, serves as a model for the later development of the concept.[8] From these literary beginnings, metamorphosis

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[2] Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Complete and Incomplete Transformation in Paul—A Philosophical Reading of Paul on Body and Spirit", in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (ed. Turid Karlsen Seim and Jorunn Økland; Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2009), 146.

[3] R. P. Martin, *A Hymn of Christ: Philippians 2,5–11* in *Recent Interpretation & in the Setting of Early Christian Worship* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 101.

[4] Martin, *A Hymn of Christ*…, 101.

[5] H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, "μεταμορφόω", in *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Ed. H.S. Jones, Clarendon Press: Oxford, UK, 1968), 1114.

[6] Christine Walde, "Metamorphosis", in *Brill's Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World: New Pauly* (Ed. H. Cancik and H. Schneider; English ed. Leiden: Brill, 2006), 783.

[7] Homer, *Od.* 4.417–418 (E.V. Reiu, tr. D.C.H. Rieu, rev. tr.; London: Penguin Books, 2003), 51; Homer, *Homeri Odyssea: Recognovit Helmut van Thiel* (Geor Olms Verlag: Hildesheim, 1991), 615.

[8] See also 10.230–243.

played a prominent role[9] in the works of the Attic tragedians Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.[10] Metamorphosis stories were also popular in Alexandrian literature.[11]

Certainly, the concept appears to have had its origin in archaic times within a mythological context, which persisted into late antiquity. Apart from its mythological use, the word μεταμορφόω was also used to describe the natural transformations of animals in terms of camouflage.[12] Galen also used the word in a medical context.[13] However, it is important to note that these naturalistic usages of the word are from the second and third centuries C.E., and may well not have been current in the first century; the available evidence tends to support the contention that, at least for the time period in which Paul was writing, metamorphoses were "limited to the realm of magic and the extraordinary capacities of the gods".[14]

Walde highlights some specific recurring structural elements of metamorphosis involving humans that can be identified from the literature of antiquity.

> In most metamorphoses of the Hellenistic and later periods, specific recurring structures of metamorphosis… can be identified: all metamorphoses take place through the action of the gods, who punish or reward those who are transformed… Characteristic of metamorphosis is its final nature (that is, there can be no reverse transformation…), but also a continuity, however it may be articulated, between the person transformed and the object into which he or she is transformed. Metamorphosis provides the opportunity to break through the natural order of things.[15]

Lucius Apuleius (c. 125–180 C.E.) was a sophist who formed part of the Greek Second Sophistic,[16] and who was an initiator of many mystery cults.[17] Apuleius' most famous work is the Metamorphoses, more commonly known

[9] For example, see Diodorus Siculus 4.81.5, 75; and Athenaeus 8.334 C, D, 16–19.

[10] Walde, "Metamorphosis," 784.

[11] For examples see Nicander, "*Heteroioumena*"; and Boeus "*Ornithogonia.*"

[12] Aelian *Var.* 1.1, 27.

[13] For example, see Galen, "On the doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato," 1.7.24-2. See also Galen, *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus* in *Claudii Galeni opera Omnia*, accessed 13 July 2012, online: http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/, vol. 11, page 792, line 17.3; and vol. 11 page 797, line 9.

[14] Walde, "Metamorphosis," 783–784.

[15] *Ibid.*, 784.

[16] S. J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 14.

[17] Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (tr. Joel C. Relihan; Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2007), xiv.

as The Golden Ass. It is notable for being the only Latin novel to survive intact from antiquity, and is invaluable for its insight into popular beliefs and culture in Roman times. Although it was certainly written a century after Paul's letters, the Metamorphoses still provide us with a window into the context within which many of the ideas that Paul expressed in his letters would have been understood.

Leinweber observes that The Golden Ass is generally regarded as one of the finest sources for witchcraft and magic as it was perceived and practiced in late antiquity.[18] The prevalence of belief in magic during antiquity should not be underestimated,[19] and in contrast to our modern notions, religion and magic were not necessarily distinguishable. In the late Hellenistic world[20] and within Graeco-Roman culture, magic was seen as completely "parallel" with religion.[21] We certainly know that the class of fiction to which The Golden Ass belonged was extremely popular in antiquity, although it had a low reputation among the educated classes.[22] It attests to the kinds of metamorphic tales that were prevalent in the mid- to late second century and, presumably, even a century earlier, when Paul wrote his Epistle to the Romans.

The Metamorphoses, or as Augustine called it, The Golden Ass,[23] is full of magic and transformations. In one example, Palaestra ("Fotis") is asked to "show me your mistress practising magic or changing her shape" (δεῖξόν μοι μαγγανεύουσαν ἢ μετα-μορφουμένην).[24] After having witnessed many transformations and having himself been changed into an ass, the protagonist Lucius is finally transformed back into a man by praying to Isis, the Queen of Heaven. As a result of his prayer and purification, Isis grants Lucius a vision

[18] D. W. Leinweber, "Witchcraft and Lamiae in "The Golden Ass," *Folklore* 105 (1994): 77.

[19] Helmut Koester, "History, Culture and Religion of the Hellenistic Age," in vol. 1 of *Introduction to the New Testament* (2nd ed.; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 363.

[20] A. F. Segal, "Hellenistic Magic: Some Questions of Definition," in *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 355.

[21] A. F. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 347. However, see also Peter Schäfer, *The Origins of Jewish Mysticism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 73.

[22] J. H. Gaisser, *The Fortunes of Apuleius and The Golden Ass: A Study in Transmission and Reception* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 296.

[23] Note that the Greek text of the *Golden Ass* has been lost, and the extant text is in Latin. However, a very similar but longer work in Greek exists called Λούκιος ἢ ὄνος (*Loukios/Lucius or the Ass*). The Latin text of *The Golden Ass* is considered to be an abridgment of *Lucius or the Ass*.

[24] M. D. MacLeod ed. & tr., *Lucian* (Vol 8; LCL; London: William Heinemann, 1967), Section 11, Line 8.

of herself and instructs him to be initiated into her priesthood in return for his metamorphosis back into a man.[25] It is worth noting, first of all, that while the transformation of human beings into animals is a common motif, "the transformation of animals into human beings is rare".[26] The transformation of Lucius from an ass back to a man is an exception.

Ovid's great narrative poem, the Metamorphoses, written and circulated in Rome possibly very early in the first century, is a landmark work dealing with μεταμορφόω. It therefore provides significant contextual relevance, both chronological and geographical, for the study of metamorphoses in the New Testament. Ovid's poem is a collection of approximately two hundred and fifty accounts of metamorphosis. Many of Ovid's versions of μεταμορφόω occur in relation to Arachne's spider web in Book VI. This episode contains a whole host of examples of gods who have transformed themselves into different animals in order to seduce beautiful young maidens. Among other gods, Zeus notably disguises himself as a satyr to seduce Antiope,[27] a shower of gold to seduce Danae,[28] a swan to seduce Leda[29] and a bull to seduce Europa.[30]

A metamorphosis of particular interest in Ovid's work is that of the Myrmidons,[31] ants that were changed into humans by Zeus to populate Aegina. This provides another exception to the usual pattern in which it is humans that are changed into animals, and are thus "downgraded," rather than the reverse. In this instance, it may not be coincidence that it is Zeus, the chief of the gods, who works this unusual metamorphosis.

Drawing again on Walde's recurring structural elements of metamorphoses, in The Golden Ass, Lucius' metamorphosis is not of a final nature; indeed, it is reversed, against the usual typology. His metamorphosis back into a human is certainly accomplished through the actions of the gods. Lucius' metamorphosis is reversed through a vision of the goddess Isis, who was hugely popular at all levels of society in the first few centuries after Christ.

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[25] Apuleius, *The Golden Ass*, Book 11.
[26] Walde, "Metamorphosis", 783.
[27] Ovid, *Met.* 6.110–111.
[28] Ovid, *Met.* 6.114.
[29] Ovid, *Met.* 6.108–109.
[30] Ovid, *Met.* 6.103–104.
[31] Ovid, *Met.* 7.612–660.

The climax of Ovid's Metamorphoses is the metamorphosis of Julius Caesar through ascension and divinification after death. Metamorphosis through apotheosis of the emperor was the best known metamorphosis in Roman antiquity. Ovid wrote that Julius had to be made a god:[32] *ille deus faciendus erat*.[33]

Given both the fundamental role of traditional mythology and the prominence of the imperial cult, it is evident that metamorphosis was a well-understood concept in Graeco-Roman society. It was, however, understood within the traditional parameters prescribed by the culture and its paradigms of belief. Metamorphosis was the work of the gods, which could be accessed by magic. When the gods became animals it was in form only and usually with seduction in mind. When humans became animals, it was usually irreversible. Under special circumstances, humans could also become divinities in reality. In a culture where rigid social rules prescribed one's role in life, metamorphosis allowed some comfort, unreal though it might have been, due to the idea that radical change was possible.

Metamorphosis in Jewish Literature

The Greek concept of human-divine "metamorphosis" had its equivalent within Judaism. Apart from Christianity, the concept of "metamorphosis" was not expressed in the sense of God becoming man, with the notable exception of Christianity. It was rather expressed in the sense of a person being transformed in a direction towards God.

The Jewish faith was defined by the key expression found in Deuteronomy 6:4, "Hear, O Israel, the LORD is our God, the LORD is one!". That meant that apotheosis was out of the question for any self-respecting Jew. But it did not mean that one could not become an angel. This was as close as possible to the concept of becoming God. Indeed, angelification was the Jewish approximation of pagan apotheosis, and we do find a significant theme of angelification in the Jewish texts from the intertestamental period and the first centuries of the Common Era.

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[32] Ovid, *Met.* 15.761. Translation by D. Raeburn, *Metamorphoses: A New Verse Translation* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 630.

[33] Ovid, *Metamorphoses: Recognovit Brevique Adnotatione Critica Instruxit* (Ed. R.J. Tarrant; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) Book 15, Line 761, 476.

Enoch and Moses are the two most important Jewish figures of divinification or angelic "transformation".[34] In the Enochic literature, for example, Enoch ascends to heaven for the ultimate reward: "astral transformation and enthronement in heaven".[35] Segal observes that the Parables of Enoch[36] contain several apparent references to angelic transformation.[37] In 1 Enoch 39,7[38] there is an image of the final judgment that seems to include the transformation of the righteous into angel-like beings.

Similarly, the notion of an angelic afterlife seems to be evident in the Epistle of Enoch, as for example in 1 Enoch 104,2–6, "(2) Be of good courage, for aforetime you were worn down by evils and afflictions, but now you shall shine and appear as the lights of heaven, and the portals of heaven shall be opened unto you… (6) …you shall become companions of the angels of heaven".[39] In the Enochic literature, the accomplishment of this transformation is signalled by "garments of glory". This is evident in 1 Enoch 62,15–16, where the righteous and elect will be "clothed with garments of glory".[40]

With regard to transformation, 2 Enoch 22,8 should also be noted. This is in connection with Enoch's transformation, after seeing God,[41] into "one of his glorious ones," which Segal interprets to be "in short, an angel and a star".[42] As another example of angelic transformation, 2 Enoch 30,8−11 states that Adam was an angel: "And on earth I assigned him to be a second angel, honored and great and glorious". Likewise, in the Prayer of Joseph,[43] Jacob

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[34] Segal, *Life After Death*, 510. See also *Sirach* 45:15; and *Testament of Moses* 1:14, 15–19.

[35] Segal, Life After Death, 274.

[36] *Ibid*., 356. The "Parables of Enoch" are found in *1 Enoch* 37–71.

[37] See Segal, *Life After Death*, 359.

[38] Claudia Setzer (*Resurrection of the Body in Early Judaism and Early Christianity: Doctrine, Community, and Self-Definition* [Brill: Leiden, 2004], 15) dates this portion of the Book of Enoch to the first century C.E.

[39] Matthew Blak, ed., *The Book of 1 Enoch: A New English Edition with Commentary and Textual Notes* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 98. See also J. J. Collins, "The Angelic Life," in *Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Body and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity* (eds. Turid Karlsen Seim and Jorunn Økland; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 291–292.

[40] Black, *1 Enoch* 62:15–16, 60.

[41] *2 Enoch* 22:7.

[42] Segal, *Life After Death*, 498–499, citing *2 Enoch* 22:8–10, recension A, and noting parallels with 2 Cor. 5:1–10.

[43] The fact that Origen cites the *Prayer of Joseph* as being in use as prior to 231 C.E. gives us the latest possible dating. See *Philocalia* 23:15 in J. Armitage Robinson, ed. *The Philocalia of Origen* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1893).

describes himself as "the archangel of the power of the Lord and the chief captain among the sons of God… the first minister before the face of God."[44] Even beyond the Enochic texts, it appears that notions of mystical ascent and angelification were well understood within Judaism. In 2 Baruch, for example, the righteous are gradually transformed into angelic creatures in paradise:

> For they will live in the heights of that world and they will be like the angels and will be equal to the stars. And… they will be changed… from beauty to loveliness, and from light to the splendor of glory. For the extents of Paradise will be spread out for them… and the excellence of the righteous will then be greater than that of the angels.[45]

The Biblical Antiquities foretell that the likeness of the faithful will be akin to the stars. It might be easy to see this as merely metaphorical, if it were not that the relevant passage emphasises the visibility of this likeness, and a direct analogy is made with the observable astral bodies. In the text, God is represented as saying: "Is it not regarding this people that I spoke to Abraham in a vision, saying, 'Your seed will be like the stars of the heaven,' when I lifted him above the firmament and showed him the arrangements of all the stars".[46]

The concept of angelification may well have been embraced by the Qumran community. In the "Angelic Liturgy"[47] there are many references to divine hierarchies, the seven heavens, and the appearance and movements of God's throne chariot,[48] familiar from Merkabah Mysticism.[49] Segal notes that the "Angelic Liturgy" appears to be "the liturgy of the human priests at Qumran who were actually undergoing transformation into angelic creatures, worshiping in the heavenly Temple. The liturgy seems to map a seven-stage ascent to heaven to view God's throne and glory".[50]

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[44] J. Z. Smith, tr., "Prayer of Joseph" in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the Old Testament and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (ed. J. H. Charlesworth, 699-1174; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1983), lines 7–9, 713.

[45] Translation by A. F. J. Klijn; see "2 (Syriac Apocalypse) of Baruch," in vol. 1 of *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments* (ed. J.H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 638. See also *2 Baruch* 51:3−5.

[46] Pseudo-Philo, 18.5, in D. J. Harrington, tr. in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (Ed. J.H. Charlesworth; Vol 2; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 325.

[47] The "Angelic Liturgy" consists of *IIQShirshab* and the other fragments found in cave 4.

[48] Segal, *Life After Death*, 412–413.

[49] *Ibid.*, 413.

[50] *Ibid.*, 304. Note also the angelomorphism in *1QSb* 4:24–28.

Crispin Fletcher-Louis has convincingly demonstrated that the Qumran community's language of mystical participation was directed toward angelification.[51] This is expressed in many texts within the context of "fellowship with the angels as a present experience for members of the sect".[52] As Collins notes, "[l]ife in the **יחד** was structured to enable and facilitate participation in the heavenly cult."[53] A focus on present fellowship with the angelic host is evident, for example, in the following statement:

> And I know there is hope for him whom Thou hast shaped from dust for the everlasting Council. Thou hast cleansed a perverse spirit of great sin that it may stand with the host of the Holy Ones, and that it may enter into community with the congregation of the Sons of Heaven.[54]

This accomplishment of this transformation is again signalled by the bestowal of "majestic raiment." Therefore, in the "Instruction on the Two Spirits," we find the promise to the righteous of "healing, great peace in a long life, and fruitfulness, together with every everlasting blessing and eternal joy in life with no end, a crown of glory, and a garment of majesty in unending light."[55] There may also be a reference to deification in 4QMA.[56] In this regard, Morton Smith considered that 4QMA should be translated as: "[El Elyon gave me a seat among] those perfect forever, a mighty throne in the congregation of the gods… I have taken my seat in the [congregation] in the heavens, and none [find fault with me.] I shall be reckoned with gods and established in the holy congregation."[57]

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[51] Crispin Fletcher-Louis, *Luke-Acts: Angels, Christology, and Soteriology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), 184–198. See also R. Elior, *The Three Temples: One the Emergence of Jewish Mysticism* (Tr. D. Louvish; Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2004).

[52] J. J. Collins, "The Angelic Life," 296

[53] *Ibid*., 301, 308.

[54] *1 QH*^{a} 11:19–21. Translation by Geza Vermes; see *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (London: Penguin, 1997), 261. Also note *1QS* 11:7–8, tr. Vermes, 115. See comments by Schäfer in Ithamar Gruenwald, "Reflections on the Nature and Origins of Jewish Mysticism," in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After: Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism* (ed. Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 123.

[55] *1 QS* 4:6−8; tr. Vermes, 102.

[56] The fragment *4QMA* was published in 1957 by C. H. Hunzinger, and comprises "a parallel text to *1QM* XIV, 4b… to 16… but in an earlier recension" (Philip R. Davies, *1QM, The War Scroll from Qumran: Its Structure and History* [BibOr 32; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1977]).

[57] Quoted in Segal, *Life After Death*, 414. Compare with Vermes' similar translation: "I dwell… in heaven, and… I am reckoned with the 'gods' and my dwelling-place is in the congregation of holiness" (4Q491, fr.11, tr. Vermes, 185).

However, Schäfer's observation, that the various manifestations of the idea of communion between humans and angels should not be "lumped together," since they take on different forms in the various writings of Qumran, should be given due weight.[58] Although this is a major theme in these writings, how exactly it was understood by the members of the Qumran community continues to be the subject of scholarly debate.[59]

The idea of transformation within Second Temple Judaism is integrally bound up with communion between the human and the divine. Modern scholars tend to focus on mystical union as "the very essence of mysticism".[60] However, Elliot Wolfson suggests that this focus is informed by Neoplatonic ontology, specifically the idea that "contemplation of God results in a form of union whereby the soul separates from the body and returns to its ontological source in the One".[61] Wolfson suggest that this model is entirely alien to Jewish sources.[62] What we do find in the Jewish sources is the idea of heavenly ascent as "leading to an ontic transformation of the adept and resulting in his angelification,"[63] and perhaps in a few cases in a later period, even deification.[64]

In concluding this section, some observation is warranted with regard to the term "mysticism" itself, as applied to Judaism. Peter Schäfer has echoed Boaz Huss's "scathing criticism" of the category of mysticism, maintaining that it, and Jewish mysticism in particular, "are based on Christian theological concepts that, in the wake of Western imperialist and colonialist efforts, have been imposed on non-Western societies and religions".[65] The stark reality is

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[58] Schäfer, *Origins*, 151.

[59] *Ibid*., 30. Schäfer (*Origins*, 153) considers that "[t]here is nothing in the Qumranic texts that would allow the reader to read into them the notion of *unio mystica*, or mystical union with God, a category so cherished by historians of religion (especially those with a Christian background). Some of the texts suggest the idea of a *unio angelica*, or "angelification" of humans, similar to what we encounter in the ascent apocalypses. Others, probably the majority, advocate a *unio liturgica*, or liturgical communion with the angels in heaven, similar to what occurs in Hekhalot literature."

[60] Elliot R. Wolfson, "Mysticism and the Poetic-Liturgical Compositions from Qumran: A Response to Bilhah Nitzan," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 85 (1994):185–202. Note that Wolfson critiques this view.

[61] *Ibid*., 186.

[62] *Ibid.*

[63] Schäfer, *Origins*, 19.

[64] See 2 *Enoch* 39; also 3 *Enoch*. With regard to the latter, see particularly Sergei A. Orlov, *The Enoch-Metatron Tradition* (TSAJ 107; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005).

[65] Schäfer, *Origins*, 354–355, citing Boaz Huss, "The Mystification of the Kabbalah and the Myth of Jewish Mysticism" *Pe'amim* 110 (2007): 9–30 (in Hebrew).

that "what we call mysticism has no equivalent in any of the languages in which our sources are preserved."[66] That the concept of "mysticism" is a more modern construct that is applied according to various perspectives would seem evident from the notorious difficulty of defining the term.[67] However, "transformation" and "metamorphosis" resulting from an encounter or communion with the divine *are* categories that were widely used and understood in the ancient world. "Metamorphosis" is a legitimate phenomenon across the breadth of the religions of antiquity, and surely encompasses the core of what the concept of "mysticism" seeks to explain.

Metamorphoses in the Epistles of Paul

Having considered the concepts of metamorphosis firstly in the Hellenistic, and then in the Jewish contexts, the question to be considered is to what extent Paul drew from each of these traditions in his own use of the concept.[68] In considering this question, the Pauline uses of the word μεταμορφόω and its cognates will be examined. In the Pauline corpus, the word μεταμορφόω is used only in Rom 12,2 and 2 Cor 3,18 (twice). Its cognate μορφή is used in Phil 2,6–7, and μορφόω appears in Gal 4,19.[69] This provides us with a discrete corpus of passages in which to examine the Pauline use of the concept of metamorphosis.

Romans 12,2

In Rom 12,2, Paul urges believers to undergo metamorphosis. His injunction is to "be transformed" (μεταμορφοῦσθε), and this is to be done "by the renewing of the mind" (τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός) and that it is the "good and acceptable and perfect" will of God (ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον). However, here we come to a point where the pagan and the Judaeo-Christian concepts of metamorphosis part company. In The Golden Ass, even though humans can sometimes prod the gods into action through magic, metamorphosis is always at the will of the gods alone, independent of the will

[66] *Ibid.*, 354.

[67] For example, David Knowles, *What is Mysticism?* (London: Burns & Oates, 1967), 9; and L. Jacobs, *Jewish Mystical Testimonies* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 1.

[68] In his article "Metamorphoses," Songe-Møller importantly deals with the concept of metamorphosis in the context of Paul's understanding of the resurrection. Here we will only deal with other passages where the word μεταμορφόω and its cognates are specifically used.

[69] Note also the negative use of μόρφωσις in Rom 2,20 and 2 Tim 3,5.

of humanity. Certainly, Paul's understanding was that the metamorphosis of believers could only take place as an action of God, and there is no urging of God required; it is τί τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, τὸ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐάρεστον καὶ τέλειον (what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect, Rom 12,2b).

Christian believers can no more transform themselves than those humans in the popular stories and myths could transform themselves. Metamorphosis is God's initiative and it is God's doing. For this reason, Paul uses the word in a passive sense, i.e., "to be transformed" (12,2). However, there is a role for humanity in the metamorphosis that God provides. Just as believers are called to resist conforming to this age, they are correspondingly not to resist the metamorphosis which it is God's will to work in their lives. The key aspect here is that both injunctions are passive, with the causative/permissive passive being used, which "implies consent" or "permission".[70]

This metamorphosis should be understood in the context of Paul's cosmological eschatology. In Romans 12,2, it is significant, as Ziesler comments, that "world" is translated as αἰών (age),[71] and so we are dealing with the shift of the ages. Körtner observes that

> Common to all types of Jewish apocalyptic is the notion that a catastrophic event will bring about a one-time, decisive turn from disaster and affliction to salvation. The thinking of Jewish apocalyptic is thus fundamentally dualistic at the outset. Cautiously formulated, the dualism of Jewish apocalyptic consists in the irreconcilable antithesis between a present condition of disaster and affliction on the one hand, and a future condition of salvation on the other… It frequently appears as the juxtaposition of two world periods of the aeons. The idea does interject itself… that the future aeon constitutes a world completely different from the present world and history.[72]

Paul's preceding discussion, prior to Rom 12,2, encompasses the spectrum of Jewish apocalyptic. De Boer notes that "[i]n the first five and a half chapters (Rom 1,1-5,11), the language and perspectives of forensic apocalyptic eschatology are clearly prominent…In Rom 6-8, however, the language and perspectives of cosmological apocalyptic eschatology predominate."[73] Rom

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[70] D. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 440–441. Wallace also notes that this usage is rare.

[71] J. Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1989), 294.

[72] U. H. J. Körtner, *The End of the World: A Theological Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 131.

[73] M. C. De Boer, "Paul and Apocalyptic Eschatology," in *The Continuum History of Apocalyticism* (ed. B. McGinn, J. J. Collins and S. J. Stein; New York: Continuum, 2003), 180,

12,1-2 may be understood as fitting the contexts of both forensic and cosmological apocalypticism, although the notion of the two ages perhaps tilts the context more towards the cosmological.

This cosmological context suggests that the sacrifice mentioned in v.1 is not metaphorical;[74] indeed, Ziesler[75] further comments in relation to v. 2a[76] that

> In English 'conformed' and 'transformed' are cognate, in Greek they are not, the first employing the root *schema*, and the second the root *morphe*… We may… take it that the two roots are used simply to provide vocabulary variation, and in talking about being conformed or transformed Paul is talking about the totality of belonging, inward and outward, t one age or the other.

The two imperatives in v. 2 should therefore be seen as complementary. One deals with resisting the "pull" of this age, and the other with not resisting the "pull" of Jesus Christ. Koester's observation is illuminating in terms of the lexical analogies that Paul chose to use in this verse:

> Astrology and magic became allies, because magic had always understood its craft as an intervention into the mysterious network of the powers of nature. Things celestial and terrestrial, stars and human beings, soul and body, spirit and matter, word and sacrament, names and gods – all were seen as corresponding parts of the same "scientific" conformity to the principles of the universe.[77]

The μεταμορφόω of believers is not to occur through astrology and magic, but rather through the τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός ("renewing of your mind").[78] This provides a clue as to what this kind of metamorphosis entails. It is an ἀνακαινώσει of the νοός.[79] The word νοός pertains to the mind in its

citing Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (tr. William Montgomery; 2nd ed.; London: Adam & Charles Black, 1953), 57. De Boer (180) notes that "the traditions of both patterns or "tracks" of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology, the forensic and the cosmological, are present in Paul's thought."

[74] See generally Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Cosmology and Self in the Apostle Paul: The Material Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1; also Joseph Peter Becker, *Paul's Usage of χάρις in 2 Corinthians 8–9: An Ontology of Grace* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011).

[75] Ziesler, *Romans*, 294.

[76] καὶ μὴ συσχηματίζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ ἀλλὰ μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός ὑμῶν…

[77] H. Koester, *History, Culture, and Religion of the Hellenistic Age, Introduction to the New Testament* (Vol. 1, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 363.

[78] "μεταμορφόω," "to be renewed, " Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 107.

[79] In Titus 3:5, Paul writes that the renewing agent is the Holy Spirit (ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου). Again, note the use of the passive.

broadest sense, as employed in "perceiving and thinking," "reasoning," and "feeling and deciding".[80] It is this aspect of the person that is to be "renewed." By the transformation of their mind, in effect, they enter into a new reality; indeed, they enter into the new αἰῶν of the spiritual kingdom of Christ himself.

Paul's use of the concept of μεταμορφόω can therefore be understood within a Jewish apocalyptic setting, with some interaction with Hellenistic currents of thought. In this regard, Russell notes that "[t]he exact relationship between the apocalyptists and the Pharisees has been the subject of much debate".[81] His own reasonable conclusion is that "the apocalyptic writers were to be found not in any one party within Judaism but throughout many parties, known and unknown, and among men who owed allegiance to no party at all".[82]

2 Corinthians 3,18

In 2 Cor 3,18, Paul uses the word μεταμορφόω in a similar context as in Rom 12,2, and in a similarly passive manner: "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory [προσώπῳ τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν] just as from the Lord, the Spirit" (2 Cor 3,18).

The metamorphosis of the believer in Christ is to be into the same image (τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα) of Christ. If 2 Cor 3,18 can be accepted as a parallel of Rom 12,2, then it may be reasonably inferred that this same image of Christ is the goal of the metamorphosis to which Paul invites believers in 12,2. Cullan observes that "[t]he idea of our transformation (μεταμορφοῦσθαι) into the image of Christ (who is himself the image of God) occurs repeatedly in Paul's writings… The relation between transformation and image is made quite clear in 2 Cor. 3,18".[83]

In 2 Cor 3,18, the metamorphosis is effected ἀπὸ κυρίου πνεύματος ("from the Lord, the Spirit"). However, the crux of this comparison is that the

[80] Liddell and Scott, *Lexicon*, 1180–1181.

[81] D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC – AD 100* (Philadelphia: Old Testament Library, 1964), 25. See also De Boer, "Apocalyptic Eschatology," 182.

[82] Russell, *Method and Message*, 27.

[83] Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament* (tr. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A.M. Hall; 2nd ed.; London: SCM, 1963), 176.

metamorphosis is effected, as in *The Golden Ass*, by a *vision* of God himself; in this case by τὴν δόξαν κυρίου κατοπτριζόμενοι ("beholding… the glory of the Lord") Jesus Christ. In Rom 12,2, Paul appears, therefore, to be using language and concepts that are understandable to his hearers, given their undoubted knowledge of popular beliefs and mythology.

Philippians 2,6–7

In Phil 2,6-7, Paul refers to Christ as one who, "although He existed in the form of God [ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ], did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant [ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου], and being made in the likeness of men [λαβών ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος]…" Ralph Martin observes that in the LXX, the words εἶδος and ὁμοίωμα are synonymous with μεταμορφόω, focusing primarily on the visible, external form, as demonstrating the inner reality.[84]

Having surveyed the various aspects of the scholarly debates regarding these verses, Ralph Martin concludes that "[t]he verb κενόω…does link verses 6 and 7; and joins the parallel terms ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦν and μορφὴν δούλου".[85] Martin recognizes that this exegesis "implies that His Servanthood is a synonym for His humanity."[86] In this he agrees with Dibelius, who wrote that *[d]er Parallelismus ist aber wohl eher synthetisch als synonym*.[87]

We therefore have here, in essence, a metamorphosis of Jesus from God to man. However, this metamorphosis is unlike anything known in the Hellenistic world. In the Graeco-Roman examples of gods who "become" humans, it is only the form, and not the reality, that they take on. Moreover, they are certainly not subject to death. The first part of Ovid's Metamorphoses accordingly contains stories of gods acting like humans (Books 1–2.) The work transitions to the final section (Books 12–15), in which humans become gods. Nowhere does a god actually become human. This was inconceivable to the Graeco-Roman mind.

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[84] Martin, *Hymn*, 103.

[85] *Ibid.*, 194.

[86] *Ibid.*, 194–195.

[87] M. Dibelius, *An die Thessalonicher I–II, An die Philipper* (HNT 11; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1925), 62.

The classic divine-human metamorphosis in the Graeco-Roman mind may be illustrated by the striking opening of Euripides' *Bacchae*. As Dionysus introduces himself, in the form of a young man, there are resonances with Phil 2,6. Dionysus declares that he has "exchanged his divine form for a mortal one" (μορφὴν δ' ἀμείψας ἐκ θεοῦ βροτησίαν).[88] Dionysus also explains that he has "taken on mortal form and changed my appearance to that of a man" (ὧν οὕνεκ' εἶδος θνητὸν ἀλλάξας ἔχω μορφήν τ' ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν).[89]

However, Dionysus' metamorphosis is only a change of "appearance," in line with the idea of the divinity as a "trickster." In Johnston's translation, Dionysus has merely "altered [his] looks".[90] The μορφὴν of Jesus, by contrast, is substantive, and not merely a "disguise"; accordingly, Jesus makes himself liable even to death. Dionysus disguises himself as a man, in his words, "making known to men my own divinity."[91] But Jesus, it seems, was "made in the likeness of men" in order to demonstrate his humanity.

In considering Euripides' use of the idea of metamorphosis, it is worth considering that "Euripides and Menander were two of the core authors in Greek education."[92] Bonner similarly observes that "[i]n Roman times, quotation from Euripides is common, and at all periods his tragedies provided models for the Roman dramatists… [and] he was recommended as by far the most useful of… dramatists for the student of oratory."[93] It is not unreasonable to expect that Euripides' concept of metamorphosis would have been acknowledged by the first hearers of Paul's letters.

The specific question of whether the *Carmen Christi* has its origins in a Hellenistic-Jewish context of a Palestinian-Jewish context has been a controverted question for generations of scholars.[94] As noted above, there

[88] Euripides, *Bacchae* 4. Translation by D. Kovacs; see *Euripides: Bacchae – Iphigenia at Aulis – Rhesus* (ed. and tr. D. Kovacs; LCL; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 12–13. Compare Johnston's translation: "I've changed my form from god to human" (see Euripides, *The Bacchae* [tr. Ian Johnston; Malaspina: Nanaimo, revised July 2003, accessed 13 July 2012]. Online: http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/euripides/euripides.htm).

[89] Euripides, *Bacchae* 53–54, ed. & tr. Kovacs, 16–17.

[90] Euripides, *Bacchae* 53–54, tr. Johnson.

[91] Euripides, *Bacchae* 23, tr. Kovacs.

[92] J. Paul Sampley, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 2003), 208.

[93] Stanley F. Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 214. See also Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 116.

[94] Martin, *Hymn*, 43–79.

seems to be a significant disjuncture between the Hellenistic concepts and those in Phil 2, and Cullman suggested that the occurrence of the root μορφή closely followed by εἰκών in Rom 8,29 provides confirmation that Phil 2,6 refers to Gen 1,26.[95] Nevertheless, it still seems that in the context of the μορφή of God into man, the narrative itself of Phil 2 lies closer to the world of Hellenism than that of Judaism. This is only natural, in the sense that although Paul's concepts are fundamentally Jewish, he is writing to an audience in a Gentile city and context. In this regard, Thurston and Ryan have noted that the Philippian hymn exemplifies what they call Paul's "dual purpose vocabulary." They explain this by commenting that

> Paul had a genius for choosing language that had connotations in *both* Jewish and Hellenistic ideational worlds… Paul either composes or chooses a hymn that has material which can be recognized both by those who know Jewish thought and by those familiar with Hellenistic thought. From whichever direction the hymn is approached, the picture of Jesus as presented services Paul's purposes exactly in the context.[96]

Galatians 4,19

In Gal 4,19, Paul writes: "[m]y children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you [μορφωθῇ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν]." Here, we have the concept of μορφόω within the context of the recurring Pauline motif of being "in Christ." In Gal 4,19, it is reversed in the sense of Christ being "in you," and it describes the process by which this state comes to be (ὠδίνω… οὗ μορφωθῇ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν). It is reasonable to see the phrases "Christ in you" and "you in Christ" as reflecting a symbiotically identical relationship in the writings of Paul.

This "being-in-Christ" motif was identified by Schweitzer as "[t]he fundamental thought of Pauline mysticism,"[97] and as "the prime enigma of the

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[95] Cullman, *Christology*, 177.

[96] Bonnie B. Thurston and J. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* (SP; Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 88.

[97] Schweitzer, *Paul*, 3. More broadly, Gruenwald ("Reflections," 27) is of the view that "mysticism is expressive of the desire to have experience of God or of experiences that come as a result of an immediate communion with God," and that accordingly, "it too has to be treated within the natural forms of religious behaviour and expression." On the broader debate about mysticism, see Schäfer, *Origins*, 354–5, citing Boaz Huss, "The Mystification of the Kabbalah," 9–30; Joseph Dan, *The Heart and the Fountain: An Anthology of Jewish Mystical Experiences* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 2–5; John J. Pilch, *Flights of the Soul: Visions, Heavenly Journeys, and Peak Experiences in the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2011); and

Pauline teaching: once grasped it gives the clue to the whole."[98] In this context, Schweitzer writes that "Paul's mysticism is then historico-cosmic where that of the Hellenistic religions is mythical. The difference is fundamental… The mysticism of the mystery-religions is individualistic; that of Paul collectivistic".[99] In this regard, Schweitzer would seem to be correct. The thought here seems much closer to the Jewish mystical tradition of metamorphosis than to the Hellenistic, both in regard to the seemingly staged or progressive process of transformation, as well as the ambiguity of the identity of the one so transformed, which we find in the Jewish apocalyptic tradition.[100] However, the Hellenistic influence never seems to be too far away. Indeed, Sellin finds the closest parallels to the Pauline "in-Christ" motif in the Hellenistic Judaism of Philo.[101]

Dunn makes the salient observation that "[t]he phrase in Christ occurs 83 times in the Pauline corpus (61 if we exclude Ephesians and the Pastorals), not counting the equivalent phrases using a pronoun ("in him/whom") defined by the context".[102] This is an extraordinarily distinctive Pauline feature,[103] perhaps somewhat neglected at the expense of, and all too often set against, the debates concerning justification by faith. In this regard, Dunn observes that "a study of participation in Christ leads more directly into the rest of Paul's theology than justification".[104] However, "[a]t the same time we must avoid the temptation to play off one aspect of Paul's theology against another".[105]

What is of great relevance here is that in Gal 4,19, Paul associates the concept of μορφόω with a concept that is one of the very key issues in his theology. In describing *how* Christ comes to be *in* the believer, he is saying that μορφόω is an important part of this process. The concept of μεταμορφόω

Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (vol. I of *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*; London: SCM Press, 1991), xix.

[98] Schweitzer, *Paul*, 3.

[99] *Ibid.*, 23.

[100] See n. 71.

[101] G. Sellin, "Hintergründe," 7–11, cited by James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998), 393, n.16, although Dunn here notes that "Paul's "in Christ" (or "Christ in me") is not notably ecstatic in character; Paul's ecstasy is more apocalyptic (2 Cor. 12.1–7) or pneumatic (1 Cor. 14.18.)"

[102] Dunn, *Theology*, 396.

[103] *Ibid.*

[104] *Ibid.*, 395.

[105] *Ibid.* For example, the debates about whether the heart of Paul's theology concerns being "in Christ," or God's faithfulness to the covenant, or righteousness or justification by faith.

would therefore seem to be central to Paul's world-view, and indeed, much more central than in the popular Graeco-Roman fascination with transformation and Jewish mystical speculations.

Conclusions

Some observations can now be made regarding Paul's use of the concept of μεταμορφόω. The first point is that the use of μεταμορφόω is passive throughout the Pauline corpus; the agent of metamorphosis is God, and the object for the transformation of humanity is the Christ-likeness, whether this is expressed as the "image" (εἰκών) of Christ, or through the ἐν Χριστός motif. This latter association, particularly through Gal 4,19, suggests that μορφόω has a more central role in Pauline thought and theology than has previously been identified.

The concept of μεταμορφόω was well understood in Hellenistic culture, and Paul's statements regarding transformation would have been readily understood within the context of Hellenistic mythology and the mystery-religions. However, it seems that Paul's references to μεταμορφόω and its cognates would have resonated more with some streams of Jewish apocalypticism. In this regard, a fundamental difference between Paul's concept of μεταμορφόω and its cognates, and broader Hellenistic usage, is that in the writings of Paul, μεταμορφόω is not simply a personal concern. Metamorphosis has universal and cosmological implications, associated with the change of the ages inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

For Paul, metamorphosis provides the opportunity to "break through the natural order of things," and it is from this aspect of metamorphosis, that was understood in the Hellenistic world, that he commences. However, Paul extends this concept and applies it to the cosmological notion of breaking through from the previous age into the next. For the individual, this meant the transformation from being a stranger to being a member of the household and kingdom established by the risen Christ.

Although we can gain valid and important perspectives on the meaning of μεταμορφόω from Greek and Jewish usages, to some extent at least, Paul's usage should be considered on its own terms. De Boer's comment must be given due weight:

> …The crucified Christ whom God raised form the dead is Paul's criterion for the appropriation of Jewish apocalyptic-eschatological categories; the latter serve the

> former, not vice versa… (the same is true of Paul's use of, for example, Stoic or Epiurean ideas). Paul does not preach apocalyptic eschatology, not even Christian apocalyptic eschatology; he preaches the crucified Christ whom God raised from the dead, nothing else.[106]

It is on this basis that we can understand how Paul drew on both his Jewish and Graeco-Roman contexts to connect with his audiences as part of the gospel that he preached.

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[106] De Boer, "Apocalyptic Eschatology," 183.