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'Race', 'Nation', 'People': Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9

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'Race', 'Nation', 'People': Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9*

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1 Peter 2.4–10 is a significant passage within the letter, rich in material from the Jewish scriptures. Verse 9 is particularly significant for the construction of Christian group-identity in that it uniquely applies three words from the vocabulary of ethnic identity to the Church: γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός, widely translated as 'race', 'nation', and 'people'. A survey of these words in pre-Christian Jewish literature (especially the LXX), in the NT, and in other early Christian literature, reveals how crucial this text in 1 Peter is to the process by which Christian identity came to be conceived in ethnoracial terms. Drawing on modern definitions of ethnic identity, and ancient evidence concerning the fluidity of ethnic identities, it becomes clear that 'ethnic' and 'racial' identities are constructed, believed, and sustained through discourse. 1 Peter, with both aggregative and oppositional modes of ethnic reasoning, makes a crucial contribution to the construction of an ethnic form of Christian identity.

Keywords: ethnicity, race, Christian identity, 1 Peter

1. Introduction

1 Peter 2.4–10 is a passage particularly full of words and images from the Jewish scriptures, which occupies a climactic position at the close of the first main section of the letter. As John Elliott puts it, the writer here brings 'to a resounding climax the line of thought begun in 1:3'.[1] He describes Christ as the elect 'stone', chosen by God but rejected by people, and the Church as the elect and holy people of God. The passage culminates in a powerful description

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1 John H. Elliott, *1 Peter: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 37B; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 407.

of the glorious status and honorable identity of this new 'people' (2.9–10). This declaration not only draws together the affirmations and the exhortations found in 1.3–2.10 but also lays the foundation for the instruction which is to follow in the second major section of the letter (2.11–4.11). 'Here' in 2.4–10, Elliott writes, 'the fundamental indicative for the entire epistle has been spoken'.[2]

My particular interest is in v. 9a, with its rich description of Christian identity, and especially the 'ethnic' or 'racial' terms used to denote this identity. It is striking and highly significant, as we shall go on to see, that here in the space of one verse no less than three key terms from the vocabulary of ethnic identity are applied to the Church: γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός, widely translated as 'race', 'nation', and 'people' (e.g., RSV, NRSV, NJB, ESV, NAB, NASV).[3]

While commentators note the importance of 2.9–10 as an appropriation of Israel's identity for the Church they have not generally paid much attention to the significance of the specifically ethnoracial terms in which Christian identity is here constructed: the emphasis has tended to fall on the corporate, ecclesiological, or Jewish character of the identity-designations, or on other phrases in these verses.[4] Conversely, in some important recent work which has begun to draw attention to the significance of ethnic language in the construction of early Christian identity, this particular text has not yet received detailed attention.[5]

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2 John H. Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy: An Exegetical Examination of 1 Peter 2:4–10 and the Phrase* basileion hierateuma (NovTSup 12; Leiden: Brill, 1966) 217.

3 On the sense that γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός together represent the three crucial terms in this respect, cf. Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University, 2005) 62, 69, 87, et passim. Love L. Sechrest, *A Former Jew: Paul and the Dialectics of Race* (LNTS 410; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2009) focuses on the terms ἔθνος and γένος. Despite the risks of anachronism and problematic associations, I shall continue to use the English terms given above as translations, while recognizing their fluid and contestable meanings. I also use the term 'ethnoracial', following Buell, *Why This New Race*, to denote the overlapping notions of 'ethnicity' and 'race'. See further the reflections towards the end of this essay.

4 E.g., Elliott, *1 Peter*, 444, stresses the 'communal' identity; M. Eugene Boring, *1 Peter* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999) 98, notes the density of ecclesiological imagery here; while Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1996) 167 focuses on the identity of Israel as holy and elect coming to designate the Church. Because of its influence on the Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, the phrase βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα has received particular attention: see, e.g., Elliott, *Elect*; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 449–55; Norbert Brox, *Der erste Petrusbrief* (EKKNT 21; Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1979) 108–10.

5 See esp. Buell, *Why This New Race*; Buell, 'Rethinking the Relevance of Race for Early Christian Self-Definition', *HTR* 94 (2001) 449–76; Buell, 'Race and Universalism in Early Christianity', *JECS* 10 (2002) 429–68; and Judith M. Lieu, 'The Race of the God-fearers', *Neither Jew nor Greek? Constructing Early Christianity* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2002) 49–68 (first published in *JTS* 46 [1995] 483–501); Lieu, *Christian Identity in the Jewish and Graeco-Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2004) 239–68, all works which focus mostly on second- and third-century evidence. Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons, then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letters of Paul* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 2007) and

My claim will be that it warrants such attention as a uniquely dense collocation of ethnic identity language, and a crucial early step in the construction of Christian identity in ethnoracial terms.

I shall explore the significance of this description of Christian identity in four stages: first, by outlining the importance of the terms γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός in pre-Christian Jewish literature, especially the LXX; second, by surveying their use elsewhere in the NT; third, by examining the influence of 1 Pet 2.9 on subsequent Christian writing; and fourth, by considering these findings and their contribution to the making of Christian identity in the light of modern theories of ethnicity and race.

2. Γένος, ἔθνος and λαός in Classical and Jewish Literature

In Classical Greek both ἔθνος and γένος have a fairly wide range of meanings and uses. Ἔθνος was commonly employed to denote groups of people, but could also be used to designate 'a class of beings who share a common identification', human or animal.[6] It could also be used to describe 'people groups foreign to a specific people group', a use that becomes especially prominent in biblical Greek.[7]

Γένος likewise was applied to both human and non-human groups, to sorts and kinds of things as well as to what we might call ethnic or racial groups.[8] As Jonathan Hall notes, it has a somewhat 'more specialised meaning' than ἔθνος, 'with its focus on the notion (however fictive) of shared descent'.[9] Love Sechrest, in a recent monograph on the subject, finds that 'kinship' ideas are most frequently associated with

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Sechrest, *A Former Jew*, focus on Paul (cf. also Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge, 'The Politics of Interpretation: The Rhetoric of Race and Ethnicity in Paul', *JBL* 123 [2004] 235–51). For brief comments on 1 Peter, see Buell, *Why This New Race*, 45–6; Buell, 'Relevance of Race', 472; Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 40.

6 Jonathan Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1997) 35. Cf. Homer *Il.* 2.459 (birds); 2.87 (bees); 2.469 (flies); 2.91; 3.32 (warriors).

7 BDAG, 276 §2; MM, 181, who note uses of ἔθνη to denote the rural barbarians living outside the πόλις. For non-biblical 'pagan' uses, see e.g. Aristotle *Pol.* 7.2.5 (1324b 10): ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν ('the non-Hellenic nations' [LCL]); Cass. Dio *Rom. Hist.* 36.41.1; to denote foreign groups in Rome, see Appian *Bell. Civ.* 2.2.13; 2.26.107; 3.35.140. Cf. also IG II² 1283 (260–59 BCE), in which ἔθνος is used of (immigrant) groups in Athens (l. 5). I am grateful to John Kloppenborg for alerting me to this inscription.

8 Cf. Homer *Il.* 12.23: 'the race of men half-divine (ἡμιθέων γένος ἀνδρῶν)' (LCL); *Il.* 2.852: 'the race (γένος) of wild she-mules' (LCL); Ael. Arist. *Or.* 45.1: 'the race of poets' (τὸ τῶν ποιητῶν γένος). Cf. MM, 124, for the common use in the papyri to denote 'a species or class of things', as well as uses corresponding 'to *gens*, a tribe or clan'.

9 Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 36. Cf. Homer *Il.* 13.354: 'Both were of one stock (γένος) and of one parentage (πάτρη)'. Homer *Od.* 15.267: ἐξ Ἰθάκης γένος εἰμί ('Of Ithaca I am by birth' [LCL]), which seems to mean, in effect, 'I am an Ithacan'. Sophocles *Oedipus Tyr.* 1383: 'of the race of Laius (γένους τοῦ Λαΐου)' (LCL, 1994 ed.).

uses of γένος in the non-Jewish authors she studies.[10] While γένος can be used as 'a subdivision of ἔθνος'[11] it need not be so, and the two terms can be used as synonyms.[12] Λαός seems always to refer to groups of people, sometimes with the specific sense of the 'common' people in distinction from the leaders.[13]

More relevant for our specific purposes are the uses of these terms in pre-Christian Jewish literature, especially in the LXX, the biblical tradition on which the author of 1 Peter seems to have drawn. In contrast to non-biblical Greek literature, where the term is relatively infrequent, λαός is a common term in the LXX, with over 2,000 occurrences generally rendering the Hebrew עם, particularly when it applies to Israel, while ἔθνος tends to be used—though not consistently—when עם refers to other people-groups.

Septuagintal usage of γένος also reflects the term's established range of meanings; hence it can be used to denote different kinds of things, plants, animals, and so on (Gen 1.11–12, 21, 24–25; Wis 19.11); specific kin- or tribal groups, or lines of descent (Lev 20.17–18; 21.13–14, 17; 1 Macc 5.2; 12.21; 2 Macc 5.22); or people in general as one (human) 'race' (Gen 11.6; 2 Macc 7.28).[14] But by far the most frequent use, and one that becomes especially prominent in writings of the first two centuries BCE, is to denote the people of Israel.[15] As Judith Lieu puts it: 'The sense of being a race or people is one proudly held in Jewish literature from the Maccabaean period, often in a context of suffering and persecution... γένος joins the more widespread and older λαός in proclaiming a sense of identity in the midst of hostility and attempted annihilation...'.[16] In the book of Judith, for example, γένος is used around twelve times to refer to the people of Israel; 2 and 3 Maccabees also have a significant number of such occurrences.[17] The use of γένος in this way is also prominent in Josephus and Philo.[18]

10 See Sechrest, A Former Jew, 84–7, 94–6.

11 LSJ, 480; cf. 344; as in, e.g., Herodotus 1.101: 'Deioces, then, united the Median nation (τὸ Μηδικὸν ἔθνος)... The Median tribes (Μήδων γένεα) are these...' (LCL).

12 Hall, Ethnic Identity, 36; Sechrest, A Former Jew, 90; see, e.g., Herodotus 1.56–57; Ael. Arist. Or. 1.50 (173D).

13 E.g., Homer Il. 2.365; 13.108; Od. 3.305. Cf. also H. Strathmann, TDNT 4.30.

14 It is most frequently used to render the Hebrew מין ('kind' or 'species') and עם ('people'): Hatch–Redpath, 239, list 17 instances for מין and 16 for עם.

15 E.g., Exod 1.9; 5.14; Josh 4.14; 11.21; Isa 22.4; 42.5; 43.20; Jer 38.1, 35, 37; 1 Esd 1.32; Esth 3.13; 6.13; Add Esth 8.21; Pss. Sol. 7.8; 17.7; cf. Lieu, 'Race of the God-fearers', 58–60.

16 Lieu, 'Race of the God-fearers', 58.

17 Jdt 5.10; 6.2, 5, 19; 8.20, 32; 9.14; 11.10; 12.3; 13.20; 15.9; 16.17. Interestingly, the NRSV translation variously uses people, nation, race, and descendants to render γένος here. There is a further reference in Jdt 16.24, though this looks most likely to refer more specifically to Judith's kin (NRSV: 'kindred'. Cf., possibly, 12.3). 2 Macc 5.22; 6.12; 7.16, 38; 8.9; 12.31; 14.8–9; 3 Macc 3.2; 6.4, 9, 13; 7.10.

18 Both authors use Ἰουδαῖος as the standard designation, and also use ἔθνος to denote the Jewish people (as a 'nation', see n. 20 below). For uses of γένος to denote the Jewish 'race' (τὸ γένος ἡμῶν, τὸ Ἰουδαϊκὸν γένος, κτλ.) see, e.g., Josephus C. Ap. 1.1–2, 59, 106, 130,

By contrast, ἔθνος is frequently used in the opposite way, to denote outsiders as distinct from 'the people'. Just as λαός and γένος are standard terms for the people of Israel, often translating עם in the Hebrew, so ἔθνη is a common designation of 'the nations', Gentiles, often (but by no means always) rendering גוים (e.g., Exod 34.24; Lev 18.24).[19] In Exod 1.9, Pharoah speaks τῷ ἔθνει αὐτοῦ (Heb. עמו) concerning τὸ γένος τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ (Heb. עם בני ישראל). Deuteronomy 7.6–7, an important text to which we shall return, describes Israel as a people (λαός; Heb. עם) holy, chosen, and special to God, set among the nations (ἔθνη; Heb. עמים). This is by no means a consistent picture though, and ἔθνος can also be used of the people of Israel, not least among later writings.[20]

While λαός is thus the most common and established designation for the people of Israel in the LXX, γένος also becomes a standard term, especially in the last two centuries BCE, and ἔθνος can be used similarly, as is the case in Josephus and Philo. The emerging prominence of γένος is particularly noteworthy, since, with its focus on the idea of shared descent, it corresponds most closely to what we would term an ethnic or racial designation and, as we shall see, highlights what is central to modern definitions of ethnic groups.

In a study of the maintenance of identity through distinction (*Abgrenzung*), focused particularly on the book of Jubilees, Eberhard Schwarz identifies three fundamental identity-forming designations (*Identitätsgründende Aussagen*) of Israel: Israel as 'holy people', Israel as 'chosen people', and Israel as a people who belong to God, God's special possession (*Eigentumsvolk*).[21] It is striking that all three of these designations are repeated in 1 Pet 2.9, a text that falls quite outside the purview of Schwarz's study. Schwarz regards Deut 7.6 as a

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160; 2.8, 288; Philo *Leg. Gai.* 3–4, 201 (cf. also 265, for Jews among all the human 'races'). Philo's comments in *Sacr. AC* 6–7 are especially interesting: he writes of Isaac being added 'but not this time, with the others, to a people, but to a "race" or "genus" (οὐκέθ' ὡς οἱ πρότεροι λαῷ, γένει δέ...), as Moses says (Gen. xxxv. 29). For genus is one, that which is above all, but people is a name for many' (LCL). Gen 35.29 LXX speaks of Isaac being added πρὸς τὸ γένος αὐτοῦ. Philo goes on to speak of those who have become 'pupils of God' as being translated 'into the genus (γένος) of the imperishable and fully perfect' (LCL).

19 Cf. Isa 42.6 and 49.6 (in some mss), for the contrast between the διαθήκη γένους (ברית עם) and the ἔθνη (גוים); G. Bertram, *TDNT* 2.367, insists that ברית עם 'refers to the chosen people'.

20 See Bertram, *TDNT* 2.364–9; Hatch–Redpath, 368–73, who list 15 Hebrew words for which ἔθνος can stand as an equivalent. See 1 Esd 1.4 (τὸ ἔθνος αὐτοῦ Ἰσραήλ); 8.66 (τὸ ἔθνος τοῦ Ἰσραήλ); cf. also 1.32, 34, 49; 2.5; 5.9; 8.10, 13, 64. For examples in Josephus and Philo see *C. Ap.* 2.220; *Bell.* 1.232, 581; 2.282; *Ant.* 14.290; 18.6; *Leg. Gai.* 117, 119, 137, 161, 279.

21 Eberhard Schwarz, *Identität durch Abgrenzung: Abgrenzungsprozesse in Israel im 2.vorchristlichen Jahrhundert und ihre traditionsgeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen. Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Erforschung des Jubiläenbuches* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, Series 23 Theology 162; Frankfurt/Bern: Lang, 1982) 53–7.

crucial text in this regard, but a similar and also important declaration is found in
Exod 19.5–6:

> So now, if you will indeed hear my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be to
> me a special people (λαὸς περιούσιος) from among all the nations (τῶν
> ἔθνων), for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a royal priesthood
> (βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα) and a holy nation (ἔθνος ἅγιον).

This, of course, is the text that the author of 1 Peter echoes in his rich declaration
of the identity of the new people of God (cf. 2.10), specifically in the phrases
βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα and ἔθνος ἅγιον. Also woven into 1 Pet 2.9 is a phrase
from Isa 43.20 describing Israel as 'my chosen people', where the LXX has τὸ
γένος μου τὸ ἐκλεκτόν. Further reflecting the influence of Isaiah is the phrasing
of the description of 1 Peter's addressees as a people for God's special possession.
The author of 1 Peter also draws on Isa 43.21 in describing the vocation of this
chosen race, 'to proclaim the virtues (τὰς ἀρετάς) of the one who called
you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. Finally, in v. 10, drawing on
Hosea 1–2, the author declares that the addressees, once 'no people' (οὐ λαός)
are now the λαὸς θεοῦ.

What is immediately striking is how, compressed into just half a verse, not only
are the three key terms, γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός, all used to denote the commu-
nities of Christians in Asia Minor but also these ethnic-identity terms are linked
with central Jewish identifications: chosen or elect, holy, and God's own or
special possession. How significant this description is can be seen when we set
this verse in the context of the NT writings more generally, and consider the influ-
ence of 1 Pet 2.9a in subsequent Christian writing.

3. Γένος, ἔθνος and λαός in the New Testament

Γένος appears relatively infrequently in the NT (20×) with the usual lexical
range. The notion of ancestral or ethnic descent is clearly prominent in the five
occurrences where the term refers to the Jewish people (Acts 7.19; 13.26; 2 Cor
11.26; Gal 1.14; Phil 3.5). What is striking is that there is only one place where
the word γένος is used to denote members of the Christian assemblies: 1 Pet 2.9.[22]

Ἔθνος is considerably more common (162×), though with a narrower lexical
range. Continuing the established Septuagintal pattern the large majority of refer-
ences, including two in 1 Peter (2.12 and 4.3), use the plural form to denote the
nations, that is, Gentiles, as distinct from Jews.[23] In both Luke–Acts and John

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22 For this observation, see, e.g., F. Büchsel, *TDNT* 1.685; Peter Richardson, *Israel in the Apostolic
Church* (SNTSMS 10; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1969) 172 n. 8.

23 For clear examples where the contrast is drawn, cf. Luke 2.32; Acts 4.27; 14.5; 26.23; Rom 15.10;
2 Cor 11.26; Gal 2.14–15.

there are also a number of uses of ἔθνος to refer to the Jewish nation.[24] Indeed, all of the five uses of ἔθνος in the Gospel of John have this referent (John 11.48, 50–52; 18.35).[25] Again what is striking is that the term is almost never used to denote Christians as a people, with just two exceptions: the clearest and most direct example in 1 Pet 2.9 and one other in Matt 21.43, at the conclusion to the parable of the tenants of the vineyard.

Λαός is also quite common in the NT (142×), with a particular concentration in Luke–Acts (83×). Generally, and particularly in Luke–Acts, the predominant use, almost always in the singular form, is in reference to the people of Israel, again following established Septuagintal custom.[26] Some occurrences, especially in the book of Revelation, have a more general, or potentially more general, reference.[27] There are also some texts where λαός clearly, or at least potentially, refers to the 'people' who now constitute the members of the Christian movement (Acts 15.14; 18.10; Rom 9.25–26; Tit 2.14; Rev 18.4; 21.3), notably in Hebrews, where the scriptural language descriptive of Israel is applied to the faithful followers of Christ (Heb 2.17; 4.9; 7.27; 13.12).

This brief overview gives us something of a perspective from which to assess the significance of 1 Pet 2.9a in terms of establishing the idea that Christian identity is specifically an ethnic or ethnoracial identity, that is, identity as a 'people', a 'nation', or a 'race'. Several points are noteworthy. First, this is the only NT text in which all three 'people' words, γένος, ἔθνος, λαός, occur together, and the occurrence of all three here suggests an almost deliberate attempt to pack the verse with ethnic identity labels.[28] Second, aside from Matt 21.43, a less direct and developed reference to the identity of the Christians, 1 Pet 2.9, is the only NT text that describes members of the churches as an ἔθνος, and the only one to repeat the concise scriptural designation 'holy people'.[29] Third, this is the only NT text in which the term γένος—an influential label for the people of Israel, especially in literature near to the NT

24 τὸ ἔθνος ἡμῶν, τὸ ἔθνος τῶν Ἰουδαιῶν, κτλ.: Luke 7.5; 23.2; Acts 10.22; 24.2, 10, 17; 26.4; 28.19.

25 Cf. F. J. A. Hort, *The First Epistle of St. Peter I.1–II.17: The Greek Text with Introductory Lecture, Commentary, and Additional Notes* (London: Macmillan, 1898 [repr. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005]) 126, who notes that ἔθνος is never used of Israel in the NT Epistles and the Apocalypse, and that in most uses in the Gospels and Acts 'it is so used only in sentences spoken by, or of persons of another nation' except in John 11.50–52.

26 For especially clear examples, see Acts 26.17, 23; Rom 15.10; 2 Pet 2.1; for the plural λαοὶ Ἰσραήλ, see Acts 4.27.

27 Luke 2.31; Acts 4.25; Rom 15.11; Rev 5.9; 7.9; 10.11; 11.9; 13.7; 14.6; 17.15.

28 Is this perhaps why the author picks the phrase ἔθνος ἅγιον from Exod 19.6, rather than the more common λαὸς ἅγιος (Deut 7.6; 14.2, 21; Hos 11.12; Isa 30.19)?

29 The more common LXX phrase, λαὸς ἅγιος, does not occur in the NT either, though some other applications of the term λαός to the Church suggest the theme of holiness, more or less explicitly: 2 Cor 6.14–7.1, where the general idea of separation is prominent; Tit 2.14, where the purpose of Christ's self-giving is 'to purify for himself a special people (λαὸς

period—is applied to the Church.[30] This is highly significant: while λαός is somewhat more widely used, it is the loosest of the 'people' terms, insofar as it can be used to describe various kinds of assembled groups—such as an assembled crowd—whereas γένος most clearly implies a specifically 'ethnic' type of identity, with its focus on the idea of shared descent.[31]

This is not of course to claim that 1 Peter is alone in constructing Christian identity in ethnic terms. Moves to engender precisely this kind of Christian identity are prominent elsewhere in the NT, especially in Paul.[32] In particular, Paul spends considerable energy developing the notion that Christians share a common line of descent, as Abraham's offspring (Rom 4.1–25; Gal 3.6–29). His most frequent label for members of the churches is ἀδελφοί, a designation that depicts them as members of a common family, with a shared status as God's adopted sons (Rom 8.14–17; Gal 4.5–7), with Jesus as eldest brother (Rom 8.29) and Jerusalem as mother (Gal 4.26).[33] This already gets to the heart of a key aspect of the term γένος, namely that of shared descent, but without using the word as such. Yet it is only in 1 Pet 2.9 that this essentially Jewish form of ethnic identity is clearly and forcefully named as such, and applied to Christians, in a way that no reader can miss. Members of *this* 'brotherhood' (ἀδελφότης, 2.17; 5.9) are a chosen race, a holy nation, and a special people; they are the people of God (2.10).

4. 1 Peter 2.9 and the Language of Race in Early Christian Literature

The significance of this can be further assessed by considering two features of early Christian discourse subsequent to 1 Peter: first, citations of 1 Pet 2.9 and second, descriptions of Christians as a 'race' (γένος).[34]

περιούσιος)'; and Heb 13.12, where the purpose of Jesus' suffering is 'to sanctify (ἵνα ἀγιάσῃ)...the people (τὸν λαόν)'.

30 In a study of 'the race of the God-fearers', Judith Lieu focuses on the θεοσεβ- language and thus misses this point: 'Both the idea of Christians as a race, a γένος, and an emphasis on their "fear of God" (θεοσέβεια)... seem to have been emerging more widely in the middle of the second century. Although these terms are foreign to the New Testament and earlier Apostolic Fathers...'. Here she cites in a note (only) uses of θεοσέβεια in 1 Tim 2.10; John 9.32; *1 Clem.* 17.3 and *2 Clem.* 20.4. See Lieu, 'Race of the God-fearers', 54 with n. 15.

31 See further below for the importance of a belief in shared descent in modern social-scientific definitions of ethnic groups.

32 See further Johnson Hodge, *If Sons*; Buell and Johnson Hodge, 'Politics of Interpretation', 243–50; Sechrest, *A Former Jew*.

33 See further David G. Horrell, 'From ἀδελφοί to οἶκος θεοῦ: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity', *JBL* 120 (2001) 293–311; Reidar Aasgaard, '*My Beloved Brothers and Sisters!' Christian Siblingship in Paul* (JSNTSup 265; London/New York: T&T Clark, 2004).

34 I focus specifically on the term γένος because (a) it seems to be the most significant in subsequent literature (e.g., in Clement of Alexandria's citations of 1 Pet 2.9 and in the description

Among the earliest citations of 1 Pet 2.9 relevant to our purpose—i.e., those where some aspect of the γένος/ἔθνος/λαός phrasing is taken up[35]—most interesting are a number in Clement of Alexandria which indicate that the particular description of the Church as a γένος ἐκλεκτόν is for Clement especially significant. For example, in his *Adumbrationes* on 1 Peter (extant only in Latin), Clement quotes part of 2.9—'But you are a chosen race (*genus electum*), a royal priesthood'—and comments, significantly, as follows: 'That we are a chosen race by the election of God is abundantly clear' (*Quoniam electum genus sumus dei electione, abunde clarum est*).[36]

In Clement's own contributions to the extracts from Theodotus, the Transfiguration is described as an occasion when the Lord showed himself, 'not for his own sake, but for the sake of the church, which is the chosen race (τὸ γένος τὸ ἐκλεκτόν)' (*Exc. ex Theod.* 4.1).[37] Here γένος ἐκλεκτόν seems to have become a concise way to describe and define the Church. And Clement's reference to the one, singular, Church is both emphatic and polemical.[38]

Overall, it is significant that of the seven or eight allusions to 1 Pet 2.9 in Clement's works,[39] five contain some focus on the word γένος, four of which pick up from the verse the key phrase γένος ἐκλεκτόν.[40] This would seem to be for Clement a key designation of the Church in 1 Pet 2.9, as his comment in the *Adumbrationes* makes clear. This is also confirmed, as we shall see, by Clement's use elsewhere of the language of 'race' (γένος) to describe the identity of Christians (see below). Another citation uses the phrase λαὸς ἅγιος, closely

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of Christians as a third race), (b) it is the term that most strongly denotes a specifically ethnic form of identity, with its focus on the idea of shared descent, and partly also for reasons of space.

35 Elsewhere, different terms and images are the focus. For example, in *1 Clem.* 59.2; *Ep. Apost.* 21 and Minucius Felix *Oct.* 1.4, it is the imagery of darkness to light that is cited.

36 Latin text from GCS Clem. Alex. III, 204, ll. 21–22. Clement also then comments on the royal and priestly identity of the Church.

37 On the reasons to take Extracts 4–5 as Clement's own work, see François Sagnard, *Clément d'Alexandrie, Extraits de Théodote: texte grec, introduction, traduction et notes* (SC 23; Paris: Cerf, 1970) 59 n. 2; and for the agreement on this, see pp. 8–9. For the Greek text with English translation, see Robert Pierce Casey, *The Excerpta ex Theodoto of Clement of Alexandria* (Studies and Documents 1; London: Christophers, 1934).

38 Annewies van den Hoek, 'The "Catechetical" School of Early Christian Alexandria and its Philonic Heritage', *HTR* 90 (1997) 59–87 (72).

39 Seven are listed in *Biblia Patristica I* (Paris: Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1975), eight in the biblical index to Clement's works provided in GCS Clem. Alex. IV.1, 25. The additional reference here is to *Exc. ex Theod.* 1.3, which seems to me a much less secure allusion.

40 *Exc. ex Theod.* 4.1; *Frag* I (*Adumbr. in 1 Pet*); *Strom.* 7.7.35.2; 7.10.58.6; 7.12.73.5 (this last refers to the righteous as τὸ βασιλικὸν γένος).

equivalent to ἔθνος ἅγιον;[41] and the most extensive quotation of 2.9–10 focuses entirely on the various identity-defining labels for the people of God.[42]

Given that 1 Pet 2.9 is the only NT text to apply the term γένος to the Christian movement, and given the extent to which Clement focuses especially on the phrase γένος ἐκλεκτόν, using it as a designation of the Church, it is also relevant to consider other places where γένος language came to be applied to Christians. Whether or not these reflect the direct influence of 1 Pet 2.9, they certainly continue a mode of description initiated by 1 Peter.

During the second century, talk of Christians as a 'race' (γένος) seems to have become established (e.g., *Mart. Pol.* 3.2; 14.1; 17.1; Hermas *Sim.* 9.17.5; *Ep. Diog.* 1).[43] Clement of Alexandria not infrequently uses 'race' language to talk specifically of the way in which those from among both Greeks and Jews have been brought together into what he calls 'the one race of the saved' (τὸ ἓν γένος τοῦ σῳζομένου) (*Strom.* 6.5.42.2; cf. *Strom.* 3.10.70.1–2; 6.13.106.4). Here, as Denise Kimber Buell has shown, using Jonathan Hall's terminology, Clement uses one particular kind of ethnic reasoning, an 'aggregative' or universalizing strategy, suggesting that all can be incorporated into this new people of God.[44] A second, and contrasting, strategy is an 'oppositional' one, which uses ethnic language to distinguish the in-group from others, and this is evident in Aristides (*Apol.* 2), the *Kerygma Petrou* (*apud* Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6.5.41.6–7), as well as elsewhere in Clement of Alexandria.[45] In Clement, for example (*Strom.* 5.14.98.4), this 'race' language is used in the context of a threefold classification, Greeks, Jews, and Christians, a classification already found in Paul, though

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41 Paed. 1.6.32.4: ἵνα καινοὶ γενόμενοι, λαὸς ἅγιος, ἀναγεννηθέντες (Greek text from GCS Clem. Alex. I, 109). The allusion to 1 Pet 2.9 is less than certain, but the surrounding vocabulary does suggest points of contact with the letter. Cf. also Justin *Dial.* 119.3 (λαὸς ἅγιός ἐσμεν).

42 Prot. 4.59.3: ἡμεῖς τὸ γένος τὸ ἐκλεκτόν, τὸ βασίλειον ἱεράτευμα, ἔθνος ἅγιον, λαὸς περιούσιος, οἱ ποτὲ οὐ λαός, νῦν δὲ λαὸς τοῦ θεοῦ (Greek text from GCS Clem. Alex. I, 46). It is interesting to note the marginal summary given at this point in the Bodmer Papyrus text of 1 Peter (P[72]): περι γενος εγλεκτον βασιλιον ἱερατευμα εθνος αγιον λαον περιποησιν, which similarly focuses on these key phrases. This is one of nine such summaries that appear alongside the text of 1 Peter. On these, and their significance for the early interpretation of the letter, see David G. Horrell, 'The Themes of 1 Peter: Insights from the Earliest Manuscripts (the Crosby-Schøyen Codex ms 193 and the Bodmer Miscellaneous Codex containing P[72])', *NTS* 55 (2009) 502–22 (511–12).

43 On this topic, see esp. Buell, 'Relevance of Race'; Buell, 'Race and Universalism'; Lieu, 'Race of the God-fearers'; Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 239–68. For a brief overview of some of this material, see David F. Wright, 'A Race Apart? Jews, Gentiles, Christians', *BSac* 160 (2003) 131–41, esp. 134–7.

44 Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 441–50; Buell, *Why This New Race*, 138–65; cf. Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 47.

45 Cf. Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 442.

without the language of 'race' or the specific designation 'Christians' (1 Cor 10.32).

Particularly in this latter type of use, the notion of Christians as a third race, alongside Jews and Greeks, is at least implicitly present, and represents a positive and self-defining Christian claim, as it does in the somewhat later pseudo-Cyprianic work *De Pascha computus*, dated to 243 CE, where Christians ('we') are positively identified as 'the third race of humankind' (*tertium genus hominum*) (*De Pascha comp.* 17). By contrast, the idea of Christians as a third race is one which Tertullian, at the end of the second century, depicts as a negative designation used by outsiders and indeed one he treats at times with some scorn. 'We are called the third race' (*Plane, tertium genus dicimur*) (*Ad. Nat.* 8), he reports, while ridiculing the idea that Christians are somehow a different species: 'Have Christians teeth of a different sort from others? Have they more ample jaws? I don't think so (*non opinor*)!' (*Ad. Nat.* 7). Yet elsewhere, rather less polemically, he describes Christians as a third race (*genus tertium*), in contrast to synagogues of the Jews (*synagogas Iudaeorum*) and peoples of the nations (*populos nationum*), from whom comes the cry to be rid of 'the third race' (*genus tertium*; *Scorp.* 10.10). He also finds a parallel to the logic of Christians existing as a third race in the existence of what he calls 'a third race in sex'—that is, eunuchs, alongside male and female (*Ad. Nat.* 1.20.4).[46] These latter examples suggest that the description of Christians as the third race was not necessarily something Tertullian rejected, though the example of eunuchs, a destabilizing 'third' category that threatens the clear distinction between the two sexes, suggests that the notion retains an unsettling edge. Indeed, there is perhaps a tacit indication in Tertullian of the tension implicit in describing Christians as members of a *genus*—in one sense this is ridiculous and in another sense not—something that perhaps hints at a deeper and more general tension between the apparent fixity yet real fluidity of 'ethnic' or 'racial' categorizations.

As Adolf von Harnack observed in his classic treatment of this subject, the description of Christians as a third race thus seems to exist both as an internal self-description and as a label apparently used by opponents. The description of Christians as a *genus* by Suetonius (*Nero* 16.2) might reflect an early use of this terminology on the part of outsiders, though the language may reflect the perspective of the time of composition (early second century) rather than the period being described (60s CE). Harnack thought it unlikely that the opponents borrowed the phrase from Christian literature and concluded that 'the term rose as spontaneously to the lips of Christians as of their opponents', noting the 'chronological succession of its occurrences' in the Preaching of Peter (early second

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46 'You too have your "third race" (*tertium genus*) not as a third religious rite (*tertio ritu*), but a third sex (*tertio sexu*)...'. Latin texts here and in the citations above from CCSL 1–2.

century),[47] Tertullian (197 CE), and Pseudo-Cyprian (243CE).[48] 'Christians', Harnack comments, 'held themselves to be the new People and the third race of mankind'.[49]

Unlike the label Χριστιανός, which seems to have arisen as an outsiders' label, gradually claimed as an insiders' self-designation, the description of Christians as a γένος seems to have arisen as a facet of Christian self-definition, even if similar language also came to be used by outsiders. Indeed, it is possible—though no more than this—that the process is the reverse of that which took place with the label Χριστιανός:[50] Christian self-description in ethnic terms, drawing of course on Jewish identity discourse, and reinforced by the kinds of exclusivism that led to hostile criticism (Tacitus *Ann.* 15.44), shaped outsiders' perceptions and descriptions.

It would be rash to propose that 1 Pet 2.9 is somehow the direct source for all talk of Christians as a γένος.[51] Nonetheless, whatever the extent of its direct influence, it is clearly the first application of the term to Christians, in the context of a clear and extensive description of the members of the churches as an ethnic or racial group. Moreover, as we have seen, 1 Pet 2.9 exerts some notable influence on later descriptions of Christians as a γένος ἐκλεκτόν, a designation of the Church that both highlights the fundamental theme of election and also makes an essentially 'ethnic' term central to this self-description. As such, it represents a rather crucial step in the making of Christian identity. Descriptions of Christians as the third race are one further derivation from this development. Even though, as we have noted, the idea of Christians as a third grouping alongside Jews and Greeks is present *in nuce* as early as 1 Corinthians, it is only later linked specifically with the language of race. And 1 Pet 2.9 marks an early and crucial step in defining Christian identity in this way, with its uniquely emphatic description of members of the Church as a race, a nation, and a people.

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47 For the date of 100–120 CE, see Henning Paulsen, 'Das Kerygma Petri und die urchristliche Apologetik', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 88 (1977) 1–37 (13). (Repr. in *Zur Literatur und Geschichte des frühen Christentums* [WUNT 99; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997] 173–209 [185].)

48 Adolf von Harnack, *The Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries*, vol. 1 (London: Williams & Norgate; New York: Putnam, 1904) 347–8 n. 2. Cf. also Lieu, 'Race of the God-fearers', 57–9, who sees '[t]wo trajectories...[that] lead to the designation of Christians being a "race" ' (57): one arising from the slurs of opponents; the other from Christian appropriation of Jewish identity designations. Similarly, Lieu, *Christian Identity*, 262–6.

49 Harnack, *Expansion*, 335.

50 Cf. Wright, 'A Race Apart', 137, discussing the description of Christians as a 'third race': 'A badge of pride so easily became a hostile sneer'. For the opposite development with regard to Χριστιανός, see David G. Horrell, 'The Label Χριστιανός: 1 Pet 4.16 and the Formation of Christian Identity', *JBL* 126 (2007) 361–81.

51 Charles Bigg, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910) 134, however, suggests regarding γένος that '[f]rom its use here [in 1 Pet 2.9] possibly comes the expression τρίτον γένος, applied to Christians'.

5. 1 Peter 2.9 and the Construction of an Ethnoracial Form of Christian Identity

The crucial question, of course, is what we should make of all this information, and how we should understand the rhetorical move made by the author of 1 Peter. An important set of questions relates to the implications of the way in which 1 Peter appropriates Jewish identity labels for the Church. It is notable that 1 Peter is simply silent about the continued existence of what Paul elsewhere called ὁ Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα (1 Cor 10.18), unlike many other early Christian texts which explicitly draw the contrast between 'old' and 'new' and suggest that the former is obsolete (e.g., Heb 7.18–19; 8.6–13; 9.11–15; *Barn.* 16.5–8; Melito *Peri Pascha*, 43). As Ramsey Michaels puts it:

> The titles of honor are used with no awareness or recognition of an 'old' Israel, as if they were applicable to Christians alone and had never had any other reference. If there is 'anti-Jewish polemic' here, it is a polemic that comes to expression simply by pretending that the 'other' Israel does not exist.[52]

The Church, it seems, has simply become the chosen race, the holy nation; thus Paul Achtemeier speaks of 'the language and hence the reality of Israel' passing 'without remainder' into that of 'the new people of God'.[53]

But our focus in this paper is on the ethnic terms themselves—also drawn from Jewish tradition, of course—that are deployed to denote the members of the Church in 1 Pet 2.9. As we have seen, this is the most explicitly ethnoracial description of Christian identity in the whole NT, and one that initiates an influential discourse about ethnicity and 'race' in early Christian writing. These ethnic terms are, as we have also seen, taken over from the language of Jewish self-identity, such that they acquire a particular resonance in early Christian literature; and this raises the further question about whether, and in what ways, Christian identity itself should be seen as ethnic or ethnoracial in character.

Despite the prominence of ethnic terminology, the established tendency in scholarship, as Denise Kimber Buell and Caroline Johnson Hodge have pointed out, has been to depict Christianity 'as a "universal" religion, one that transcends ethnic and familial particularities'. Jewish ethnic particularism is contrasted with non-ethnic universal Christianity, with Paul especially seen as 'the transition point between an old, exclusive, ethnic Judaism and a new, inclusive, universal Christianity'.[54]

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52 J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Waco, TX: Word, 1988) 107.

53 Achtemeier, *1 Peter*, 69. Cf. also Brox, *Petrusbrief*, 103: 'Für den 1Petr sind solche Aussagen von vornherein auf die christliche Gemeinde hin und für niemand sonst gemacht'. For a brief discussion of the broader issues this raises, see David G. Horrell, *1 Peter* (NTG; London/ New York: T&T Clark, 2008) 102–5.

54 Johnson Hodge, *If Sons*, 3–7 (quotations from 3 and 7). Cf. also Buell, *Why This New Race*, 138; Buell and Johnson Hodge, 'Politics of Interpretation'. This contrast was earlier challenged in

Insofar as early Christianity adopts terms of ethnic or kinship-based identity, these tend to be described as 'fictive'.[55] Charles Cosgrove, for example, insists that Paul's 'spiritual' redefinition of Jewish identity to constitute being Christian 'is expressly not a notion of ethnic identity'.[56]

Recent discussions of the subject of ethnicity, however, may lead us to question this contrast between 'real' ethnicities and the self-evidently 'fictive' kind of quasi-ethnic language used in early Christian discourse. For a start, much recent social-science scholarship has stressed the ways in which ethnicity, and other concepts such as 'race' and 'nation', are essentially '*social constructions*, the product of specific historical and geographical forces, rather than biologically given ideas whose meaning is dictated by nature'.[57] This modern emphasis may in fact cohere well with ancient notions in our period of what we now call ethnic identity, in which there was not only a sense of stability and continuity through descent, but also—in dialectical tension with it—some sense of mutability and possibility: one could become, or cease to be, Greek, Roman, or Jewish depending on one's connections (including adoption) and conduct, which generally included religious dimensions. Thus Tim Whitmarsh speaks of 'a deep self-consciousness about the fluidity of identity construction' among elite Greeks under the Roman empire, suggesting that 'what happened to Greeks in the Roman period involved a similar kind of denaturalization of identity to that experienced in the modern global village'.[58] Regarding Judaism, Shaye Cohen argues that 'in the second century B.C.E., the metaphoric

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an essay by Nils Alstrup Dahl, 'The One God of Jews and Gentiles (Romans 3.29–30)', *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977) 178–91, and, more recently, by John M. G. Barclay, 'Universalism and Particularism: Twin Components of both Judaism and Early Christianity', *A Vision for the Church: Studies in Early Christian Ecclesiology in Honour of J.P.M. Sweet* (ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael B. Thompson; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997) 207–24.

55 Cf. Sechrest, *A Former Jew*, 126 with n. 26, who insists, in connection with Paul's discussion of kinship with Abraham, that 'Paul is speaking of new kinship relations with Gentiles that are as "real" as any other kind of ethnic relationship' (n. 26).

56 Charles H. Cosgrove, 'Did Paul Value Ethnicity?', *CBQ* 68 (2006) 268–90 (272).

57 Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose, 'Introduction: Placing "Race" and "Nation"', *Constructions of Race, Place and Nation* (ed. Peter Jackson and Jan Penrose; London: UCL; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1993/1994) 1–23 (1, italics original). Cf. also John Stone, 'Max Weber on Race, Ethnicity, and Nationalism', *Race and Ethnicity: Comparative and Theoretical Approaches* (ed. John Stone and Rutledge Dennis; Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) 28–42 (33); Kevin Avruch, 'Culture and Ethnic Conflict in the New World Disorder', *Race and Ethnicity* (ed. Stone and Dennis) 72–82 (73).

58 Tim Whitmarsh, 'Greece and Rome', *The Oxford Handbook of Hellenic Studies* (ed. George Boys-Stones, Barbara Graziosi, and Phiroze Vasunia; Oxford and New York: Oxford University, 2009) 114–28 (124). Cf. also Richard Alston, 'Changing Ethnicities: From the Egyptian to the Roman City', *Gender and Ethnicity in Ancient Italy* (ed. Tim Cornell and Kathryn Lomas; Accordia Specialist Studies on Italy 6; London: Accordia Research Institute, University of London, 1997) 83–96, who stresses the ideological and political dimensions of

boundary separating Judaeans from non-Judaeans became more and more permeable. Outsiders could become insiders'.[59] Unfortunately, since he regards ethnicity as 'closed, immutable, an ascribed characteristic based on birth', Cohen depicts this development as a shift from ethnic to cultural-religious identity.[60] John Barclay is more convincing, it seems to me, in depicting Judaism in the period as 'primarily an ethnic tradition', though one which proselytes could join so as 'to acquire in effect a new "ethnicity" in kinship and custom'.[61] Or, as Sechrest puts it, Jewish notions of ethnicity and race in the period of the first centuries BCE and CE make 'religion' the central 'criterion of identity' (though kinship and other factors remain significant) such that Jewish ethnicity is most prominently a religio-cultural concept.[62] Indeed, one of the valuable things this constructionist perspective brings to light is that there is a wide range of factors that could potentially be used as signifiers of ethnic identity, only some of which are salient in any given discursive or social contexts.

This socially constructed characteristic applies also to the language of race, despite that term's use to convey what is often perceived as a more 'biological' and thus immutable description of identity. There is no clear distinction between ethnic and racial identity, between the discourses of ethnicity and of race, or between ethno-politics and the politics of race.[63] Because of the tainted history of the language of race, some maintain that it is better to abandon that language altogether.[64] It is certainly valuable to be reminded that there is no

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ethnicity ('ethnicity is an ideological alignment' [85]) and explores the fluidity between Egyptian and Greek ethnicities in Roman Egypt.

59 Shaye J. D. Cohen, *The Beginnings of Jewishness: Boundaries, Varieties, Uncertainties* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA/London: University of California, 1999) 110.

60 Cohen, *Jewishness*, 136. Note, e.g., the straightforward statement at the opening of his chapter: 'Ethnic (or ethnic-geographic) identity is immutable; non-Judaeans cannot become Judaeans any more than non-Egyptians can become Egyptians, or non-Syrians can become Syrians' (109). Cf. the critical comments of Buell, 'Relevance of Race', 468–9; Buell, *Why This New Race*, 162–3.

61 John M. G. Barclay, *Jews in the Mediterranean Diaspora from Alexander to Trajan (323 BCE – 117 CE)* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996) 408; see 402–13. On Jewish proselytism, see also Barclay, 'Universalism', 212–13. It may also be relevant, then, to note that 1 Peter's use of the descriptions πάροικος and παρεπίδημος adopts terminology from the 'semantic field' of proselytes/proselytism in some Jewish sources: see Torrey Seland, 'πάροικος καί παρεπίδημος: Proselyte Characterizations in 1 Peter?', *BBR* 11 (2001) 239–68, repr. in *Strangers in the Light: Philonic Perspectives on Christian Identity in 1 Peter* (Biblical Interpretation Series 76; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 39–78.

62 Sechrest, *A Former Jew*, 97–105, esp. 104–5, also 209.

63 Cf. Thomas H. Eriksen, 'Ethnicity, Race, Class and Nation', *Ethnicity* (ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith; Oxford Readers; Oxford: Oxford University, 1996 [1993]) 28–31.

64 E.g., Calvin J. Roetzel, 'No "Race of Israel" in Paul', *Putting Body and Soul Together: Essays in Honor of Robin Scroggs* (ed. Virginia Wiles, Alexandra Brown, and Graydon F. Snyder; Valley

objective, fixed meaning to terms like nation and race, and that we must beware of importing modern and debatable assumptions—about the biological essentialism of race, or the nation-state as the obvious locus of sovereignty—into our studies of early Christianity and our translations of ancient texts. Yet others insist—rightly in my view—that it is better to continue to use the language of race, alongside that of ethnicity, while making clear that race, like ethnicity, refers to a facet of identity that is constructed rather than given. As Buell comments, 'we need to keep the term active so as to be able to interrogate the ways that our interpretive models encode, and thus perpetuate, particular notions about "race"'.[65] The concepts of both ethnicity and race remain relevant to the study of early Christianity, contrary to a view that would see these—and especially 'race'—as intrinsically irrelevant to describe 'a historical movement constituted by means of joining'.[66] As Buell puts it:

> if we view both race and religion as socially and historically contingent concepts with no essential meanings or intrinsic relationship with one another, then we must not read early Christian literature through a lens that presumes a disjuncture between Christianness and race (or kinship). Instead of seeing conversion in contrast to ethnoracial identity, early Christians perceived ethnicity/race as concepts flexible enough to encompass both the radical transformation of identity attributed to the conversion process and the stability of identity hoped for in its wake.[67]

Indeed, one of the reasons why Buell finds Hall's work so valuable is in his insistence that ethnic identity 'is ultimately constructed through written and spoken discourse'; 'ethnicity is not a primordial given, but is instead repeatedly and actively structured through discursive strategies'.[68]

Modern sociological definitions of ethnic groups, like the term γένος, often emphasize belief in common origins or shared descent, as in Max Weber's classic definition: 'human groups (other than kinship groups) which cherish a belief in their common origins of such a kind that it provides a basis for the creation of a community'.[69] Weber's definition highlights the importance of *beliefs*

Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997) 230–44; Philip F. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003) 40, 55. Contrast the comments of Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 432–5, who deliberately uses 'race and ethnicity interchangeably' (435).

65 Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 434.
66 Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 436.
67 Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 436.
68 Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 2 and 41 respectively. Cf. Mark G. Brett, 'Interpreting Ethnicity: Method, Hermeneutics, Ethics', *Ethnicity and the Bible* (ed. Mark G. Brett; Leiden: Brill, 1996) 3–22 (10): 'Although *ethnie* can be exceptionally durable once formed, they are also symbolic constructions which have to be maintained by reiterated practices and transactions.'
69 Cited in Stone, 'Max Weber', 32.

rather than 'any objective features of group membership... It is this *sense* of common ancestry that is vital, but the identification with shared origins is largely, if not wholly, fictitious'.[70] The same goes for the notion of race, which Benjamin Isaac defines as 'a group of people who are believed to share imagined common characteristics, physical and mental or moral, which cannot be changed by human will, because they are thought to be determined by unalterable, stable physical factors: hereditary, or external, such as climate or geography'. It is belief in the reality of race that is crucial, even if, for Isaac, such beliefs are inevitably false.[71]

In the light of such perspectives, it is interesting to set out a more expansive, modern, social-scientific definition of an ethnic group, and to consider how early Christianity in general—and 1 Peter in particular—includes all aspects in some form or other:

1. A common *proper name*, to identify and express the 'essence' of the community;
2. A myth of *common ancestry*, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an *ethnie* a sense of fictive kinship, what Horowitz terms a 'super-family'...;
3. Shared *historical memories*, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events and their commemoration;
4. One or more *elements of common culture*, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;
5. A *link* with a *homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples;
6. A *sense of solidarity* on the part of at least some sections of the *ethnie*'s population.[72]

Anthony Smith, from whose work this definition comes, does not pretend that every element is evident and identifiable in all ethnic groups. Moreover, different facets of ethnoracial identity may be prominent or salient in different contexts, ancient and modern. All this makes what is already a somewhat broad, even loose, definition seem even more fuzzy. Yet this perhaps goes to show—contrary to popular preconceptions that we know exactly what we are talking about when

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70 Stone, 'Max Weber', 32, my emphasis.
71 Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2004) 34. Cf. pp. 30, 32–3, 515, etc.
72 John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, 'Introduction', *Ethnicity* (ed. Hutchinson and Smith) 3–14 (6–7, italics original). This summarizes the more extended discussion of the 'foundations of ethnic community' in Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 22–31, for whom the roots of modern nations are to be found in a model of ethnic community (p. x). Sechrest, *A Former Jew*, 48–50, also presents this definition of an ethnic group, drawing on Smith's work.

we use the categories of 'race', or 'ethnic origin'—how malleable, how essentially constructed, such group-identities are.

Drawing on this broad definition, it would not be far fetched to claim that the making of early Christianity, drawing heavily, of course, on Jewish discourse and tradition, constitutes precisely the creation of these facets of an ethnic group's identity. In particular, 1 Peter could be shown to make interesting and significant contributions to most of these elements:[73] 1 Peter takes a particularly crucial first step towards the claiming of Χριστιανός as the insiders' common proper name, and, as we have seen, makes a fundamental contribution to the construction of Christian identity in ethnic terms by the brute fact of its application to the Church of ethnic or racial descriptors. Moreover, with its stress upon the addressees' new birth, from imperishable seed with God as father, the letter constructs a particular sense of common (divine) ancestry (cf. 1.2–3, 17, 23; 2.2). The shared historical memories focus on the 'heroic' figure of Christ, whose sufferings and subsequent glory indicate a paradigmatic path for his followers (2.21–25; cf. 1.3–12); and a certain pattern of living—'doing good'—is constitutive of the believers' (kin-based) identity (3.6).[74] The idea of a homeland is also implied in the use of diaspora and Babylon imagery (1.1; 5.13), even though this homeland appears symbolic ('an inheritance...kept in heaven', 1.4) rather than earthly. And the sense of solidarity, evident in a number of ways in the letter, is perhaps best epitomised in the kinship language of 2.17 and 5.9 (ἀδελφότης), the positive counterpart to the dislocation and alienation indicated by the addressees' description as πάροικοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι (2.11; cf. 1.1, 17).[75]

This is not to suggest, of course, that early Christian identity is entirely or uncomplicatedly to be described as an ethnic or ethnoracial form of identity. The movement also bears close similarities with voluntary associations, or with modern conversionist sects.[76] The idea of incorporating people from a diversity

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73 I am grateful to Francis Watson for the encouragement to pursue this point, which I hope to work out in more detail in a future publication.

74 Cf. Philo *Virt.* 206–7, on those among the Jews—Abraham's offspring are particularly in view—who fail to reproduce the virtues of their ancestors (αἱ τῶν προγόνων ἀρεταί) and are thus 'denied any part in the grandeur of their noble birth (εὐγενεία)' (LCL). I am grateful to John Barclay for alerting me to this comparison.

75 This juxtaposition is, of course, central to the thesis of John H. Elliott, *A Home for the Homeless: A Social-Scientific Criticism of 1 Peter, Its Situation and Strategy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2nd ed. 1990 [1981]), where the household (οἶκος) is seen as the central positive image of belonging.

76 E.g., for an important recent study that locates Christian and Jewish groups among the various associations of antiquity, see Philip A. Harland, *Dynamics of Identity in the World of the Early Christians: Associations, Judeans, and Cultural Minorities* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 2009). For the use of modern models of religious sects, see Elliott, *Home*, who argues that it is the conversionist sect in particular that provides 'the closest sociological analogue' for 'the addressees and their situation as described in 1 Peter' (102; see further 101–6).

of ethnic backgrounds is strongly embedded in early Christian discourse, especially in the Pauline letters (Gal 3.28; Col 3.11), and people remained conscious of their former 'ethnic' identity, which could still identify and distinguish them from other Christians, as again Paul makes clear (Gal 2.15; Rom 9.3).[77] But none of this contradicts the fact that the early Christians, and the author of 1 Peter in particular, used ethnoracial language to describe and construct 'Christian' identity. And once we see ethnic identity as socially constructed through discourse, as something *believed* more than objective or factual, then early Christian identity is as 'really' ethnic as are other forms of ethnic identity in the ancient and indeed the modern world.[78]

One might also question whether such constructionist definitions of ethnic identity imply that any religious group might be defined as an ethnic group, if it exhibits all or most of the above characteristics. I think the answer to this would be affirmative, at least potentially. But it is especially clear if that religious group uses ethnoracial terminology of itself, such that it explicitly identifies and regards itself as such a group—which is partly why 1 Peter marks such a crucial step in the history of the making of Christian identity. In drawing on the specific traditions of Judaism—a form of ethnic identity with religio-cultural practices at its heart—the author of 1 Peter, along with other early Christian writers, was able to construct just such a form of identity, without a focus on specific (geophysical) territorial attachment or biological (human) kinship links. In short, as Buell and Lieu in their different ways have shown, it suited early Christians to claim and describe their identity in ethnic terms, to use 'ethnic reasoning' as one discursive means to articulate that identity.

It remains to ask, finally, what kind of rhetorical strategy, what form of ethnic reasoning, is evident in 1 Pet 2.9 and the letter more broadly, and how this relates to the context and aims of this text.

It is relevant to recall here Lieu's observation that γένος comes to prominence in Jewish self-identity discourse precisely in a context of 'hostility and attempted annihilation'.[79] Similarly, 1 Peter's use of γένος language, and the rich depictions of Christian identity in the passage in which it appears, comes in a context of evident hostility and suffering. The letter's overall strategy, in which the identity-designations of 2.9 play an important role, is—put in terms of social identity

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77 In Rom 9.3, Paul clearly uses συγγενεῖς to refer broadly to fellow Israelites. This may well be the sense also in the uses of the same word in Rom 16 (7, 11, 21), though translations (e.g., NRSV) sometimes suggest a narrower group ('relatives').

78 I wrote these lines, in an early version of this paper, before I had access to Sechrest's study, but it is notable that her study (*A Former Jew*, focused on Paul) lends substantial weight to this claim.

79 Lieu, 'Race of the God-fearers', 58, cited above at n. 16. Perhaps it is no accident that we also find the terminology in defensive tracts by Josephus (*C. Ap.*) and Philo (*Leg. Gai.*); see above n. 18.

theory—to develop a positive sense of in-group identity, of the status and honour that acrue to membership of the community, in the face of negative evaluation and stigmatization on the part of outsiders. The adoption of ethnic-identity language, along with the honorific and highly valued designations of Israel's special identity, represents a strategy of 'social creativity', that is, where group members 'seek positive distinctiveness for the in-group by redefining or altering the elements of the comparative situation'.[80] Despite the shame which their accusers seek to bring upon them, the readers of the letter are assured of their special status and ineradicable bonds, as members of God's γένος ἐκλεκτόν.

In this sense, 1 Peter's mode of ethnic reasoning is 'oppositional'. The addressees may be surrounded by people (τὰ ἔθνη!), who malign them as evildoers (1 Pet 2.12), and by immorality and licentious excess (4.2–4), but *they* are a chosen race and a holy nation, dwelling as aliens and strangers scattered in a hostile world (1.1, 17; 2.11). Yet in another sense, 1 Peter's discursive strategy is strikingly non-oppositional. Unlike plenty of other early Christian texts, there is no *direct* claim here—though it might be implied—that the Church appropriates an identity which is at the same time denied to Israel.

Indeed, some aspects of 1 Peter's strategy of ethnic reasoning might be seen as 'aggregative', where 'ethnicity is established through connections more than by distinctions', as in Clement of Alexandria's universalizing rhetoric about the drawing of Jews and Greeks, or Greeks and Barbarians, into the one race of the saved.[81] To begin with the language of 2.9, drawn from Isaiah 43, the vocation of the chosen race is to 'proclaim the virtues of the one who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light'. As many commentators point out, this vocation is one both of worship and of proclamation, an act which 'declares' (ἐξαγγέλλω) God's excellence in and to the world.[82] This missionary dimension is more explicit still in 2.12, where the motivation to 'conduct yourselves honourably among the

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80 Henri Tajfel and John Turner, 'An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict', *Intergroup Relations: Essential Readings* (ed. M. A. Hogg and D. Abrams; Philadelphia: Psychology Press, 2001 [1979]) 94–109 (originally published in W. G. Austin and S. Worchel, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* [Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole, 1979] 33–47), 104. Cf. Hall, *Ethnic Identity*, 31, on strategies that an ethnic group can employ in the face of negative social identity.

81 Cf. Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 442; Buell, *Making Christians: Clement of Alexandria and the Rhetoric of Legitimacy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1999) 104–6.

82 Cf. Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on I Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 149–51; Reinhard Feldmeier, *The First Letter of Peter: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor University, 2008) 141; Joel B. Green, *1 Peter* (Two Horizons New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 62; Elliott, *1 Peter*, 439–40: 'this proclamation of God's honor is fitting not only within but also *beyond* the boundaries of the Christian community' (italics original). See also Stephen Ayodeji A. Fagbemi, *Who Are the Elect in 1 Peter? A Study in Biblical Exegesis and its Application to the Anglican Church of Nigeria* (Studies in Biblical Literature 104; New York: Lang, 2007), esp. 105–20.

Gentiles' is so that, seeing the Christians' good works, these non-believers may glorify God on the day of visitation (cf. Rom 15.9–10). This suggests the possibility of conversion, a possibility more clearly expressed as a motivation for the good conduct asked of wives (3.1). In other words, even those who are presently hostile or cruel towards the γένος ἐκλεκτόν are regarded as potentially members of it.

This subtle and complex mix of oppositional and aggregative strategies bears out Buell's point that these are not exclusive alternatives but can coexist in varied and flexible ways.[83] In the end, though, the significance of 1 Pet 2.9 for the use of ethnic categories in constructing Christian identity may lie primarily in the simple fact of its having taken the terms γένος, ἔθνος, and λαός, and, drawing on established Jewish traditions, applied them to the Church. Just as 1 Peter represents the first attempt to claim what came to be the identity label *par excellence*—Χριστιανός—as a positive badge of self-identity,[84] so too it represents the first move to designate Christians explicitly as a γένος, a move that was of considerable significance in the evolution of Christian identity discourse.

83 Discussing Clement of Alexandria, Buell writes: 'we find oppositional reasoning—Christians form a distinct race, superior to others—coexisting with aggregative reasoning—"others" can become Christians by adopting the true worship through a process of training in faith'. Through studies of various early Christian texts, she suggests, 'we can begin to glimpse both the pervasiveness of ethnic reasoning and its strategic flexibility for early Christian self-definition' (Buell, 'Race and Universalism', 445).
84 See Horrell, 'Χριστιανός'.