



ON THE INDICATIONS TO THE TRANSFORMATION OF HUMANS IN PAUL¹

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Abstract

The article asks, did Paul write that human beings go through significant changes during their life? If yes, what kind of changes he imagined? Circumcision was a change in the appearance of a man and a transitional act, but the ,old‘ human nature did not change. Baptism instead identifies believing persons with Christ’s rising and unites them in the likeness of his resurrection. The baptised believers can then walk in the newness of life. Paul next demonstrates in 2Cor 4:16–5:9.17 how an inner human being may be renewed day by day. In death, final change will take place. Paul used in 1Cor 15 the image of the human body to describe the change in form as a transition of humans from one form of being to another, from the earthly body to the heavenly body. Here Paul explains most clearly the purpose of the transformative changes in humans.

Keywords

Human nature, form, inner human being, likeness, newness of life, body.

In English ,humanity‘ is often used to refer to a universal understanding of Latin *homo sapiens*, but humanity is a modern term. A human (being) as a noun may represent one person – a man, woman, or child. Human as an adjective means relating to or concerning people, or even

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refers to an emotion, weakness, or failure. A positive appraisal is visible if one says that a person or group that is humane behaves with kindness, thoughtfulness, and sympathy towards other people.² In the assessment of human nature this modern point of departure, influenced by the Renaissance and Enlightenment, is automatically present in our minds. It is not my objective to estimate the plausibility of this view. I leave it aside and ask questions that rise from Paul's time, environment, and texts.

People often say that human nature does not change during a lifetime. Individual persons may develop, but they are not a subject to serious transitions from one fundamental condition to another. Ancient Mediterranean culture, however, testifies that notable changes take place. The Latin verb *transformo* corresponds to the Greek μεταμορφώω and both mean 'to transform', in passive voice, 'to be transfigured'. Hence ἡ μεταμόρφωσις as *transformatio* or a transformation.³ The noun μεταμόρφωσις is not used in the New Testament writings, but the verb μεταμορφώω occurs twice in the Jesus tradition to describe Jesus' appearance during the transfiguration (Mk 9:2 and Matt 17:2), and twice in the epistles of Paul (2Cor 3:18 and Rom 12:3). Based on Paul's use of this verb and anthropological storylines in his epistles I intend to sketch the structure of his thought on the subject.

My main research questions: did Paul let readers understand that human beings go or may go through essentially significant changes during their lifetime? Second, if the answer is affirmative, what kind of changes he may have had in his mind? Third, what was the purpose or function of these transformative changes?

I presuppose that Paul's autobiographical notes testify to the events that changed his own character and mind (Gal 1:15 f; Phil 3:7–9; 2Cor 12:1–10). These changes caused the turnover of his thought world, explain a good portion of the subjectivity of his expressions and lay at the bottom of his theology.

² See the article „Human, humans; human being; humane“ in *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary* 1990. London and Glasgow: Collins, 710.

³ The poem *Metamorphōsēs* of Publius Ovidius Naso (43 B.C.–17 A.D) had an impressive beginning: „Aurea prima sata est aetas, quae vindice nullo sponte sua, sine lege rectumque colebat“. The poem, written decades before Paul's ministry, may have been somewhat known when Paul attended school in Tarsus. The poet seems to say that significant changes in historical eras go in parallel with changes in human character and behaviour.

James D. G. Dunn (1998: 713) describes Paul's theology as a dialogue on and among three levels: „The deepest level was that of Paul's inherited convictions, with all the taken-for-granted implied. The middle, pivotal level was the faith which came to him on the Damascus road, but often referred to in formulaic or allusive terms. The most immediate level was that of the letters themselves, where the immediacy of the dialogic character of Paul's theology becomes most apparent“. These ideas are applicable also to the study of his anthropology. However, I try to minimise the use of this modern term by replacing anthropology with the ‚view of man‘, the ‚idea of man‘, and the ‚image of man‘ where possible.

One may understand Paul's personal experiences, communicated in Gal 1:15–17 and 2Cor 12:2–10, concisely describe or interpret a sense of transition from one state of human being to another. My article sheds light on the way Paul describes changes in human disposition or nature, the transition from an old one to a new human being. The latter one belongs „to the family of the Messiah, to the people of God he referred to as the *ekklēsia*, the ‚called-out ones‘, corresponding in some ways... both to the Jewish synagogue community and to civic gatherings of the Gentile world“ (Wright 2005: 6).

PAUL'S VOCABULARY, TERMINOLOGY, AND INHERITED CONVICTIONS

Today the holistic view of humans prevail that deny the separation of humans to body and soul. In addition, often a concise statement of Biblical theology goes like this: The Man is a unity (*Lexikon zur Bibel* 1960: 910, s.v. Mensch).⁴ This generalisation seems partially to suit Paul's view of Man described in 1Thess 5:23 in the form of spirit, soul and body. It is possible to explain humanity as a general designation with the help of the three main aspects: humans as created beings, humans as individuals, and humans in relationships. Raymond C. Ortlund states specifically that man, standing side by side with woman, is nevertheless the only way to

⁴ „Die Bibel sieht und versteht den Mensch stets als EINHEIT, wenn auch von verschiedenen Seiten her; sie spaltet ihn nicht in einem Widerstreit von Leib und Seele bzw Geist auf. Der Mensch als Ganzes ist (nicht hat) eine lebendige Seele (1Mo 2,7). Auch der Gegensatz von Fleisch und Geist meint immer den ganzen Mensch, der als solcher fleischlich oder geistlich gesinnt ist (Röm 8,5–9).“

refer to human partnership and after Genesis 2, „the most explicit biblical exposition of man and woman is found in the writings of Paul“ (Ortlund, R.C. Jr. 200: 652). Paul was the first to formulate the early Christian idea of Man.

Transformation as a term occurs in religious studies. An Estonian scholar Erki Lind says in his study on bodily transformation in religions, that the human body is culturally constructed wherein ritual plays a major role. He suggests that in Christianity transformation is related to eschatology whereas the positive state of body exists in the beginning of the history – before the Fall – and at the end, after the Resurrection (Lind 2013: 127). Lind states that in Christianity, however, transformation does not take place during rituals and is rather of the same value to the act of creation by God. He mentions Baptism and Eucharist but leaves unclear how he relates these rituals to the topic (Lind 2013: 128–129). I want to find out what kind of information Paul gives us in connection with the ‚transformative events‘ during a human lifetime.

One may understand transformation as a change in appearance (form), function, or nature. Linguistically speaking, the word μορφή as a shape or form (Gestalt) was known since Homer and was synonymous with εἶδος, ἰδέα and σχῆμα. The word did not have any unequivocal meaning in philosophy (Behm. 1942. *ThWNT* IV: 750–752). The belief that Gods are able to change their form (μορφή θεοῦ) was general among the Greeks which is well understandable if we pay attention to their divine anthropomorphisms. As to the verb μεταμορφόω, the Greeks believed that Gods had power to change their shape and Hellenistic mystery religions used this metaphor.⁵ Hence the easiness for Paul to use these words in various connections.

Cultural presuppositions that characterised the background of Paul's thinking and which he partially shared with a number of his addressees was the common belief that Man is God's creation, a specific ‚Jewish theological‘ awareness of being part of the Covenant, and practical and emotional awareness of belonging to the chosen nation. The phenomenon of belonging to a chosen nation and sharing a Covenant draws a barrier and signals an otherness in comparison of Jews to „the others“. Thus, on a

⁵ See in detail: „Umformen, verändern, in eine andere Gestalt verwandeln, vorwiegend pass oder med gebraucht“ (Behm. 1942. *ThWNT* IV: 762).

general level, since „image of God“⁶ is clearly a foundational expression in defining the biblical concept of humanness (Man), creation by God is the first (trans)forming act⁷. In Gen 2:7 it is written clearly that the Lord God formed Man from the dust of the ground. In addition to that, it is possible to describe election by God (Gen 12:1–3; 15:5; 17:5–7) as a forming of a nation and thus as a (trans)forming act, echoed in Rom 4:17–18. Some kind of otherness has taken place to compare the elected ones with those who were not.⁸ In the process of elective (trans)formation the individual is related to the social, and vice versa.

Though a number of Jewish Christians communicated probably in Aramaic, all early Christian documents are in Greek. Most of the Roman world, and a fair portion of the capital city Rome, spoke Greek as its first and sometimes its only language (Wright 2005: 5). As a Hellenistic Jew of Asia Minor, Paul certainly shared several common views of his time about the nature of the world and human beings and expressed his thoughts in Greek. Before further discussion, I specify the meaning of these anthropological terms Paul used in his seven undisputed original epistles:

ἄρσην	(<i>arsēn</i> ; male; männlich), occurs 4 times
ἀνήρ	(<i>anēr</i> ; man, der Mann), occurs 43 times
ἄνθρωπος	(<i>anthrōpos</i> ; Man, human being; der Mensch), occurs 88 times
γυνή	(<i>gynē</i> ; woman; die Frau), occurs 43 times
θηλυς	(<i>thēlys</i> ; female; weiblich), occurs 3 times

Words describe and represent objects and create human imagination: what is Man? Concepts, however, are often bigger than the single words. For example, *anthrōpos* is a well attested and central designation for Man as a human being which Paul uses more than ‚man‘ and ‚woman‘ taken

⁶ Creation κατ’ εἰκόνα θεοῦ in Gen 1:27 stood as a kind of general Greek expression in the background of the religious thinking of the Hellenised Jews.

⁷ The Bible quotes are NRSV. „Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed“ (Psalm 139:16). I also refer to the belief in God who creates, who gives life to dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rom 4:17).

⁸ „I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed“ (Gen 12:2–3).

together. But the meaning of *anēr* is wider than it seems at first look.

Analysis is often difficult since the use of the words *anthrōpos* and *anēr* is sometimes intertwined since their meanings partly overlap. The real physical man (*anēr*) as a masculine human being is often in the background, no matter whether *anēr* (man) or *anthrōpos* (Man) stands in the written text. On the one hand, in 1Cor 7:1 *anthrōpos* is written but *anēr* is intended.⁹ Probably Paul supposed that his intended readers would understand the text in the same way. This sentence may be confusing in English, though not so much in German and Estonian.¹⁰ On the other hand, it would be difficult and clumsy to try to replace the noun man/Man with other words, for example humanity, or human being wherever *anthrōpos* stands, and leave ‚man‘ to designate *anēr* only. It seems that Paul preferred the word *ho anthrōpos* (Man; der Mensch) in general and presupposed that Man included both ‚man‘ and ‚woman‘. I use Man for *anthrōpos*, man for *anēr* and male for *arsēn* wherever possible.

CIRCUMCISION AND BAPTISM DENOTE BEGINNINGS

My method is to follow how Paul presents significant formative and transformative events and processes that take place during a human span of life and what kind of changes the reader discovers there. I begin with a historical and religious question, who belong to Israel? Jews were convinced that human's social aspect – the aspect of status – depended on whether a person *is* or *is not* a member of the covenant, the tribe, and the nation. Circumcision means that a circumcised man is obedient to the Law and consequently is an Israelite.

Physical circumcision, decreed by the Law, is the visible physical sign of the covenant (Gen 17:10–13) which as a religious phenomenon simultaneously has a strong social effect confirming the view that the human being is understood as a unity (Einheit) of physical-biological, religious and social relations, all of which are described and determined

⁹ ... ,It is well for a man (here: *anthrōpos*) not to touch a woman (*gynē*).‘

¹⁰ Der Mann und der Mensch in German and *mees ja inimene* in Estonian. In German, however, the Article *der* is still common for both Mann and Mensch. It is not the case in Estonian, since Estonian nouns do not have sexes, or articles.

by the Torah. One may understand the Torah as the covenant charter of Israel, „the Law given to bind Israel to YHWH, to establish the nation of his people“ (Wright 2005: 22). Circumcision functions as a sign of Abraham’s son and belongs only to men (*anēr* and *arsēn*). To be an Israelite brings a special social sense of „belonging to somewhere“ and is an essential part of the image of an Israelite (man). However, both men and women constitute Israel which is to be seen as God’s royal nation of holy priests, chosen not only out of the world but also for the sake of the world (Ex 19:6; Deut 7:6; 10:15), to whom belong the adoption, the glory, and the covenants (Rom 9:4–5).

Circumcision as a change in the appearance and physical form of a man is simultaneously a transitional act and rite. It is also a symbol and a part of the image of a male¹¹ Israelite, but not of a human being in general. Gentiles were human beings as well as the Jews, but not *the* Jews until circumcised and ‚transformed‘ to Israel.¹²

According to Paul, because of circumcision on the eighth day, he himself is a member of the people of Israel (Phil 3:3). In Romans 6:3–11 he steps to a more general ground and presents the idea that the new life brought by Christ entails a reshaping of human beings. Paul has derived basics of his teaching about baptism from the early Christian tradition developed before the beginning of his own activity. What probably was new and original is the emphasis that baptism into (εἰς) Christ means baptism into (εἰς) his death (NRSV). Though baptism is also a rite, it is not just baptised Christians who are only symbolically „with Christ“. ¹³ Much more, „Paul means that they actually experience a union with him“ (Fitzmyer 1993: 434).

Baptism identifies a person not only with Christ’s act of dying, but also with his rising. In the conformation to the image of Christ’s death,

¹¹ Both *anēr* and *arsēn*.

¹² Judith Lieu in her attempt to construct early Christianity has several interesting discussions on identity matters. In the study on the attraction of women in/to early Judaism and Christianity she refers to Jewish inscriptions mentioning women, „particularly where women hold office within, or act as benefactors to the synagogue“. She adds that some of these women were not born Jews (Lieu 2005: 89). Though there is no direct reference of *how* Jewish women were counted as Israel in the full sense of the word without circumcision, Jewish women belonged beyond doubt to Israel.

¹³ Baptism in Moses (1Cor 10:1–6) is Paul’s allegory in referring to the presence of Jesus Christ already in the beginning of Israel’s journey.

„our old Man“ or self – *anthrōpos* –, is being crucified.¹⁴ „The action of God in baptism in burying the follower with Christ makes him a member of the family“ (Campbell 2006: 154). Here the ‚with-terminology‘ in relation to Christ demonstrates the corporate aspect of Christ-following. Common baptism of both Jews and Gentiles represents a destruction of old, sinful identities and the creation of a new identity grounded in the death and resurrection of Christ (Watson 2007: 279).

Since believers are not themselves literally crucified or resurrected, it seems probable that ὁμοίωμα denotes „likeness“. The believers do not participate in the exact form of Christ’s death and his resurrection. Though baptised believers can walk in the newness of life now (Rom 6:4), „the likeness of his resurrection“ (Rom 6:5) refers to the general resurrection at the end of time (Jewett 2007: 401). It appears that in Romans 6 references to the past (dying with Christ), present (walking in newness of life), and future (rising with Christ) are woven together. Being alive to God in Christ entails a basic change in human nature and way of life.

In Galatians 3:26–27 all baptised people are called „sons of God“. Like it is with the use of the word *anēr* which is often synonymous with *anthrōpos*, here *hyios* (son) is equivalent to *teknon* (child). Some decades after Paul similar thoughts are expressed in John 1:12.¹⁵ The baptised became sons of God as those incorporated into God’s Son. One may state very exactly that „the sons are made sons by being conformed to the image of the Son (Rom 8:29; cf. Gal 4:19).“ According to L. J. Martyn (1997: 376) one may say that here Paul gives a clue to the purpose of confirmation. I will turn to this concept later in connection with 2Cor 4:16 and 3:18. In Gal 3:27–28, Paul states that there is no longer male (*arsēn*) and female (*thēlys*) among those baptised into (εἰς) Christ, and rebukes circumcision as a precondition of acceptance into the Church. Paul chooses words that describe humans according to physical nature but does not shed light upon the nature of the image of Man (*anthrōpos*) or concept of Man in the wider sense of the word. One may conclude that men should be admitted to the Church on the same basis as women, without an additional virile

¹⁴ In Phil 3:10 Paul states: „... by becoming like him in his death / *symmorphizomenos tō thanatō autou*.“

¹⁵ John 1:12: But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God.

precondition – physical circumcision. That means that within the ecclesial community uncircumcised men will not lose their social dignity as men.

The status of a Jewish man in the Church means that he can still be a member of the covenant, the tribe, *and* in addition to that of the Christian community, Israel of God.¹⁶ He can still be obedient to Torah *and* at the same time to the Law of Christ (Gal 6:2). He may be circumcised, but if he is, he *is of the same value as* the uncircumcised „for neither circumcision nor un-circumcision is anything, but a new creation is everything“ (Gal 6:15). When does new creation come into being? Romans 6 allows one to think that baptism probably functions as a decisive initial impulse, but that conformation to the new creation is also a process described in 2Cor 4:16–18. Accordingly the crucified ‚old Man‘ and the destroyed ‚body of sin‘ (Rom 6:6) will experience the renewal of the ‚inner Man‘ (2Cor 4:16) who might walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4).

All these passages taken together imply that the baptized persons are no mere individuals anymore but creatures who are included to the corporate entity of God’s church. One may suppose that in Gal 3:26–28 Paul’s wording suggests that in baptism the structure¹⁷ of the original creation¹⁸ had been set aside (Martyn 1997: 376). It seems partially true. If structure designates the constructional aspect of creation, and changes in structure mean certain changes in creation order, the conclusion would be possible that the structure of the original creation becomes less significant or even relative if *ecclēsia tou theou*, a new kind of corporate body – the Church of God, is the centre of attention and of primary importance.

It is astonishing how in Galatians 3:27–29 Paul’s use of rather „naturalistic“ anthropological expressions like *arsēn kai thēlys* refer to the overcoming of biological dividing lines between biological sexes (and social genders) in baptism and states that those who were baptised into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ. One may even imagine that male and female humans (*i.e.* human beings) obtain something of the appearance of Christ. This symbolical „new appearance or form“ has

¹⁶ Gal 6:16; 1Cor 10:32.

¹⁷ A word σχῆμα as synonymous with form (μορφή) may well be used to explain Paul’s thought here.

¹⁸ Paul applies a similar discourse of this world by saying in 1Cor 7:31: „For the present form (τὸ σχῆμα) of this world is passing away.“

its beginning in baptism, marks new social connections and designates belonging to a new body where there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28). Paul based the linguistic form of his idea on the Septuagint translation of a very basic text, Genesis 1:27: „So God created humankind¹⁹ in his image, in the image of God²⁰ he created them; male and female he created them“²¹.

The context allows a conclusion that Paul used basic anthropological words that emphasise the physical constitution of Man²² to surpass some interpersonal and social differences within the Church. According to Gal 3:28 a sort of transformative act, though the verb μεταμορφώω does not occur, takes place in baptism which is part of baptism's function. Consequently, nothing important happens in human lives prior to baptism, but substantial events take place in baptism and after baptism.

PAUL USED NOVEL EXPRESSIONS TO DESCRIBE CHANGES IN HUMAN BEINGS

Careful reading of Paul's epistles reveals texts that refer to significant transformative processes and his use of innovative expressions. After stating (Gal 1:14) that he advanced in Judaism beyond many others Paul describes Judaism as something which does not determine his real self any more or at least not in full. He even designates his life before he was called by God as „my earlier life in Judaism“ (Gal 1:13).

A devoted student of mine takes care of old people in a residential nursing home. The physical condition and outer shape of these patients are wasting day by day. She told me that she is astonished to see a few believing seniors still grow spiritually and even be sometimes happy. How is it possible? She told me that she probably testifies to the phenomenon described in 2 Corinthians 4:16. Paul says that even though our outer nature (Man) is wasting away, our inner nature (Man) is being renewed

¹⁹ Notice that here in the LXX the noun ἄνθρωπος is used which is Paul's statistically dominant designation of Man.

²⁰ κατ' εἰκόνα θεοῦ.

²¹ ἄρσῆν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς.

²² Man as a common denominator for man, male, woman, and female.

day by day.²³ This inner human being (the inner Man – ὁ ἕσω ἄνθρωπος) is close to, but not identical with the spiritual person.²⁴ The inner Man is inherently connected with the mind and represents this rational aspect of the „I“, which is in harmony with the law of God (Rom 7:22). The inner Man has much in common with the heart and mind and therefore the spiritual condition of the heart influences and partly determines the inner quality of the person.²⁵ Decisive is the permanent internal renewal of Man, supposedly identical with the gradual transformation into glory of 2Cor 3:18.

This renewal is not an event, but a divine transforming process leading to the new creation while the person walks in the newness of life.²⁶ „New creation is both an affirmation of newness and of continuity within the ongoing purpose of God“ (Campbell 2006: 146).²⁷ On the inner human being in Paul see in more detail: Randar Tasmuth, „Pauline Anthropology: On the Inner Human Being and the Human ‚I‘.“ in *Theological Journal. Publication of Estonian Theological Society*. Special issue „Within and Around Early Christian Ideology“. – Usuteaduslik Ajakiri 2/2014 (67), 45–65.

In Galatians 4:19 Paul addresses his community and expresses deep concern and love by calling its members his little children. What follows is his wish that Christ would take hold of them in a very „intimate“ way: „My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth until Christ is formed (μορφωθῆ) in you.“ There is a similarity between the renewal processes of human persons described in 2Cor 4:16 and formation of them noted in Gal 4:19. Both of them are not ritual acts but take place

²³ One may describe the inward Man as the real self that passes from the body of flesh to the body of resurrection (Stacey 1956: 211).

²⁴ Thomas Schmeller says briefly that „Der ‚innere Mensch‘ ist der Mensch, der durch das Wirken des Geistes zu einer neuen Schöpfung (S,17) wird“ (Schmeller 2010: 277).

²⁵ The work of the Spirit is to transform Christians into the divine likeness, which is Christ, and which is the new creation (Tasmuth 2018: 89).

²⁶ Supposedly, in one sense, this renewal would become outwardly visible in the manifestation of the Christlike character (Thrall 1994: 351).

²⁷ Reference to the continuity between the present and future form of Man is expressed by Otto Michel in connection to Romans 7:22: „Die Rede vom ‚inneren Menschen‘ soll in diesem Zusammenhang nur andeuten, dass das himmlische Wesen in dieser Welt und Leiblichkeit nur verborgen angefangen hat und der Vollendung bedarf“ (Michel 1978: 235).

perpetually only if the person involved is a Christian and presumably baptised, that is, united with Christ in a death and in a resurrection. This process of the formation of the new Christ-Defined identity is, because of baptism, the formation of a corporate identity in Christ (Campbell 2006: 151–153) in which the individual aspect does not get lost. Paul reveals the goal of this process in Rom 8:29: „For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within the large family.“

A little later Paul pays attention to the everyday life of his readers. In Romans 12:1–2 advice is given not to be conformed to (the structure of)²⁸ this world, but in accord with Rom 8:29 be transformed (μεταμορφουσθε) by the renewing of minds.²⁹ First, this moral exhortation is a reference to 2 Corinthians 4:16 in regard to the inner human beings who are renewed day by day, who might walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4) and who may be delighted in the law of God (Rom 7:22). The location of the shared joy in the law is specified as the ‚inner self/person‘ (Jewett 2007: 470). The renewal of the mind (νοϋς) is requisite for knowing and doing God’s will (Chamblin 1993: 770). Second, this view is in harmony with Gal 4:19 and allows to conclude that this transformation³⁰ is the result of the transforming power of Christ.

Paul’s passive voice use of μεταμορφουσθαι („be transformed“) with a basic meaning of „remodel“ and „change into another form“ is oriented to this life rather than the next that takes place under God’s influence. In contrast to Greek philosophers and mystic religions, this change is corporate rather than individual, with this exhortation Paul gives good advice to all members of the body of Christ. The means of the

²⁸ This μη συσχηματιζεσθε in Rom 12:1–2 is the first imperative, negatively expressed, states that Christians should not be conformed to any other standard than deriving from Christ. It is followed with the second, positively expressed imperative that recommends a complete metamorphosis of thinking, willing, and conduct (Fitzmyer 1993: 640–642).

²⁹ In 1Cor 2:16 Paul states that we have the *mind* of Christ that sounds like a synonymous expression to his pain of childbirth until Christ is *formed* in the brothers and sisters in Galatia (4:19). In addition to that, the *renewing of minds* in Rom 12:1f emphasises the already known expression of our inner human being who is being *renewed* day by day (2Cor 4:16)

³⁰ The noun μεταμορφουσθε is in passive voice, and the human being addressed is the object of the external transforming power of God.

transformative process is explained by the expression „by the renewal of the mind“ (τῆ ἀνακαινώσει τοῦ νοός). It is likely that „the transformation Paul has in view here is shaped by the recovery of a realistic appraisal of ethical choices in the light of the converted community’s experience of the ‚new creation‘ brought by Christ“ (Jewett 2007: 733).

Identity is a modern word not found in Paul, but a short note on it is necessary. Continuing tension between his previous and newfound belief-systems and practice³¹ raises the questions, „Who did Paul think he was“, or even „Who did Paul say he was?“ Nina Nikki supposes that there is no singular answer and brings into play the flexibility and multiplicity of identity according to a given context (Nikki 2013: 77) and emphasises that the question is about Paul’s social identity rather than his personal identity. I agree with reservation that while discussing both aspects at the same time there is no necessity to draw a sharp line between individual and social identities. Nikki’s quotation of Abrams & Hogg who say briefly that social identity is „self-conception as a group member“ (Nikki 2013: 84) brings both sides neatly together. I would summarise that the transformative process effects both individual and social, that is, all aspects of personality.

The motive why Paul discusses human identity matters is the missionary context of his activity. Paul reveals the motive power of his thoughts and practice – he is doing it all for the sake of the gospel (1Cor 9:23). This announcement is in harmony with his self-understanding as the proclaimer of the Son of God among the gentiles (Gal 1:15–16). Paul shares with gentiles in Christ the primary identity-marker, which is faith in Christ.³² At the same time „he differs from them in that he is both Jewish and, by divine commission, apostle to the gentiles“ (Campbell 2006: 157–158). Paul himself, based on his life experience, embodies several personal/individual and corporate aspects of the divine transformative process out of which some, he probably believed, would be transferable to other human beings, too.

³¹ „To the Jews I became as a Jew...To those under the law I became as one under the law... To those outside the law I became as one outside the law...“ (1Cor 9:20–21). Paul mentions three groups he „becomes as“: Jews, Gentiles and weak.

³² Campbell says briefly that when Paul spoke of his experience, it was always Christ-oriented and Christ-defined. He sums Paul’s theologising in the phrase, „For me to live is Christ“ (Campbell 2006: 148).

CHRIST RAISED FROM THE DEAD AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

Paul's vocabulary, seen in the light of Hebrew and Greek literature, deserves special attention, but a very brief reference is possible here. In religious and ideological discourses images and symbols as vehicles of communication play significant roles. Images are imaginative means to describe reality. „An image is any word that names a concrete thing (such as tree or house) or action (such as running or threshing). Any object or action that we can picture is an image“ (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* 1998: xiii.).

Greek is rich in words that are associated with the English noun *image*.³³ One of them is icon (εἰκών – a likeness, image, portrait).³⁴ Images are flexible vehicles to express ideas that are difficult to explain, nevertheless the readers of the Bible should try to experience the image as literally and in as fully a sensory way as possible (*Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* 1998: xiv). It is possible to understand images as elements of an idea that has a wider and general construct in speech and thinking. Greek *he idea* – the look of a thing – is related to *to eidos* – that which is seen, form, shape, or figure (Tasmuth 2009: 118). Change in form, nature or appearance of a person also means that the image of the person is changed, that the person appears to others in a new way – in a more or less or not at all recognizable way.

In the anthropological imagery of Israel and early Christianity, the image of Man depends on the image of God.³⁵ According to Bray, the term ‚image‘ can translate both the Hebrew *selem* / Greek *eikōn*, and the Hebrew *demut* / Greek *homoiosis*, though the latter is usually rendered as ‚likeness.‘

³³ We already have paid attention to the OT statement in Gen 1:27 that God created (hu) man(kind) in his image. It is the only expression of its kind, but the solemnity of this expression has been very influential.

³⁴ There are two other options: ὁμοίωμα (a likeness, image, resemblance) and ὁμοίωσις (a becoming like, assimilation – Plato; likeness, resemblance – NT). See Liddell and Scott's *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*. The Seventh Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press 1991: 556.

³⁵ Coins belonged to Caesar because his image was on them, so human beings belong to God because his image is in us. Paul uses the symbol of mental childbirth by saying that he is in the pain of childbirth for the Galatians until Christ is formed in them (Gal 4:19).

(Bray, G. L. 2000. „Image of God“. *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*: 575). From the baptismal discourse of Rom 6:5 we learn that Christians shall be joined in the likeness of Christ's resurrection. This brings us to the last topic of the present study.

According to 1 Corinthians 15:12.20 and Romans 6:9 Christ is raised *from the dead* (ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγήγερται), a divine event that laid basis to the belief of the resurrection of *the dead* (ἡ ἀνάστασις τῶν νεκρῶν) like it is in 1Cor 15:42. In Romans 6:5 Paul expressed the idea of *likeness* but not of *sameness* of the resurrection of Christ and humans. Likeness is not sameness. The choice of words in 1Cor 15 seems to make a difference in nuances between what happened to Christ and what will happen to humans in the ἀνάστασις.³⁶ Since this transition of humans from one form (of being) to another does not take place during their earthly life span as it is with baptism and daily renewal it is not my primary topic. However, since resurrection of humans is part of the whole picture of God's transformative activity, there is a need to include the topic briefly.

Before the resurrection of the Lord, earthly Man (*adam* – Gen 1:27) bears the likeness (*eikōn*) of the earthly one. Paul takes it for granted that human life originates from the earth (1Cor 15:45–53) and this earthly tent-like house (*oikia tou skēnous*) will be destroyed (2Cor 5:1). Consequently, the imagery in 2Cor 4:16–5:5 is anthropological rather than ecclesiological. Therefore, the *building* (or *house*) *from God* seems to be taken as a reference to the believer's resurrection body. Reference to those who already are in Christ as a new creation (2Cor 5:17) runs as a parallel to the walking in the newness of life of Rom 6:4.

Paul gives advice not to lose heart: though the outer nature (Man, person) is wasting away, the inner nature (Man, person) is going through the process of renewal day by day. The outer physical person is to be identified with the mortal flesh (*sarx*) which is constantly being given up to death (2Cor 4:11). The inner person, however, Paul relates to the new creation. „It is a striking but thoroughly Pauline conviction that this *inner*

³⁶ First reference to the advent of Christ and resurrection of the dead is in 1Thess 4:13–18, but in 1Cor 15 Christ rose from the dead and the resurrection of the dead are thematically connected for the first time. Niels Hyldahl says that it is only in 1Cor 15 „wo zum ersten Mal Auferstehung Christi und Auferstehung der Toten thematisch zusammengedacht und einander angehört werden; auch dort aber bleibt das Christusergebnis noch Ausgangspunkt des Heils“ (Hyldahl 1980: 135).

person which has been made new is itself *renewed daily* (cf. Col 3:10, „the new which is being renewed“ – Furnish 1984: 289). A superb expression indeed.

The imagery in 1 Corinthians 15 is eschatological rather than anthropological. However, the eschatological images have an anthropological element, and the anthropological element has the eschatological images as the perspective and consummation. Paul uses the word *eikōn* twice in a contrasting way to describe the Man in two conditions: „... *the image of the earthly – the image of the heavenly...*“ (1Cor 15:49). Perhaps one would expect that by natural generation, human beings after *the first person Adam* participate in the same *earthly* material and continuingly bear the image of the earthly, but it is not the case.

Instead, it is likely that the Greek philosophical distinction between matter and form was foreign to Paul's thinking (Sider 1975: 431). According to Paul those who by spiritual generation are given a new nature by *the last Adam* participate in his heavenly being.³⁷ This likeness is part of the image of the future Man³⁸ and the expression of the eschatological transforming event in 1Cor 15:51 goes as πάντες δὲ ἀλλαγῶμεθα (we will all be changed). The verb in passive voice refers to God's transforming act in harmony with Phil 3:21 where Paul states that the Lord Jesus Christ „will transform the body of our humiliation so that it may be conformed to the body of his glory“ (NRSV).

CONCLUSIONS

My point of departure was to answer the questions on the transformation of human beings based on the epistles of Paul. If to understand transformation as a marked change in nature, appearance (form) or function, especially so that human persons are improved, then all these aspects find their specification in Paul's epistles. The character of changes

³⁷ Ronald J Sider like many others discusses continuity and discontinuity between the perishable body and the imperishable body. He suggests that the spiritual (imperishable) body will be to the perishable body what the new plant is to the seed and puts it briefly: „Hence there must be a genuine, significant transformation“ (Sider 1975: 435).

³⁸ In 1Cor 15:42–44 Paul explains that this is a spiritual body which is imperishable and is raised in power.

and the purpose of the transformation became quite clear too.

Understanding Paul presupposes knowledge of the creation of Man by God, since one of the core terms, „image of God“, appears as the only definition of humans in the beginning of Scripture (Gen 1:27), inclusive for both genders. Creation is a forming act of God who calls into existence the things that do not exist (Rom 4:17), followed by the calling of Abraham and constitution of the chosen nation, Israel.

First, in the beginning of an individual human life in Christ is baptism, a single event. Circumcision caused a change in the appearance, physical form and religious image of an Israelite and was simultaneously a transitional act and rite. This change was, however, not enough, since the ‚old‘ human nature did not change. Instead, it should ‚die‘ in baptism with Christ. Baptism also identifies believing persons with Christ’s rising and unites them in the likeness of his resurrection, in the conformation to the image of Christ’s resurrection.

It appears that this first transformative event does not turn believers into the exact form of Christ’s resurrection yet, since the likeness of his resurrection in Rom 6:5 refers to the general resurrection at the end of time. The baptised believers can nevertheless now walk in the newness of life. Romans 6:3–11 allows a conclusion that baptism functions as a decisive initial impulse in the process of forming a new creation – a concept Paul developed in his earlier epistles to the Galatians and Corinthians. One may summarise that according to Paul, nothing important happens to human beings before (prior to) baptism. Everything that matters takes place during and after baptism. The only agent who transforms humans is the one who formed, created them – God of Israel.

Second, Paul demonstrates his innovative thinking in 2Cor 4:16–5:9.17 by not describing an event like baptism in Rom 6:3–11 but by explaining a lasting process. There one meets an inner human being who in certain circumstances is being renewed day by day, apparently despite of the aging body. The inner Man is in connection with the mind and heart and participates in moral decision-making. This permanent internal renewal of Man depends on the spiritual condition of Man, on the walking in the newness of life, and is possible if one is intimate to the resurrected Christ. This new (gradual) creation is both an affirmation of newness and of continuity within the ongoing purpose of God.

These individual and corporeal transforming events take place during a human's lifetime. In the Pauline view of humans, creation narratives of Genesis remained permanently valid. Paul used Septuagint expressions of Gen 1:27 for male (*arsēn*) and female (*thēlys*) a few times and preferred man, woman, and Man. Furthermore, the words that characterise both biological and social aspects of Man (*anēr* and *gynē*) prevail against purely biological and physiological designations (*arsēn* and *thēlys*). However, Paul chose *arsēn* and *thēlys* in the place where physical and biological differences between men and women are visually most evident.

In Galatians 3:26–28 he connected the overcoming of these differences to the Church. This also refers to the corporate aspect of (the idea of) Man where the three aspects of humanity – humans as created beings, humans as individuals, and humans in relationship – are tied together. Baptism is the basis for Church membership. As there is no male and female anymore, the structure of the original creation order has somehow received a new shape, or form. Those *male* and *female* who were baptised into Christ have clothed themselves with Christ, have received (symbolically) new appearance, are prepared for the most glorious event, receiving the form of Christ (Gal 4:19) and as a new creation constitute the Israel of God (Gal 6:15–16). Here the purpose of God's transforming activity becomes visible.

Third, in death, at the end of the earthly lifespan, final changes in human nature will take place. It is an eschatological event. It is the consummation of the work started in baptism by God. Paul used in 1Cor 15 the image of the human body as a connecting factor between christology, anthropology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. He described the change in form as a transition of humans from one form of being to another, from the earthly body to the heavenly body. His formulation „Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven“ (1Cor 15:49) explains as much as possible not only the eschatological changes in which humans share, but implies also a transformed physicality. It is here that Paul explains most clearly the purpose of the transformative changes in humans. The humanness of the „transformed and conformed ones“ is different. These people are humans, Men, but they are Christ like humans. Transformation as a marked change in the nature, appearance or character of someone, receives completion.

Kokkuvõte

Viitedest inimese muutumisele Pauluse kirjades

Artiklis käsitletakse küsimust, kas Paulus laskis oma kirjade lugejal järeldada, et inimesele saab osaks langenud loomuse muutusi ehk transformatsioone. Kui jah, siis milles need seisnevad? Ümberlõikamine muutis küll meeste füüsilist kuju ja oli üleminekuriitus Iisraeli rahva liikmeks saamiseks, ent ei muutnud loomust. Ristimises nägi Paulus esmalt inimese üheks saamist Kristuse surma ja ülesäratamise sarnasusega ning võimalust kõndida elu uudsuses. Teiseks nägi Paulus võimalust, et ristitu seesmine loomus saab uuendatud päev-päevalt. Jumala töö on Rm 12:2 kohaselt ka inimese meele uuendamine igapäevases elus. Nii nagu need kaks kuju ehk vormi muutust on Jumala töö, on seda ka elukaare lõpu järel aset leidev inimese uuel kujul üles äratamine surnuist. Kolmas transformatsioon on eshatoloogiline ja seisab mingisuguses seoses loodu uuendamise ja uue loodu mõiste kontekstis.

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