

African Journal of Contextual Theology
 SIST, Attakwu – Enugu
 P.O. Box 9696, Enugu, Nigeria
ajct@sistenugu.com

Subscriptions

The *African Journal of Contextual Theology – AJCT* – (ISSN 2141-3037) is published annually. The subscription price is the following:

Nigeria: N500 per issue

Foreign: US\$20.00 per issue (including postage)

Payment may be made in cash or by cheque, payable to:

Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu
Enugu, Nigeria

The issues are available from Spiritan International School of Theology (cf. address above).

Permissions

For information on how to request permissions to reproduce articles / information from this journal, please visit www.sistenugu.com / SIST Journal.

All editorial correspondence should be sent to:

The editor-in-chief

African Journal of Contextual Theology

Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu

P.O. Box 9696 Enugu, Nigeria

e-mail: nwachukwums@gmail.com ; editorajct@yahoo.com

Advertising

Enquiries about advertising and requests for review of Books should be sent to:

The Editor – Advertising

Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu

P.O. Box 9696 Enugu, Nigeria

e-mail: ajct@sistenugu.com

Journal Logo: the logo of the Journal is the map of Africa and the SIST logo, with the symbolic depiction of the Holy Spirit and the book. The Holy Spirit inspires our studies (the book) and the context (Africa) in which we do theology.



All rights reserved; no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means without prior written permission of Spiritan International School of Theology, Attakwu – Enugu, Nigeria.

Typeset, by SIST Publications.

Printed and bound by
Real Images
6 Bishop Ayogu Street,
Uwani – Enugu
08038814020, 07057422314

THREE

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN CONVERTS IN EPHESIANS 2:11–22 AND THE CONCEPT OF *QAROB* IN RABBINIC LITERATURE

Mark Enemali, CSSp, Ph.D.

1. Introduction

The Holy Trinity is a communion of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, the bond of love and unity between God the Father and God the Son, is also responsible for bringing people into communion with the Trinity. Conversion entails a radical change of status in the person being converted engendered by the Holy Spirit. In describing this change of status, the letter of Paul to the Ephesians makes use of spatial and temporal imageries. This paper focuses on the exegetical background of the use of these imageries in the description of the work of the Holy Spirit that brings Gentiles close in order to experience God. The imageries are similar to the ones used in rabbinic literature to describe the change that takes place in converts to Judaism. The narrative of God's action through Christ in the Spirit that has now eliminated the difference between Jews and Gentiles in the Christian community (Eph 2:11–22) contains a curious use of the rhetoric of distancing and bringing close expressed in the use of the Greek terms *makran* and *engus*. In other words, a contrast is expressed between far and near (spatial imagery), and past and present (temporal imagery) in the description of the experience of the Gentile Christians. A similar contrast is found in the use

of *qarob* and *rahoq* in rabbinic literature, when the situation of foreigners who become converts is described.

Both the Christian usage and that found in rabbinic literature appear to be related to the traditional sense of drawing close to God or the holy place (temple) in the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, and of becoming a member of the community at Qumran.¹ As we shall show here, the difference between the two usages is that, while in the Christian usage it is the Spirit of God that does the work of bringing near, in rabbinic literature, God's agency in bringing near is not quite explicit or central. We shall begin with a brief overview of the letter to the Ephesians and an analysis of the passage (Eph 2:11–22). This will be followed by a brief discussion of the Spirit as an inner principle of religious experience. After that the use of *qarob* in the Hebrew Bible will be examined. This will be shown to be in the background of the technical use of the term at Qumran for the recruiting of members. A discussion of the use of *qrb* in some rabbinic texts as it pertains to the description of converts will follow. Finally, there will be a conclusion with a recommendation for the Church in Africa.

2. Overview of the Letter to the Ephesians and Analysis of Eph 2:11–22

The letter of Paul to the Ephesians has been largely found to have elements of epideictic² and deliberative rhetoric.³ In this letter,

¹ J.A. Loader, "An Explanation of the Term *Proselutos*," *Novum Testamentum* XV (1976), 270–277.

² Deliberative, forensic, and epideictic are the three genres of rhetoric discussed by Aristotle (see *Rhetorical* 1.3.1–3 [1358a–b]). According to

we see a panegyric that elucidates God's mysterious action through Christ in the Spirit that has made it possible for Gentiles to become part of the people of God (3:1–21). The addressees of this letter are Gentile Christians who have been united with the original heirs of God's promise without becoming Jews. In the letter, one notices a concern with the root and origin of the

him, particular social contexts require different speeches. Every speech has three parts: the speaker, the subject being discussed, and the audience. The deliberative speech consists of arguments meant to persuade or dissuade the audience with respect to a particular action in the future. Forensic or judicial is the type of speech made before a judge in the law court in view of a decision as to whether something happened in the past or not. Epideictic speech consists of praise or blame and is often meant to entertain or enhance the knowledge of the audience. For more description of the three rhetorical genres, see the entries in David E. Aune, *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003).

³ Nils A. Dahl, "Ephesians," in *Harper's Bible Commentary* (ed. James L. Mays; San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers; Society of Biblical Literature, 1988): 1212–1219, 1212 considers it as a variant of the epideictic genre meant "to praise the excellence of a god, an outstanding person, a virtue, or a city and its laws." A. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 46 and A. C. Mayer, *Sprache der Einheit in Epheserbrief und in der Ökumene* (WUNT 150; Tübingen: MohrSiebeck, 2002), 20, both classify it as epideictic, though Furnish does not accept this view (*ABD* 2.536). Mayer agrees that it is epideictic but observes that it does not really fit the schema found in rhetorical handbooks. Hübner (1997, 22–23) suggests that Colossians and Ephesians both contain elements of deliberative rhetoric though he remains skeptical concerning the rhetorical analysis of both letters. Cf. David E. Aune, "Ephesians, Paul's Letter to the," in *The Westminster Dictionary of New Testament and Early Christian Literature and Rhetoric* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 158–162, 158–159.

Church in Israel. The work of God's power (the Holy Spirit) is emphasized in the entire event. The author, probably a Jewish Christian writing around the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century C.E., describes the human predicament apart from Christ in terms of the situation of Gentiles, dead in transgressions and sins. In this situation they had no hope. He insists that the power of God makes alive the one dead in sins. It is this power that has wrought transformation in the lives of the Gentile Christians and has brought them near.

The letter speaks of heavenly seats, which are opposed to the universe below the moon. God's superabundant grace in the age to come is opposed to conformity to the age of this world. The author claims that Christians have already been saved, raised, and enthroned with Christ, a view that appears to transcend Paul's usual stance (e.g. Rom 5:9–10; 6:1–11).

The author of Ephesians does not favor the use of the OT in terms of promise-and-fulfillment. In his view, the prophets of the OT failed to understand the true meaning of their own prophecies. Thus he writes:

...the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that is, how the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.⁴

⁴Eph 3:4b–6, cf. Aune, *Dictionary*, 160.

There is, however, conformity with Paul with regard to emphasis on grace and not works. Through the grace of God the distinction between "far" and "near" or "then" and "now" has been wiped out. There is association of cosmic powers with the demons (this world and darkness). Dualistic trends that divided the universe between good and evil are countered by the emphasis on the sovereignty of God, Creator and father of all. There is reference to Isa 57:19: "Peace, peace, to the far and the near, says the Lord; and I will heal them." Far and near in "Jewish usage applied respectively to those who lack and those who have full legal and religious rights as the people of God."⁵ In the description of the new community interesting metaphors are used, such as: God's city, household, building, and temple. The author gives a negative twist to the walls erected by the commandments to protect the purity of Israel. Christ had to tear the wall down in order to unite the two groups, i.e., the Jews and the Gentiles.

Eph 2:11–22 begins with a reference to circumcision. The Gentiles are described in a contemptuous manner as uncircumcised. The Jews had status and dignity, which was absent among the Gentiles. The antiquity of circumcision goes back to Abraham (Gen 17:9–14), and Paul was proud of being circumcised (Phil 3:5). And in the early church there was the view that proposed that the Gentiles be circumcised in order to come under the covenant (Gal 6:12–13; cf. 5:2–6, 11; Phil 3:2–3).

⁵ Nils A. Dahl, "Ephesians," in *Harper's Bible Commentary* (ed. James L. Mays; San Francisco: Harper & Row, Publishers; Society of Biblical Literature, 1988): 1212–1219, 1216.

In talking about the instrument that brought about circumcision, the text mentions “by the hand.” In the OT, work of human hands refers to idols (cf. Isa 2:18; 10:11). In the NT, it describes the construction of a temple (Mark 14:58; Acts 7:48; 17:24; Heb 9:11, 24). This is in contrast with the work of God. At any rate, the Gentile who does not even have this mark of circumcision is compared with the Jew who has it. Christ has changed the situation of both of them.⁶ The emphasis on circumcision as the work of human hands, and its difference from what God has done in the lives of the Gentiles, owes to the need to stress the work of God in bringing the Gentiles near. It is by grace, and not by human works, that they are brought near, and this makes the blood of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit significant for the process of conversion. The role that God plays in the process of the conversion of the Gentiles will not have any equivalence in rabbinic literature. In rabbinic literature, the Gentiles bring themselves near and are welcomed and in some cases the role of Elijah as mediator is mentioned as one who comes to bring fairness in human affairs.

In the letter to the Ephesians, there is emphasis on the past situation of the Gentiles and the disparity between them and the Jews. Jews and Gentiles who are believers are now united in Christ in one body.⁷ The author of Ephesians sets three notes of contrast between past and present conditions of the Gentile Christians (2:3). “But,” “now” as opposed to “formerly” (v. 11) and “in that time” (v. 12), and change in locale to designate

⁶Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 354.

⁷Ibid., 355.

relationships; prior to conversion they were separated from Christ but now are in Christ.

Far and near, as used in the OT, apply to the description of Gentile nations where they are seen as "far off" (Deut 28:49; 29:22; 1 Kgs 8:41; Isa 5:26; Jer 5:15) as opposed to Israel who is described as "near" (Ps 148:14).⁸ The point of reference is YHWH. So "coming near" is used in this context in terms of coming near to God. The use of bringing near in Ephesians goes beyond merely making the former Gentile a Jew, and refers to the situation where both Jews and Gentiles are made one in Christ Jesus. The Jews, as a result of their possession of revelation, were near to God while the Gentiles lacking that revelation were far off from God.⁹ Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the principle of unity, Gentiles are not simply made Jewish thereby possessing revelation, but both groups are made one in the experience of the risen Lord. The passive, "have been brought," has God as its agent. It is the power of God rather than human action or effort, which has drawn the Gentiles near.

What the author describes in v 12 as the pre-Christian condition is theological.¹⁰ Beyond the moral and sociological situation he goes to their theological situation. Five privileges were missing in the Gentiles at that former time: they were without Christ, did not belong to the commonwealth of Israel, were strangers to the covenant promises, had no hope, and were without God. Among

⁸Ibid., 362. See also Lincoln 138–39.

⁹Ibid., 362.

¹⁰ Ernest Best, "Ephesians 2:11–22: A Christian View of Judaism," in *Text as Pretext: Essays in Honour of Robert Davidson* (ed. Robert P. Carroll; JSOTSup 138; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992): 47–60, 52.

these five items, relation to the messiah appears to be most important. It is the aspect that is most positively stressed. "They have been redeemed by him, they are 'in him', they are members of his body, they have been made alive with him, raised with him and sit with him in the heavenlies."¹¹

The first item on the list is that they were without Christ (alienated). In contrast to Israel that had the hope for the messiah, Gentiles had none. "Without Christ" may mean without the messiah. Ernest Best argues that being without Christ here does not refer to the pre-incarnate presence of the messiah in Israel.¹² We have no sign in the rest of Ephesians that Paul held this view. "Christ" also does not refer only to the historical Jesus who lived and died in Israel.¹³ This would reduce the strength of the point, since it would have been true only for a limited time.¹⁴ It is most likely that Christ refers to the promised messiah.¹⁵

¹¹Ibid., 53. This is in opposition to the list Paul gives in Rom 9:4–5 that places Christ in the climax. Here all begins from Christ.

¹² 1 Cor 10:4; 1 Pet 1:11; Jn 12:14 – against the view of M. Barth, *Ephesians* AB; for the idea see A.T. Hanson, *Jesus Christ in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965). For the view that refers to pre-incarnate see H. von Soden, *Die Briefe an die Kolosser, Epheser, Philemon* (Hand-Commentar zum Neuen Testament; Leipzig: Mohr, 1893). Cf. Best, "Ephesians," 54.

¹³ So E. Haupt, *Die Gefangenschaftsbriefe* (KEK; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1902); H. Rendtorff, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (NTD; Gottingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1955); Merklein, *Christus*, 18).

¹⁴Best, "Ephesians," 54.

¹⁵ So H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Epheser* (Dusseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1971); J. Gnllka, *Der Epheserbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1971); F.

Secondly, they were alienated from the citizenship of Israel. The Greek, *apellotriomenoi* has to do with excluded and alienated (cf. Eph 4:18; Col 1:21). *Politeia* refers to commonwealth in classical Greek (state or citizenship). Hoehner distinguishes between the quest to become members of the political state and the citizenship of Israel. The issue at stake here is citizenship because of the privileges.¹⁶ Some Gentiles were admitted to Judaism as proselytes, but in most cases, they were excluded from citizenship of Israel.¹⁷ *Politeia* does not appear in the Septuagint (LXX), but only in the Jewish texts that had no Hebrew underlying them. Thus it came to Judaism in the Hellenistic period (2 Macc 12:7). It means "constitution."¹⁸ It could also refer to "way of life."¹⁹ Since it is clear that Jews had no constitution at this time, the most likely meaning is that of citizenship, that is, membership of a community that entails the rights, privileges and way of life related to that membership.²⁰

Thirdly, they were strangers to the covenant of promise. They lacked any relationship with the covenant God had made with Israel. The status of being a stranger or foreigner meant the absence of the full rights of citizens. This was the condition of Gentiles as described in Jewish terms (Jer 5:19; Matt 27:7). The plural "covenants" is found only in Gal 4:24 and Rom 9:4. The OT understanding of covenant is such that God made only one

Mussner, *Christus, das All und die Kirche* (Trier: Paulinus-Verlag, 1955), 77.

¹⁶ Cf. Phil 3:20.

¹⁷ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 357.

¹⁸ Josephus, *Ant.* 4.45; 13.245.

¹⁹ 2 Macc 8:17; 4 Macc 8:7.

²⁰ 2 Macc 13:14; 4 macc 17:9. Cf. Best, "Ephesians," 54–55.

covenant with Israel and this is renewed on a number of occasions. The plural, *diathekai* is not used in this sense.²¹ The plural may refer to promises often but here as well as in Rom 9:4 covenants and promises appear as separate items in the list. Hence it is impossible for it to mean promises here.²² Best suggests that what we have here is an unusual use of the plural that may have arisen from the Christian view of two covenants, the one made with Abraham and the one made with Christ (Jer 31:31–34; cf. 32:40; Isa 55:3; Ezek 37:26) that is commemorated at every Eucharistic celebration. We rather speak here of promise in terms of the totality of the promise made to Israel to which the Gentiles are strangers as the author earlier mentioned. The Ephesians saw the community of Israel as expecting a messiah and creating a new community of the new covenant (cf. 2 Cor 3:6; Heb 8:6; 12:24). The description of this community takes up a great part of the letter to the Ephesians.²³

Finally, the Gentiles had no hope, and they were without God in the world. Having no hope and being without God are not directly related to Israel and may appear to be value judgments more than theological descriptions.²⁴ Best argues that the description of the situation of the Gentiles is a reflection of the description of Judaism. In other words, the phrases used are mirror-images of the description of Judaism by at least one Christian. Judaism “looks forward to the coming of the messiah, it is the community of God’s people with whom God has entered into covenants with their promise, it believes in the true God and

²¹ Cf. C. Roetzel, “Diathekai in Romans 9, 4,” *Bib* 51 (1970), 377–90.

²² Best, “Ephesians,” 55.

²³ See Eph 2:19–22. Cf. Best, “Ephesians,” 56.

²⁴ Best, “Ephesians,” 56–57.

has hope.”²⁵ In Rom 9:4–5 Paul describes Judaism. Eph 2:11–12 corresponds to Paul’s description in Romans in terms of the following elements: reference to Israel, the covenants, the promises, Christ, God. The reference to hope is unique to Ephesians while the giving of the law, sonship, worship, and the fathers are unique to Romans.

There is a contrast between the purposes of the two lists. While Romans is concerned with the belief that God has not abandoned Israel (and this remains true after Christ), in Ephesians the concern is with the contrast between the past and the present situation of Gentiles. They were once without Christ. Now they have Christ. There is no conclusion about the Jews but clearly Christ was from them and once belonged to them, and it does not say that the privileges are no longer enjoyed by them. What the writer is concerned with is the fact that the privileges now belong to Christians.²⁶ Jews have a list of privileges that are compiled in some writings – 2 Macc 2:17–18; 4 Ezra 3:13–24; 2 Bar 57:1–3. Here, in the letter to the Ephesians, the emphasis is not on the privileges but on the action of God.²⁷

The understanding of Jesus as peace has at its background the Jewish interpretation of Isa 9:5, 6. Christ makes peace between the elements on earth and heaven.²⁸ This action of Christ is

²⁵Ibid., 57.

²⁶Ibid., 59.

²⁷ Cf. L. Cerfaux, *Recueil Lucien Cerfaux*, II (BETL, 7; Gembloux: Duculof, 1954), 339–64, 340 n. 1.

²⁸ Here is a link with Col 1:15–20. The two entities mentioned in Eph 2:14–16 (*ta amphotera*, *tous duo*, *tous amphoterous*) are two parts of the cosmos, heaven and earth. In this we see the cosmic context of Ephesians. To make this peace Christ destroyed the dividing wall.

important to the author of Ephesians because of his interest in the initiative of salvation in God that has brought the Gentiles near and has dealt a death-blow to the barrier that once was present between the Jews and the Gentiles.²⁹ For him, grace and not human works is responsible for the miracle of bringing the Gentiles near. The law is part of what caused the barrier and Christ has destroyed this barrier through his death on the cross (Col 1:15–20).

The writer uses the OT, traditional material, and Colossians in his writing. His main purpose is to congratulate the Gentiles whose status has changed through the power of God in Christ. The contrast schema shows this as the main point. He also shows the Gentile Christians that their salvation came from somewhere. “Salvation has a history, they have a place in that history, and there is a sense in which in experiencing salvation they have entered into the heritage of Israel.”³⁰ The problem that the author addresses is therefore that of ignorance of their roots. But there is emphasis too on the discontinuity of this community. There is now a new creation that replaces the two old communities that had been separated by a wall. And the new community that is now made of Christian Jews and Gentiles enjoys privileges that go beyond what Israel previously experienced (cf. vv 19–22).

The idea of a cosmic wall between heaven and earth is seen in later Gnosticism, but we also see it in earlier Judaism. Cf. 1 Enoch 14:9; 3 Apoc. Bar. 2:1, 2; T. Levi 2:7. Cf. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 129.

²⁹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 129.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 133.

The language of the transformation that has taken place is that of Jewish proselytism of "having come near" though this is not about becoming part of Israel but entails access to God and membership of the new community.³¹ "Far" and "near" remind the reader of Isa 57:19 which speaks of peace for those far and near, but before the writer uses this, he applies the hymnic material that depicts Christ as peace and bringer of cosmic reconciliation to humanity. Through the death of Christ, he has abolished the law which caused the separation. Christ's death has on the one hand reconciled Jews to Gentiles (horizontal dimension) and on the other, has reconciled both groups to God (vertical dimension).³² This is a Christological interpretation of Isa 52:7 and it is possible through the action of the Holy Spirit. This is what accounts for the uniqueness of the Christian understanding of conversion. The Holy Spirit does the work of bringing the believers close to Christ. How the Spirit does this is worth investigating, which brings us to the next issue of interest: the Holy Spirit as an inner principle of religious experience and the new life of grace.

3. The Holy Spirit Is an Inner Principle of Religious Experience and the New Life of Grace

The Holy Spirit brings people to encounter God by working in their hearts. It is this action of the Spirit that makes the word of the preacher effective and produces positive results. Saint Paul recognizes the role of the Spirit in his preaching as he writes to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 1:5-6):

³¹ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 159.

³² *Ibid.*, 160.

Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit.

The essential elements of a theology of preaching can be found in this passage. In addition to its affirmation of the effectiveness of Christian preaching, it sees the word of God as a living reality, and its vitality comes from the “dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit.”³³ Thanks to the power of the Spirit, the word spoken by the preacher becomes efficacious and goes beyond the power of mere human rhetoric.³⁴ This Spirit produces some religious experience. The Holy Spirit is at work both in the preacher and the listener. This word produces “joy” and “full conviction,” which empowers the listener to accept the faith and hold tenaciously to it “in spite of persecution.”

Here are the elements we associate with religious experience: recognition that the word is true; a feeling of joy that springs from this recognition as a great gift of God; and a readiness to cling to it even in the face of martyrdom.³⁵ This idea is

³³ Nicholas Fogliacco, *The God of all Consolation: A Theology of Salvation and Mission as Divine Comfort* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2004), 84.

³⁴ For a recent development of the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration, interpretation and adaptation of the Word of God, see Jack Levison, “A Theology of the Spirit in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 78, No. 1 (2016) 90–110.

³⁵ Fogliacco, *God of all Consolation*, 84.

connected with what is understood when we speak of biblical inspiration. The Bible is "written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" (*Dei Verbum* 9). When we say this, we first of all understand that the text was composed with the help of God's Spirit. In other words, God was involved in the composition of the text. There is another meaning that could be an extension of this. And this is what we would like to stress here. This is about the effect the Bible has on the reader and the Christian community. The Bible "inspires" when it is proclaimed in liturgical gatherings of the community as the authoritative text of the community.

Beyond the realm of emotional experience, the Holy Spirit, acting on the reader, produces faith (1 Cor 12:3), justification which is conversion (1 Cor 6:17; Col 2:12–13), and "new life." The Christian lives a new life "in the Spirit," that is, "a participation in the pneumatic-eschatological existence of the risen Lord."³⁶ Through baptism, the Christian shares in the divine sonship of Christ. By incorporation into Christ (1 Cor 6:15; 12:12, 27–28; Rom 12:4–5; Col 1:19–20; Eph 1:22–23), he becomes God's adopted child (Eph 1:4) and participates in the filial experience of Jesus and so can say with him "Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

These gifts make the Christian united to Christ in a special way so that something happens at the level of his being. A "regeneration" (Ti 3:5) takes place and he becomes a "new creation" (Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), and possesses what Prophet Ezekiel calls the "new heart" (36:25–27). As Fogliacco

³⁶Ibid., 85.

maintains, “The rebirth opens up new moral possibilities, in a climate of interior ‘freedom’ (Gal 5:12), which is the fruit of the love infused by the Spirit (Rom 5:5).”³⁷

So, the person drawn to Christ, experiences a rebirth, which makes the believer live and act in the Spirit. As Aquinas maintains, the free acts performed by the Christian in the state of grace belong to the Holy Spirit.³⁸ And Hans Urs von Balthasar goes even further, stressing the idea of the Spirit as the “ultimate subject” of our actions.³⁹ This type of complete dependence on grace and the power of the Holy Spirit makes the understanding of conversion in Christianity unique.

4. *Qrb* in Hebrew Bible, and Qumran

The traditional proselyte terminology in Ephesians has its roots in the OT. It was also used at Qumran, and it is related to the use of the term in rabbinic literature. J. A. Loader discusses the term *proselutos* and its background in the religious use of the term *qrb* “to come near.” He recognizes at least three nuances in the religious use of the term: cultic, metaphorical and eschatological. The cultic use of the term designates approaching the holy sphere. In the OT *qrb* in one of its cultic use means approaching the cult.⁴⁰ Here we have the concept of approaching the holy place. Loader argues that this Jewish use of the *qrb*-concept explains the Hellenistic Jewish term *proselutos*.⁴¹ He notices a

³⁷Fogliacco, *God of all Consolation*, 85.

³⁸*Summa Theologica* I–II, q. 93, a. 6 ad 1.

³⁹Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Spiritus Creator* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1982), 99.

⁴⁰Exod 16:9; Lev 9:5; Num 25:6; Isa 65:5; Ezek 9:1; Ps 65:5.

⁴¹Loader, “Explanation of *Proselutos*,” 276.

pattern in the translation of the technical *qrb* in the LXX. There is a distinction in the translation between the cultic and the metaphorical nuances. When *qrb* is used in the cultic sense the Greek word is *proserchesthai*, *prosferein*, or *prosagein*, but when the metaphorical sense is referred to, the terms *engizein* and *engus* are used. There are some exceptions to this pattern though (e.g. Isa 45:5, 61:1, 21), but Loader maintains that these may be explained by particular circumstances in their different cases.⁴² In Ephesians *engus* is used rather than a form of *proserchesthai* because an adjective is more appropriate as a counterpart of *makran* than the verb. The passage does not mention *proserchesthai* but it is the clearest exposition of *proselutos* and its meaning for the church.⁴³ The OT is also familiar with the concept of the holy community.⁴⁴

The same concept is applied to the process of becoming a member of the Qumran community. Acceptance into the community entails two stages – that of bringing in, by the overseer (*pāqid*), of the aspirant, and then bringing near (*qrb*). This is set out in *IQS* 6:13–22. The Qumran community distinguished clearly between simply bringing in with the use of the verb *bw'* and bringing near with the use of the verb *qrb*. The one who aspires, at the preliminary stage, turns to the truth and turns away from all evil (*lashuv la 'emetvelasurmikkol 'awel*). At this propaedeutic stage, he comes before the *rabbim* to be taught the doctrines of the sect.⁴⁵

⁴²Ibid., 276.

⁴³Loader, "Explanation of Proselutos," 277.

⁴⁴Exod 19:5–6; Lev 19:2; Deut 7:6; 26:18–19; 28:9; Isa 62:12.

⁴⁵Loader, "Explanation of Proselutos," 271.

Where *qrb* is used, it is employed in a technical sense of becoming a member. After the one who has been brought in has gone through the preparatory stage, at the decision of the *rabbim*, he may either “come near” or be “removed.” Loader suggests that *qrb* here can only refer to becoming a member.⁴⁶ *Qrb* in this technical sense of “acceptance as a member” (*piel*) or “becoming a member” (*qal*) can be seen in 1QS 7:21, 8:18, 9:15. So, Qumran uses *qrb* in the sense of becoming part of the community. While in the OT it is used in the sense of approaching a holy place, in Qumran, the community is a sort of temple and *qrb* is used when one becomes a member of this community.

5. *Qrb* in Rabbinic Literature

This concept is also attested in rabbinic literature. We shall survey a few rabbinic texts. In MishnahEduyot 8:7, ToseftaEduyot 3:4 and BavliKiddushin 71a we have a reference to the role of Elijah in distancing or bringing close. The concept is used here in a sense quite similar to the use of the term in Qumran. The Mishnah text is as follows:

There was a family, Beth-Serifa, in Transjordan; Ben-Sion removed it by force (*riḥ^aqāh*). And there was yet another (family), but Ben-Sion brought it near by force (*qēr^ebāh*). Elijah will come to pronounce such people unclean or clean, to remove or to bring near.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Ibid., 271.

⁴⁷Eduy 8:7.

For Loader, the issue in the Mishnah does not simply concern the membership of priestly family. In Kiddushin 71 there is an extension of the issue. Purity of birth is not the ground upon which Elijah will come to distance or bring close but injustice. Those who were brought near by force will be distanced and those who were distanced by force will be brought near.⁴⁸ Racial purity is only important in so far as it does not contribute to the injustice. That is why the text says that once the family is of mixed blood, it can never be altered again but also says that some of the greatest people came even from such families. So Elijah's verdict is not going to be based on purity of birth but on injustice.

Mekhilta Tractate Amalek contains a fascinating discussion of Jethro the father-in-law of Moses that employs the concept of *qrb* in terms of coming near to God by way of becoming part of Israel. The Mekhilta considers Jethro as a paradigmatic convert.⁴⁹ Following the example of YHWH who encouraged Jethro when he wished to become a convert, Moses, and by implication, all the rabbis are admonished to encourage prospective converts who have come near and wish to convert for the sake of Heaven. God claims a credit for Jethro's coming.

R. Eliezer says: This was said to Moses by God: "I, I who said the word by which the world came into being, I am One who welcomes, not One who repels." As it is said: "Behold, I am a God that brings near, saith the Lord, and not a God that repels" (Jer 23:23). "I am he

⁴⁸ Loader, "Explanation of Proselutos," 272.

⁴⁹ Gary Porton, *The Stranger Within Your Gates: Converts and Conversion in Rabbinic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 59.

that brought Jethro near, not keeping him at a distance. So also thou, when a man comes to you wishing to become a convert to Judaism, as long as he comes in the name of God for the sake of heaven, do thou, likewise, befriend him and do not repel him.”⁵⁰

Here, in the Mekhilta, Jethro is not the one speaking. Whereas in Exod 18:7 Jethro speaks to Moses, here the ‘I’ is attributed to God and is joined to the words in Jeremiah. Gary Porton observes that there is a forced exegesis here and suggests that “the midrashist wanted to make the point that converts should be welcomed into the Israelite community and merely sought to find a way to support his argument.”⁵¹ The interesting point here is the description of the approach of converts in terms of coming near.

Jethro decided to leave the world of prosperity and came to the desert, a place of deprivation, just to belong to the people of God. *Ba’* is used here in terms of the desire to enter the community. When Jethro came to the Tent which Mekhilta calls the house of study, Moses narrated to him the deeds of the Lord in order to attract him and bring him near to the Torah.⁵² Jethro returns to his place after his conversion. He goes back and becomes a missionary, leading his people to study of Torah and bringing them under the wings of the *Shekinah*. It is interesting that a Gentile, not a native-born Israelite, carries out the work of proselytizing.

⁵⁰Mekhilta Tractate Amalek, 149–161.

⁵¹Porton, *Stranger*, 257 n. 96.

⁵²Mekhilta Tractate Amalek, 171–2.

Qrb is also used in Sifre to Numbers in the discussion of how God's power brings Gentiles who loved the Torah near. Notice that the Gentiles in question have to first express their interest in the Torah or the people of God. Gentiles who came close to Israel and were accepted are used as a pedagogical tool to teach Israel to draw close to the Torah. The Rechabites receive the reward of descendants (Jer 35:18–19), for following the instruction of their ancestor. The text in Sifre says that proselytes are not allowed to enter the inner *sanctum*. In fact, even Israelites are not allowed. But it says further that they (the converts) took seats on the Sanhedrin and taught the rulings of the Torah. The interesting thing is the conclusion of the argument. If God brings close those who bring themselves near how much more the Israelites who carry out the Torah!

Porton points out that there is an ambivalent attitude towards the convert in the Sifre. This is expressed in the negative and positive representations of Jethro. On the one hand, base motives are imputed to Jethro in his quest to join the People of Israel. On the other, Jethro is referred to as "the people's eyes," i.e., he is as precious to Israelites as their eyes.⁵³ The descendants of Jethro are seen as the same as those of Jonadab the son of Rechab. The bond between Jethro and Rechab creates a problem since YHWH had promised that Jonadab would always have descendants standing in the presence of the Lord. For a descendant of a convert to stand in the Holy of Holies is a big thing. Joshua questions the possibility of a convert entering when normal Israelites cannot. His willingness to let converts become members of the Sanhedrin is picked up by Sifre. Joshua allows a

⁵³Porton, *Stranger*, 64.

symbolic entrance by recognizing that they sit in the Sanhedrin and teach Torah. There is also the interpretation that Jonadab's female descendants were to marry into the priestly clan.⁵⁴

Rahab is also described here as a convert and Sifre Numbers states that according to Eliezer, eight priests and eight prophets descended from her.⁵⁵ She received these blessings though she was a Gentile because she brought herself near to God.

But because she brought herself near, the Omnipresent brought her near, if an Israelite carries out the Torah, all the more so.⁵⁶

Jethro, Rahab, and native-born Israelites are placed at the same level according to these passages. The Gibeonites too though from a distance, brought themselves near. They were accepted. Ruth the Moabite also brought herself near and she was accepted.

The need to accept and bring near Gentiles who wish to convert comes up strongly in the example of Abraham. Genesis Rabbah 39 speaks of how Abraham will be a blessing (Gen 12:2):

“And you will be a blessing” (Gen 12:2)

“Since the word may be read ‘pool of water,’ what it means is just as a pool of water removes the cultic uncleanness of an unclean person, so you will bring near to God those who are far from him.”

⁵⁴Sifre Numbers Beha'alotekha 78, Horovitz 73, ll. 5–18.

⁵⁵Sifre Numbers Beha'alotekha 78, Horovitz 73, l. 19–74, l. 8.

⁵⁶Sifre Numbers 78.

Said R. Berekiah, "Since the Scripture states, 'I will bless you,' why does it go on to state, 'you will be a blessing?'"

"He said to him, 'up to this point I have to give a blessing to my world. From now on, lo, the power of blessing is handed over to you. To the person whom you wish to give a blessing, give a blessing.'"⁵⁷

Abraham is compared to a pool of water that makes one clean for cultic act. The blessing that Abraham gives is that of bringing the Gentiles near to God. Abraham is extolled also in Leviticus Rabbah as one who came from afar: he lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar (Gen 22:4). God is praised who brought near Israel who was once far. The primacy belongs to God. "R. Hanina b. Papa said, 'This means we accord primacy to the Holy One, blessed be He, from whom we were far, and who brought us near to himself.'"⁵⁸ God's loving kindness is expressed here.

The Gentile blesses Hillel in Shabbat 31a "who brought me near under the wings of the Shekinah." *Qrb* under the wings of the Shekinah is used for the acceptance of proselytes into the people of God. This is related to Ruth 2:12. Joshua says in Palestinian Kiddushin 4:65b "I shall not bring them near (*mqrbn*) nor remove them (*mrhqn*)" concerning the Gibeonites. Their acceptance into Israel and rejection is described in terms of bringing near and distancing (Josh 9). The decision is not made

⁵⁷Genesis Rabbah, 39.

⁵⁸Leviticus Rabbah, 14:2.

by Joshua but reserved for David to make later and it is framed in terms of entering into the community of Israel.⁵⁹

In Numbers Rabbah 3:2 there is reference to the blessings of those whom God chose and brought near (Ps 65:5). The commentary goes on to distinguish between those chosen by God and those brought nearby God. While election applies to Abraham, Jacob, and Moses (Israelites), bringing near applies to Jethro and Rahab (Gentiles).⁶⁰ The former were chosen but not brought near, while the latter were brought near but not chosen. The criteria for choosing and bringing near are the good deeds that God observes in them. While the Israelites are already near by virtue of their election, the Gentiles require a special act of bringing near. This special act of bringing near is, according to Loader, proselytizing.⁶¹ According to Genesis Rabbah 39:14,

He who brings near a heathen and converts him, should be regarded as if he has created him.

And in Leviticus Rabbah 134b:

When a stranger arrives to become a proselyte, give him your hand to bring him near under the wings of the Shekinah.⁶²

From the foregoing it is clear that *qarob* in rabbinic literature has a technical sense of the acceptance of proselytes in Israel.

⁵⁹Loader, "Explanation of Proselutos," 274.

⁶⁰MidrTanch. Tsav 8.

⁶¹Loader, "Explanation of Proselutos," 275.

⁶²Ibid., 276.

6. Conclusion

From the foregoing it is clear that the use of the rhetoric of distance and bringing near in the description of the contrast between the past and the present situation of Gentile Christians has a counterpart in rabbinic literature in the description of the past and present situation of proselytes. The process of bringing close entails some kind of continuum such that the terminology does not make a binary distinction. In other words, it does not simply make a difference between those who are in and those who are out in a stark manner. The distinction is rather in grades. Before their conversion Gentiles were far. With their conversion they are brought near, not just to Israel, but to God according to Ephesians. For Sifre, the descendants of the Gentiles do not simply become Israelites or enter the nation and become converts. Rather, they become priests and prophets.

There appears to be no difference between the way converts are treated and the way penitents within the nation are treated.⁶³ A similar phenomenon takes place in them and there is a slippage of dichotomies.⁶⁴ In the description of the experience of the Gentile Christians in Ephesians there is no clear distinction between converts and penitents. On the contrary the rabbis have a clear-cut distinction between the two. Novick notes that apart from a few passages where there is no clear distinction, the

⁶³ This is an issue that this paper has not really addressed but is worth studying.

⁶⁴ Novick discusses the lack of distinction between conversion and repentance in some Jewish texts, particularly *Joseph and Aseneth* and in Philo. Cf. Tzvi Novick, "Varieties of Turning: Repentance and Conversion in Ancient Judaism" (unpublished paper).

majority view in rabbinic literature shows that there is a distinction. This is based on the understanding in Judaism of covenant as a soteriological category. The covenant was the basis for exclusion and inclusion in salvation. Conversion has to do with status, while repentance has to do with sin and punishment. Repentance, he maintains, was an essential part of the process of conversion in *Aseneth*. The large amount of attention given in *Aseneth* to practices associated with repentance elsewhere in Second Temple and rabbinic literature supports this view.⁶⁵

So far, we have paid attention only to the relationship between the use of the rhetoric of bringing near in Ephesians and *qarob* in the Hebrew Bible, Qumran, and rabbinic literature. The cultic nuance of the term *qarob* permeates all the sources we have examined. In the Hebrew Bible, the term describes the process of approaching God to worship. In Qumran it describes the process of becoming a member of the sect, which views itself as consecrated to God, and so is a kind of temple. In rabbinic literature, it describes the experience of converts who bring themselves near to God or the Torah and are accepted. And, in Ephesians, it describes the transformation that God brought into the lives of the Gentiles who have become Christians and are now near to God.

A distinction that appears to stand out between Ephesians and the texts we have examined in rabbinic literature concerns the role of God in the process of conversion. For Ephesians, God did everything for the Gentiles through the blood of Christ in the

⁶⁵Sackcloth, ashes, fasting, confession of sin, and prayer. Cf. Novick, "Varieties," 7.

Holy Spirit. In the texts we have examined from rabbinic literature, except in few cases, the emphasis is not so much on God as the beginner of the process but as one who willingly responds to the initiative of the converts by welcoming them. Again, while Ephesians speaks of redemption which includes forgiveness of sins, the texts from rabbinic literature do not see repentance and forgiveness as essential part of the process of conversion.

At this juncture, it is worth asking what possible implication this understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in bringing people close might have for the African Church. The point is obvious. If the Holy Spirit is the one who makes it possible for Gentiles to come near, and Africans are part of the Gentiles, then there is the need to create more awareness of the role of the Holy Spirit in the African Church. There is need to be more conscious of the presence of the Holy Spirit and allow room for the expression of our total dependence on the Third Person of the Trinity. This can be done through the promotion of devotions to the Holy Spirit and more schooling of ministers and the faithful in the area of pneumatology.