PAUL AND THE DIASPORA: 
RE-IMAGINING CHURCH WITH THE AID OF RAHNER AND HARINK*

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ABSTRACT

Just on fifty years ago, the leading Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner offered a celebrated prediction that the church of the future would be a “diaspora” church, even in countries hitherto traditionally Christian. It is interesting to recall this forecast in connection with the recent appearance of a monograph by the Canadian systematic theologian Douglas Harink, Paul among the Post-liberals. In considerable debt to the work of John Yoder, Harink attributes a similar ecclesiological view to Paul, arguing that the apostle saw the situation of the Gentile churches as akin to that of Israel among the nations; his missionary aim was not to draw every human being into the church but to ‘call out’ a people from the nations that, together with Israel, would form the eschatological People of God. This article tests Harink’s understanding of Paul against several significant Pauline texts which suggest a more inclusive and universal summons to salvation.

1ST OCTOBER, 2004 MARKED THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF A PUBLIC LECTURE given in Cologne, Germany, by the leading Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner. In that lecture, which appeared in English translation in 1963, Rahner proposed that the present situation of Christians can be characterised as that of a “diaspora” in a wider non-Christian society. Christianity, he foresaw, would cease to be a religion of growth (from cultural forces) and become a religion of choice, with the laity taking a primary role and the clergy deprived of socially


privileged status. The church would not cease to be missionary—to commend its gospel and seek to implement its values in wider society—but all this would have to be done in a spirit of dialogue rather than imposition from the position of privilege historically enjoyed by Christianity in the West.

Rahner’s call received a lukewarm response from Catholic church authorities, encouraging as they were at the time the growth of Christian democracy in Western Europe, led by figures such as Maurice Schumann, Alcide de Gasperi and Konrad Adenauer. It was regarded as overly pessimistic by many fellow theologians. But Rahner stuck to it to the end of his career. Fifty years on, despite the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the consequent freedom to worship, the vision looks remarkably prophetic—certainly as regards Europe and, we can surely add, Australia.

At the time of the 50th anniversary of Rahner’s attempt to identify a “diaspora” future for the church, the appearance of a monograph attributing a similar ecclesiological view to Paul is particularly interesting. I refer to the study of the Canadian systematic theologian Douglas Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals.* As the title itself indicates, Harink cuts himself from the start as a postliberal theologian—very much in the tradition of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. As regards Paul, he lists four strands in recent Pauline scholarship that he has adopted:

1. The New Perspective on Paul (though with sharp critique of some of its representatives, notably N. T. Wright);5

2. The apocalyptic perspective, with its strong sense of God’s decisive intervention in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to disarm the powers oppressing humanity and inaugurate the new age;6

3. The subjective understanding of the phrase *pistis Christou:* the phrase “encapsulates a narrative about Jesus Christ rather than a narrative about the dynamics of faith in the believing subject”7

4. A political perspective: in the crucifixion and resurrection God has acted apocalyptically to reveal and establish a new political order, shaping a new people or “citizenship” (*politeuma*) called out from

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7 Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 15–16.
9 Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 17.
the old empire to be a sign of God’s socio-political will for all humanity.10

It is not my intention to offer a comprehensive review of Harink’s work or even to address each of the four strands just listed. I propose to fasten upon and critique aspects of this fourth strand, one where Harink is particularly dependent upon the work of the Mennonite theologian John Yoder. For Yoder, the history of Diaspora Judaism, that is, Judaism from the time of the Babylonian exile to the present day, provides a model for the church’s political presence amongst the nations.11 Yoder found this model in Paul: “were the church faithful to Paul, it would readily discover its true character as the Gentile Diaspora people of God whose life would mirror that of Diaspora Judaism.”12 Paul was not the great Helleniser who took an originally Jewish message and shaped it into a new religion that was essentially Greek and Gentile; on the contrary, it is more accurate to call him the “the great Judaizer of Hellenistic culture.”13 What Paul was doing was taking the mode of being God’s people among the nations, as classically indicated by Jeremiah 29:4–7:

4. Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7 But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (NRSV)

For Yoder, followed by Harink, Paul applied this to the new messianic, predominantly Gentile communities which were being formed through his preaching about Jesus the Messiah.14 The Diaspora synagogues before Paul had already been making proselytes of varying degrees of integration with Judaism. The difference for Paul was that, with the advent of the Messiah, the new age had come, the in-gathering had begun, and Gentiles no longer needed to become Jews in order to come under the Torah of the Messiah.

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10 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 17–18.
11 Harink summarises Yoder’s position on Israel as Diaspora in Paul among the Postliberals 194–98.
12 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 190
14 Cf. Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 192.
In Yoder’s understanding of Paul

there are finally no definitive reasons, only historically contingent ones, why the church and non-messianic Judaism should have finally split and entered into an antagonistic relationship. Both sociologically and theologically they shared a virtually identical call to be God’s people in the midst of the nations in a particular way, bearing witness non-violently to God’s sovereignty over the nations and God’s faithfulness and grace to his people.¹⁵

The split was encased as the church became increasingly hellenised and romanised until, with the age of Constantine, the visible Christian body became simply identical with the empire—a process only reversed with the emergence of the communities of the Radical Reformation, including, of course, Yoder’s own Mennonite tradition. These communities reclaimed something of the original Jewish diaspora mode of the early Christian communities, which may still serve as an instructive mode for the present Christian church.¹⁶ In Harink’s view, Yoder’s perspective may function as a “significant resource to enable the church to move beyond its entrenched supersessionism, rooted in a negative view of Judaism and a misreading of Paul, and to begin learning from faithful Judaism a great deal about the church’s own calling and mission in a world wracked by violent nationalisms and tribalisms.”¹⁷

Several questions arise here, including such matters as the validity of Yoder’s view of Judaism as a diaspora,¹⁸ and a whole range of issues in respect to Paul’s continuing view of the place of his non-messianic kinsfolk in regard to the economy of salvation. My focus here will be upon the way in which Harink further articulates a “diaspora” view of the church within an overall interpretation of Paul and his mission. Harink faults Yoder for paying insufficient attention to God’s election of Israel and the part that this should play in Christian theology.¹⁹ In Harink’s understanding of Paul, “God irrevocably elects a specific people—Israel and, through Jesus Christ, the ekklesia as Israel’s extension into the nations—in order that God might bring glory to his

¹⁵ Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 196.
¹⁶ Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 194, 196.
¹⁷ Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 201.
¹⁸ Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 195, n. 62, draws attention to the critique of Yoder offered by Peter Ochs in a foreword to the new posthumous publication of a collection of Yoder’s works, entitled The Jewish-Christian Schism (see n. 13 above for an earlier publication of the collection under the same title) co-edited by himself and Michael G. Cartwright: John Howard Yoder, Michael G. Cartwright, and Peter Ochs, The Jewish-Christian Schism Revisited, Radical Traditions (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), see esp. 2–6.
¹⁹ Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 195–98.
name among the nations."\(^{20}\) Without allowing Rahner’s vision to fall from
view,\(^{21}\) my proposal from this point on is to review further and test against my
own understanding of Paul the vision of the church as God’s “diaspora-mode”
people among the nations that Harink, in considerable debt to Yoder, finds in
Paul.

Harink begins by observing that the postmodern, multicultural, multireligious
world that we inhabit today bears considerable resemblance to the pluralist
world of Paul and the early Christian communities. “As Paul and the early
communities encountered, witnessed to, and lived in a pluralist context as a
minority religion, so too, it seems, do the churches in today’s Western soci-
eties.”\(^{22}\) Hence “we need to listen to Paul anew about the normative form of
Christian witness in a pluralist context.”\(^{23}\) Paul’s aim was not “to propose an-
other religion to the nations,”\(^{24}\) but to call out and build up in their midst a
people out of two cultures (Jewish and Gentile) formed by allegiance to the one
God of Israel and his Son Jesus the Messiah.”\(^{25}\)

Harink suggests that Paul originally hoped to establish such a people by in-
corporating his Gentile converts into the existing Jewish communities and
synagogues of the Diaspora. He believed that through God’s action in Christ
believing Gentiles were now fully members of Abraham’s family and should be
welcomed into full participation in the life of the synagogues without having to
undergo circumcision or take on full observance of the Torah. Rather, Jews and
messianic Gentiles—precisely as Jews (retaining their Torah observance) and
Gentiles (not taking on Torah observance)—would constitute the one people of
God. “(T)he Torah was primarily available to both Jews and Gentiles as the
scripture [italics mine] bearing faithful testimony to God’s deeds in Christ and
the Holy Spirit. It was only secondarily available as a set of practices identify-
ing one particular group within that community, the Jews.”\(^{26}\)

Because, understandably, Paul’s difficult challenge to the Diaspora commu-
nities was by and large rejected, the communities or “citizen’s assemblies”
(\(ekklesi\(\alpha\)i\)) that Paul formed became largely, though not exclusively, Gentile.\(^{27}\)

\(^{20}\) Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 207.
\(^{21}\) It is somewhat ironic that I am linking Rahner and Harink through the common
appeal to the notion of “diaspora” since Harink actually cites Rahner among the lib-
eral theologians, whose focus, in the wake of Schleiermacher, upon the religious
subject as the object of theological inquiry he decries; see *Paul among the Postlib-
erals* 28. By the same token, reflecting prejudices of a past age, Rahner distinguishes
his sense of the church as diaspora from the Jewish diaspora because it is not to in-
volve a “ghetto mentality” (“Position of Christians” 42).
\(^{22}\) Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 211.
\(^{23}\) Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 213.
\(^{24}\) Ibid. Harink justifies at some length his preference for the concept of “culture” over
\(^{25}\) Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 218.
\(^{26}\) Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 221.
\(^{27}\) Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 218–19.
In this connection Harink cites with approval Richard Horsley’s contention that the use of the term ekklesia, the term for the citizens’ “assembly” of the Greek polis (city-state), shows the primarily political rather than religious nature of the communities. The opening address of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 1:2) gives powerful expression to this sense of being a “citizens’ assembly” of God, “sanctified” or set apart from the wider Corinthian society by virtue of God’s election and call to be “holy ones” in that place, in union with a world-wide assembly of all who call upon the name of the Lord. Like Israel, the church in Corinth has been “incorporated into a name, a story, a communion, a purpose and a goal that is not of its own making” but proceeds from divine choice.

The imperial power of God apocalypted in Jesus Christ calls out from among the Gentile peoples nothing less than a new people, in fundamental continuity with the people of Israel, whose form of life is conformed to Jesus Christ and the Scriptures through the power of the Holy Spirit. This God, this people, this culture cannot, in the first instance, be anything other than different in a fundamental sense from any other culture of another people and another god. And that difference precedes and sets the norm of discernment for any engagement with other religions or cultures.

This “difference” compels Harink to confront the issues of religious and cultural pluralism. In such a context, Harink holds firmly to a Pauline theology of election. “The essential marker of elective monotheism ... lies in the desire of the unique God to summon from out of the human mass a unique community established in his name and the desire of that community to serve God in love and obedience by responding to his call.” “Paul’s entire engagement with Gentile culture ... arises out of a message about the God who once chose Israel as his people and is now also calling, a people for his name from among these Gentile nations.” This people is not to supplant Israel but to be joined to Israel in Jesus Christ to form one elect people of God.

Harink acknowledges the difficulty that the notion of “election” creates for conversation or dialogue between religions. He goes on to tackle the even

29 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 231.
30 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 213–32.
31 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 239.
33 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 241.
34 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 242.
greater problem created by what he calls, “the scandal of universality”: the fact that the church believes it has a message and way of life which is “‘good news’ for all peoples,” a claim that is as intrinsic to its identity as the particularity of its election as God’s people.

Here, however, Harink warns against a false move: to shift from a claim about God’s act in Jesus Christ for Israel and the nations to a claim about the universality of Christianity as religion and its supposed mission to establish itself (by various means of persuasion) as the one, true religion in or over the nations. A proper assessment of Paul will see that the gospel which he preaches “does not establish one religion among others, but calls forth a specific people (the ekklēsia of God as an extension of historical Israel) that does not relate to its worldly context as soul to body but, more accurately, as ‘nation’ to ‘nation.’” Paul may have believed the God of Israel to be “intent on saving the peoples of the earth through the power of the gospel,” but this does not mean that he expected the people of God to become “simply coextensive with the peoples of the earth.” “[H]ither, by the cruciform power of the gospel (God) will call out and create a people who will be faithful to the form of life which being “in Christ” or having “the mind of Christ” will shape among them.” The task of this people is not to “acquire control of the helm of worldly history but to enact an alternative history as a witness to the lordship of the crucified Christ among them.”

Thus for Paul, in Harink’s view, the primary task and mission of the church is its own on-going conversion to the lordship of Jesus Christ, so that, “as a converted and converting people,” it may also be itself “a constant invitation and call to the citizens of the wider world to enter the life of the people of God and therein also to participate in the life and purpose of the triune God.”

There is no dissolution here of Gentile and Jew into one generic humanity. The whole point of Paul’s letter to Rome is that these two are not called to eradicate the differences but to “welcome one another” and join in the common praise of the God of Israel.

Paul’s apostolic strategy, Harink believes, functioned principally under the rubric of friendship. “Far from being a street-corner preacher or a ‘mass’ evangelist, Paul took his gospel into the lives and homes of the Gentiles who would welcome him. He met and talked with them face-to-face. ... He urged them to

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35 Ibid.
36 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 243.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 244.
40 Harink, Paul among the Postliberals 248–49.
live in the freedom and holiness of the gospel ... to become partners in his work and to share life with the people of God."41

ASSESSING HARINK

There are many aspects of Harink’s interpretation of Paul with which one could enter into discussion.42 Here I should like to focus solely upon the sense of the ekklesia called forth from among the nations, according to the model of the “diaspora” situation of Israel: not seeking to make believers of all members of the Gentile world but bearing witness to or “modelling,” before the nations, being the people of the God. I should like to test this out against my own reading of Paul in this area.

The sense of the “church” as the community of God’s people called out from among the nations of the world is attractive, and seems at first sight to accord well with an etymological understanding of the Greek word ekklesia. We know that the primary reference of that word in Koine Greek is to an assembly of citizens of the polis called for some particular occasion or purpose.43 How the term came to be applied to the local communities of Jesus’ movement remains one of the great mysteries of NT scholarship. Why did the community speak of itself as the “ekklesia tou theou”? The biblical background traditionally proposed—the use by the LXX of ἔκκλησιά to translate the Hebrew קהלה as a designation of the Exodus community of Israel—is not well founded.44 More pertinent may be its use in the Dead Sea scrolls (1QM 4:10; 1QS 2:4) for the eschatological community of God: a self-designation of the community which understood itself to be the company elected by God to be the centre and point of crystallisation of the eschatological Israel now being called into existence.45

41 Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals* 253. Though Harink does not mention it, Paul’s description of the non-believer’s likely reaction to the phenomena of speaking in tongues and prophecy in 1 Cor 14:22–26 may be of relevance here.

42 See the extensive review by David G. Horrell, *Journal of Theological Studies* 55/2 (2004) 663–68. Horrell faults Harink for taking insufficient account of passages in Paul where, especially in the ethical area, there is considerable overlap rather than discontinuity with the values, terms and forms of moral discourse in the surrounding culture, Greco-Roman as well as Jewish (e.g. Phil 4:8; Rom 12:17; one could surely add Rom 12:1–2).


44 While *ekklesia* is almost always a translation of קהלה, the reverse is not at all always the case. It is so predominantly in 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and many of the Psalms but, crucially, is not so for the Pentateuch, save for several references in Deuteronomy (4:10; 9:10; 18:16; 23:2, 3, 4 [2], 9; 31:30); for the Exodus community the term *synagōgē* is much more prevalent; cf. K. L. Schmidt, art. *ekklesia* *TDNT* 3.529.

45 Roloff, art. *ekklesia* 412a.
The word “call” (kalein) is, of course, very significant for Paul. It occurs in the phrase (toutous kai ekalesen) following upon the sense of God’s election of the community of believers in the catena of divine saving events Paul sets out in ringing tones in Rom 8:29–30. And one thinks also of the “vessels of mercy prepared before-hand for glory,” whom God “has called (hous kai ekalesen), not only from Jews but also from Gentiles,” of Rom 9:24, where Paul goes on (v. 25) to find scriptural validation for this mixed composition of God’s eschatological people in a composite rendering of Hos 2:23 and 1:10. But whether Paul or the Greek speakers to whom he wrote heard the connection between such “calling” and the resultant ekklesia as strikingly as we do is a good point. We still tremble under the strictures uttered against such linguistic associations over 40 years ago by James Barr.46

The key issue, however, it seems to me, is whether Paul thought of the ekklesia as potentially (and ideally) comprising all members of the Gentile world or whether, as Harink, following Yoder suggests, it is not a matter of the people of God becoming simply coextensive with the peoples of the earth, but of calling a select group, akin to diaspora Israel, from among the peoples of the earth.

To a significant degree the issue revolves around the sense of the word “all” (pas/pantes), which occurs so frequently in Paul’s letter to Rome (1:5 [en parin tois ethnēsin]; 1:16; 2:10; 3:9, 23; [4:16]; 5:12, 18; 8:32; 10:4; 11:32) and is particularly prominent in Rom 10:11–13:

9. because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10. For it is by believing in the heart that one gains righteousness and it is by confessing with the mouth that one gains salvation. 11. For scripture says, “Every- one who believes in him will not be put to shame.” 12. For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him. 13. For “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 3:5 [LXX]).

It has long been my understanding that Paul’s “all” in Romans is collective: that is, it has the implied sense “all: Gentiles as well as Jews”; or “Jews as well as Gentiles,” rather than referring to individuals.47 The question remains, then, whether Paul intends all Gentiles globally as addresses of the Gospel or whether, as I think Harink would want to maintain, he thinks of calling out cer-

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47 See further Brendan Byrne, Romans (Sacra Pagina 6; Collegeville, MN: Glazier, 1996) 353.
tain individual Gentiles from among the Gentile mass to become members of the eschatological people of God.

If the latter is the case, we may then ask what becomes of the remaining mass of the Gentile world, whose present situation and portending fate Paul sketches in uncompromisingly negative terms in Rom 1:18–32. Harink concedes that in Paul’s view God’s salvific will is universal. But did Paul conceive of some kind of salus extra populum Dei (“salvation outside the people of God”) for this vast mass of humankind that either has not heard or has not been impressed by either the original proclamation of the Gospel or the enduring witness of the ekklesia called out from among them?

Let me recall other Pauline texts that would seem to be of relevance in this connection:

1 Cor 9:19–22: 19 For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though I myself am not under the law) so that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law) so that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, so that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.

Is this “winning” (kerdainein) a winning for the ekklesia or is it a winning for “salvation”? That “winning” in fact has to do with salvation is suggested by the phrase “save some” (tinas sōsō) in v 22 (cf. also 10:32–33). 48

Then there are two passages in 2 Corinthians:

2 Cor 2:14–16a: 14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. 15 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are being lost; 16 to the one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

Paul here seems to operate with a clear distinction between those who are being saved (tois sōzomenois) and those who are being lost (tois apollymenois).

And a little later, defending again his apostolic strategy:

48 Cf. also 1 Thess 2:15b–16a (with reference to the Jews in Judea): “... they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved.”
2 Cor 4:1-4: 1 Therefore, since it is by God’s mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. 2 We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God’s word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone (pros pasan syneidēsin anthrōpōn) in the sight of God. 3 And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are being lost (tois apollymenois). 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

What is the range of “everyone” or more literally “every conscience” in the phrase (pros pasan syneidēsin anthrōpōn [v 2])? And we note again the reference to “those being lost” (v 3).

In many ways it all comes back to the crucial text in Rom 11:26–32, where Paul, with reference to Gentile believers’ attitude to non-messianic Jews, speaks of the “mystery” that has to do with the final salvation of God’s people:

25. For I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers (and sisters), concerning this mystery, lest you be wise in your own judgments, the mystery, namely, that a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number (plērōma) of the Gentiles has come in, 26. and so all Israel will be saved.

It is now generally agreed that by “all Israel” Paul means ethnic Israel (as in v 25)—though not necessarily with the implication of the salvation of each and every individual in a quantitative sense.⁴⁹ But what is meant by the “entrance” of the plērōma of the Gentiles? Plērōma is notoriously open to several shades of meaning (that which fills; that which, when added, brings to completion; the full number; that which is filled; the act of fulfilling; state of being full; etc.).⁵⁰ The usual understanding of plērōma here is that it designates the “fulness” that will be achieved when the number of the Gentiles destined to be saved is complete. However, plērōma could be understood in a sense congenial to Harink⁵¹ as the “topping-up” of ethnic Israel which will make complete the composite eschatological people of God. That would be to understand the phrase exegetically: the completion which consists of the Gentiles. This would go along with Yoder’s—and Harink’s—sense that what Paul had in mind was more the Judaisation of the Gentile world than the Hellenisation of the Jewish.

While it is not possible to rule out this interpretation of a highly controversial text, it does seem to me to run counter to the statements regarding salvation

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⁴⁹ See further Byrne, Romans 354.
⁵⁰ Cf. DBAG 829–30.
⁵¹ Though Harink does not mention the phrase in the context where one might have expected such a mention: the treatment of 11:1–32 on pp. 173–74.
or its opposite (eternal loss) in the other Pauline texts cited above. Paul thinks of the Gentile world as lying under the wrath of God, threatened with eschatological destruction. The only source of rescue for members of that world is a positive response to the preaching of the gospel and incorporation into the ekklēsia, the community of faith. Through this process they are transferred from the world that is being lost (tois apollymesinos) to that which is being saved (tois sōzomenois [2 Cor 2:15]).

This means that when Paul, at a mature stage of his career (following the writing of Romans), surveyed the situation of the world in regard to salvation he would presumably have seen it divided into four groups: 1. the bulk of Israel that had not responded in faith to the proclamation of the crucified Messiah—that is, the Israel whose current negative response to the gospel and future fate with respect to salvation is the particular focus of Romans 9–11; 2. members of Israel (Jewish believers) who had responded positively to that preaching (the “remnant chosen by grace” of Rom 11:5); 3. members of the Gentile world who had responded to the preaching with faith, and who had followed up that response through baptism into the community of salvation; 4. members of the Gentile world who had not so responded. It is members of groups 2 and 3 who constitute the ekklēsia as Paul would have contemplated it throughout the Mediterranean world. This composite community of faith is factually in a “diaspora” situation, a scatter of tiny communities in the great cities of that world. The question is whether, in Paul’s mind, it is also in principle in such a situation, i.e., like the “diaspora” situation of Israel, or, on the contrary, it is thrust much more in a missionary situation towards that as yet unbelieving world than Israel ever was.

It is certainly the case that it was the latter view that prevailed in what, generations after Paul, came to be called “Christianity,” a religion distinct from Judaism, which eventually, of course, became the official religion of the prevailing world power (Rome under Constantine) in a way unthinkable for Judaism. The question is whether this development was a genuine fulfillment of Paul’s own expectation as expressed in his letters or whether it represents a quantum leap beyond that expectation, which in itself adhered far more closely to the Jewish “diaspora” model.

Harink has given us a reading of Paul which calls the latter view from his writings. I have adduced in this review statements in his letters which I think either directly or implicitly stand against it. The intriguing thing is that the Christian church today, as Rahner foresaw fifty years ago, does seem in many parts of the world to be moving towards the “diaspora” situation that Harink has found in Paul and, which, of course, the communities of the Radical Reformation have for centuries maintained to be the true Christian stance. It is this match with present and likely future reality that has rendered Harink’s reading of Paul’s ecclesiology so apposite and timely, and so deserving of consideration by contemporary students of Paul.