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**'Transformational ethics' in Plotinus and Paul**

In his treatise on the virtues, Plotinus argues that man should 'live, no longer, the human life of the good man—such as Civic Virtue commends—but, leaving this beneath him, will take up instead another life, that of the Gods. For it is to the Gods, not to the good, that our Likeness must look: to model ourselves upon good men is to produce an image of an image (*hoos eikoon eikoni hoomoiootai*): we have to fix our gaze above the image and attain Likeness to the Supreme Exemplar (*paradeigma*)' (I.2.7; transl. Stephen MacKenna).

Transformational ethics, which characterizes Platonic and Neo-Platonist thought, has also exerted influence on Jewish and Christian writers like Philo, Paul, and Clement of Alexandria. In this paper I shall focus on similarities between Paul and Plotinus. Making use of new studies on the setting of Paul's Corinthian correspondence (Bruce Winter, *Philo and Paul among the Sophists*, Cambridge 1997), I shall argue that Paul places the outward and rhetorical *modus operandi* of contemporary sophists in stark contrast to the need for inward transformation into God's *eikoon* (2 Cor 3.18-4.4).

By insisting on the transformation into God's image within the immediate context of anti-sophistic polemics, Paul seems to adapt the Classical theme of real philosophy as opposed to mere sophism. This theme is applied by introducing the notion of being transformed into the image of God (cf. Plotinus, I.2.7). Paul further explores this idea of transformation by drawing on the Platonic notion of the inner man (Theo Heckel, *Der Innere Mensch: Die paulinische Verarbeitung eines platonischen Motivs*, Tübingen 1993; cf. the 'authentic man' in Plotinus, I.6.9); all this should enable one to live an ethical life that is well-pleasing to God (2 Cor 4.16-5.10). In this paper, I shall show the Hellenization of Pauline ethics by drawing on Platonic transformational ethics as expressed in Plotinus and other Platonists.

I would like to suggest that it was only from the Graeco-Roman period onwards that Jews and Christians developed an interest in man's transformation into God's image. Apart from the *Book of Genesis*, Jewish Scripture barely articulated the view that human beings were created after God's image and likeness (*Genesis* 1.26). This isolated passage in Jewish Scripture only became the locus of the distinctive *concept* of man bearing the image of God when it was translated into Greek and could be linked up with Graeco-Roman reflections on being like God, assimilating one's soul to God, imitating God, becoming like God (Plato, *Theaetetus* 176A; cf. Hubert Merki, *Homoioosis Theooi*, Freiburg 1952; David Sedley, 'The Ideal of Godlikeness,' in: G. Fine, ed., *Plato 2*, Oxford 1999), and attaining likeness to the supreme exemplar (Plotinus).

Platonic transformational ethics seems to have exerted a profound influence on Graeco-Roman Judaism and nascent Christianity. This process can be demonstrated by focussing on Paul and Plotinus. Plotinus, like Paul, seems to understand the idea of becoming like God as an ethical ideal; by imitating the original, man detaches himself from the body and its concerns and is purified (cf. Julian Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New*,

Ithaca/London 1999, Chap. 3: 'Becoming Like God: Ethics, Human Nature, and the Divine').