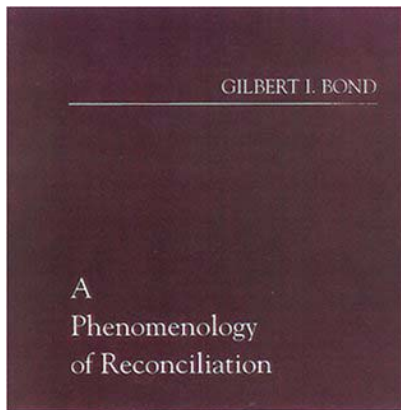


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Diasporic Community,  
Creole Consciousness,  
& the Religious Life of Paul

**Bond, Gilbert I.**

***Paul and the Religious Experience of Reconciliation:  
Diasporic Community and Creole Consciousness***

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In this wide-ranging study Bond argues that Paul's mystical transformation can be understood in terms of modern theories of phenomenology of religion drawn primarily from the insights of Edmund Husserl and William James. He approaches Paul from the so-called "New Perspective" in that he (1) rejects the psychological readings of Paul advanced by Augustine and Luther and (2) seeks to make sense of Paul in the context of his religious community as a Diaspora Pharisee. The study is highly complex, and I cannot pretend here to offer more than a few highlights. But it will be well to hear Bond's description of what a phenomenological study aims to accomplish:

Phenomenology in general and phenomenology of religion in particular ... proceed in a direction similar to the sociological (from text to beyond text), yet aim to uncover the ontological realm as revealed in the relationship between various modalities of being and consciousness. The theoretical frame within which a religious-phenomenological investigation proceeds is determined by the person's experience of the sacred. (73)

Bond begins in chapter 1 with William James, who offered two opposing "constructions of the human agent in experience" (6). On the one hand, in *Varieties of Religious Experience* James presented "the isolated, atomized individual of religious experience

whose consciousness is mediated by subjectivity.” On the other hand, in *Principles of Psychology* James presented “a relational self.” Although Bond explores both constructions and the interplay between them, it is the latter that occupies him most fully, as he argues for “the relational ground of being as the source of human modality and the mediation of the ontological structure of the sacred” (6). In other words, apart from the ontological reality of the Divine, one’s experience of it is mediated by the shared experience of one’s interpretive community.

In chapter 2, Bond argues that one’s sense of self is similarly mediated: “We must ask how phenomenology would differ in the understanding of its project if it proceeded not from the investigation of experiential subjectivity and its concomitant ontology of consciousness, but undertook the examination of experience as mediated by the plurality of the selves, which owe their existence to a relational ontology” (14). And again:

James concludes that there must be multiple social selves, for “*a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of these his images is to wound him.... [We] may practically say that he has as many different social selves as there are distinct groups of persons about whose opinion he cares*” [quoting *Principles of Psychology* 1:294).... The phenomenological experience is one of knowing and feeling what another person thinks and feels as one’s self becomes another subject’s intentional object. (22)

This leads to an exploration of various theories of honor and shame, from which Bond proposes

that Paul manifests the behavior of one who has internalized and enacted a commitment to an idealized self through his identity and membership in the diasporic community of Pharisees. His ability to maintain conformity to their ideals, I contend, serves the function of protecting him from a painful self-conscious experience of an unacceptable and inadequate part of his being...: not the guilt-strapped struggling, unjustified spiritual hero before a relentlessly righteous and just Deity who demands repentance. Paul’s struggle is both the internal protection against archaic wounds to his nuclear self, and the communal protection against devaluing interaction with derisive ideal onlookers of the Hellenistic Diaspora, both sources of past and present shame-humiliation. (31)

Bond then interprets Paul’s mystical experience psychologically as an integration of dissociated elements of his fragmented self that, “once incorporated become the core of

his self and the source of his powerful need for the reconciled community of Jews and Gentiles who together become the collective and cultural mediation of the sacred” (31).

In chapter 3, Bond expands this point through explorations of Augustine, Luther, and Paul’s own diasporic context. He concludes that “Paul’s struggle is neither the crisis of opposing will nor conscience. In Paul we encounter the crisis of creolization, for in the culturally heterogeneous composition of his identity and experience reside the sources of his religious creativity and his religious struggle that are responses to the conditions of a Pharisee in the Hellenistic Jewish Diaspora” (65).

With this hermeneutic context in mind, Bond turns in chapters 4 and 5 to discuss Paul’s theology of reconciliation: “Paul’s primary mode of being is best understood as that of a *creole*; his consciousness, *creolian*; and the process by which he tries to cultivate and impart sensibilities to others I refer to as *creolization*. Paul’s emic term for the process of creolization is *katallage* (reconciliation)” (79).

Bond lifts the term “creole” from linguistic and anthropological descriptions of the blending of elements from Europe, Africa, and the Americas into new, hybrid cultures in the New World. He identifies three basic elements of creole culture. First, it is an authentic expression of the peoples in the blended context, for whom it is unnatural to operate strictly according to the standard conventions of any one of the root cultures. Second, it is transgressive in that it deliberately reworks elements of the root cultures. Third, it is innovative (81). Bond sees Paul’s transformed self as creole in that “The radical introduction of inclusive heterogeneity into his consciousness as the indispensable [*sic*] core of his authentic personhood marks the emergence of creole consciousness” (83).

Bond’s startling suggestion is that Paul did not have a creole consciousness before his transformative, mystical experience. Of course, he recognizes that the Pharisees made certain obvious accommodations to life in a Greco-Roman world (85), but he maintains that “It is possible to manifest the cultural embodiments of creolization to an outside observer without possessing the consciousness of one’s location at the intersection of cultural convergence. This is the condition of Paul the Pharisee” (83). Bond’s point is that, prior to his transformation, Paul’s sense of self was mediated through his experience of life within an exclusivist Pharisee community:

In Paul’s psychic configuration, purity through separation from Gentiles would have offered one defense against the injuries of shame in a Greco-Roman culture of honor with whose values of status and strength he was thoroughly intimate. He would look upon them as unclean and therefore inferior by the standards of his

community of Pharisees. But the vulnerable core of Paul's wounded self would have projected upon those Jews who were less than zealous and more than lax in their observance of the law. He would therefore be able to look upon his Diaspora brother through the eyes of Greek onlookers and see in them the unidentified receptacle of his projected, narcissistically wounded self. In a double movement of intersubjectivity, Paul would unconsciously reconfigure the elements of both cultic purity (Hebrew) and honor/shame (Greek). (96)

But all that changed for Paul when he was snatched up by the divine:

Paul's ecstatic moment of intense exposure of himself in the presence of the ultimate "ideal spectator" (William James), wherein both his "shame parts" and his experience of the Deity is pervasive glory would enable him to incorporate the despised, devalued, and painfully intolerable realms of himself in the presence of divine empathy whose penetrating acceptance of the unacceptable in Paul results in the experience of wholeness as the heterogeneous self... Paul would have entered an extended period of disorientation as he attempted both to make sense of his transformative transport to heaven and to relocate himself in a community that would confirm and conform to his experience. (104)

In other words, Paul's new sense of self compelled him to create new "eschatological communities of messianic expectation shaped by the values and dispositions of inclusive otherness, mutual vulnerability, and empathic bonding" (106), not merely because such communities reflected his new understanding of the Deity but also because they reflected and confirmed his new understanding of himself. Despite his protests to the contrary, one wonders here whether Bond has really provided an adequate alternative to the Augustinian and Lutheran readings of Paul. Has he merely replaced one existential angst with another?

In my opinion, Bond's study suffers from a problem that plagues some social-scientific studies of the New Testament. Theories of human behavior based on studies of modern people can be useful as heuristic devices to raise questions about ancient people reflected in ancient texts, but at some point the argument must be established not merely on a cogent description of what the model predicts but on evidence from primary sources as to what was actually happening in the ancient communities. The next logical step to test Bond's reading of Paul would be to engage the work of scholars who specialize in the analysis of texts and material culture. I might suggest, for example, such studies as Jane Webster, "Creolizing the Roman Provinces" (*AJA* 105 [2001]: 209–26). Webster explores the emergence of Santaria in Cuba as an analogy for the emergence of a genuinely new cult of the horse goddess Epona at the intersection between Celtic tribes and Roman

colonial occupation. Or in a similar vein, one could mine the essays collected in Siân Jones and Sarah Pearce, *Jewish Local Patriotism and Self-Identification in the Graeco-Roman Period* (JSPSup 31; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), which explore literary and archaeological evidence for how various Jewish communities negotiated new identities in various Diaspora contexts. Bond's argument is relatively short, comprising only 116 pages of text, but it is highly abstract, theoretical, turgid prose, as one may see from the excerpts above. Some interaction with the primary evidence for life in one or more specific Pauline communities would help ground the arguments in the real-life experiences of actual communities in Paul's world, if not those of Paul himself.

I have by no means adequately represented all the complex ideas Bond weaves together from phenomenology, psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and so on. As a New Testament scholar I appreciate how much he has absorbed of the current debates in Pauline studies, and I can forgive him for some gaps, since he is not a specialist in the field. Bond's reading of Paul is indebted especially to J. D. G. Dunn and informed also by extensive reading of numerous other Pauline scholars. Still, I might suggest a few places where additional reading would have been useful. Bond mentions Stowers's analysis of diatribe in Rom 5–8 (71) in order to argue, à la Scroggs, that Rom 5–8 is not of a piece with Rom 1–4; 9–11, but he shows no awareness of Stowers's *Rereading of Romans*, which presents a detailed analysis of the diatribe in Rom 1–4 and offers a unified reading of the entire letter. Bond's discussion of Paul's Adam typology (107–8) would benefit from engagement with N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant*, and his discussion of Paul's story of Jesus would benefit from engagement with Richard Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*.

Bond's phenomenological approach to Paul is interesting and will be useful to different scholars for different reasons. Conservative scholars who often chafe at the tendency of modern critical methods to bracket out the divine from historical research will appreciate the perspective of phenomenology, which takes seriously the individual's experience of the sacred as a reflection of the ontological truth of the divine. Those who are interested in social-science approaches to New Testament interpretation may be stimulated by Bond's phenomenological insights into such topics as honor/shame, dyadic personality, and the psychological development of the person. Those who study the dynamic interplay between fundamentalist religions and nationalist politics will gain insight into the roots of rage in the various culture wars of our time (e.g., 94–96). Those who follow the "New Perspective" on Paul will appreciate Bond's demonstration of how phenomenology might shed light on Paul's transformation from an exclusivist Pharisee to an apostle of a "creole messiah" who evokes a new, inclusivist community that transgresses the boundaries of traditional cultures.