

Summary of Klaus Vibe's Ph.d.-thesis, *The Spirit of Faith: A comparative Study of Philo's and Paul's Reading of the Abraham Story*.

The thesis takes as its starting point the fact that Philo of Alexandria and Paul have in common that they refer to the Abrahamic promises as promises of the Spirit or of divine inspiration. This fact has, of course, been acknowledged by Pauline scholarship, but only few have used this observation as a stepping stone to a closer examination of how Philo's and Paul's reading of the Abraham story stand out from one another. Many scholars have emphasized the differences between Philo's and Paul's respective readings of the Abraham story – with good reason, as the differences are real and substantial. Philo depicts Abraham as a particular kind of soul, which he characterizes as a lover of learning – as a φιλομαθής. The lover of learning is characterized by the fact that he or she reaches perfection through education, that is, that he or she uses education as a vehicle for the attainment of virtue in a consummated form. It follows from Philo's description of the lover of learning that virtue is considered as something that is attained as the student engages herself first with the encyclical studies and thereafter with the study of philosophy.

Philo defines faith in God as the queen of virtue, that is, as the virtue that encompasses all other virtues. Hence, Philo refers to Abraham's faith, as attested in Gen 15:6, as something that reflects the fact that he has attained virtue in a generic or consummated form. This means that faith is configured as an apex, that is, as something that is reached on the basis of long and strenuous process. Scholars have rightly emphasized that this is something that represents a real difference between Philo and Paul; hence, for instance, Benjamin Schliesser argues in his book from 2007 *Abraham's Faith in Romans 4* that "Philo's intellectualism and individualism his notion of achievement, the reduction to the psyche, and the placing of faith at the *end* of one's relationship with God mark the most profound divergences between the two theologians."<sup>1</sup> Philo's appropriation of a sequential pattern, according to which faith or virtue is attained as a result of a successful completion of an educational program is a critical difference between Philo and Paul. Scholars – not least professor Karl Olav Sandnes – have argued that such a sequential pattern is something that is irreconcilable with Paul's worldview.

Nonetheless, Philo's and Paul's descriptions of Abraham's faith have also something in common, not least the fact that they both describe Abraham's faith in God's promises as something that involves considering the things that are not yet present as already present due to the steadfastness of the God of the promise (*Migr.* 43–44; Rom 4:17). Moreover, the fact that Paul describes contemporary faith (i.e., the faith of those who follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith – Rom 4:12) as something that involves God's extension of the power of the Spirit (Gal 3:1–5) suggests that it would be worthwhile to take a closer look on how their respective readings of the Abraham story are related to their respective convictions regarding the nature of God's gift of the Spirit. Thus, in brief, this study takes as its starting point the fact that both Philo and Paul associate the Abrahamic promises with God's gift of the Spirit. On this background I have examined (a) how they describe the gift of the Spirit as being related to the Abraham story and (b) what kind of role the Spirit assumes in the lives of those who follow in the footsteps of Abraham's faith. This examination is pursued to cast further light not only upon Philo's and Paul's respective readings of the Abraham story but also upon the way their respective philosophies/theologies stand out from one another on a more general level.

<sup>1</sup>Benjamin Schliesser, *Abraham's Faith in Romans 4* (WUNT 2/224; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 424.

This thesis is concerned with clarifying Philo's and Paul's views regarding what kind of role the Spirit assumes in the lives of those who believe, for which reason it is framed by recent discussions of how divine and human agency were related to one another in Paul and his cultural environment. This is so because in both Philo's writings and Paul's letters divine inspiration is the means through which the gap between the divine and the mundane world is bridged.

The account of Philo's reading of the Abraham story is given on the basis of an examination of three of Philo's allegorical commentaries (*De Congressu*, *De Migratione Abrahami* and *De Mutatione Nominum*) that have in common that they all stress the importance of education for Abraham's attainment of faith or virtue. However, this is not the only thing that these commentaries have in common. In these commentaries, Philo also stresses the fact that virtue is a gift – and therefore something that must be ascribed to God. Hence, Philo argues not only that virtue is attained through education, but also that virtue is attained as a gift from God. Philo is able to maintain both perspectives for two reasons: a) because he identifies Abraham's love for learning as something that springs from divine inspiration, and b) because he identifies the lover of learning's exposure to learning as an exposure to the divine Logos and, as such, as an exposure to the divine powers that draw the lover of learning to God.

Moreover, in *De Migratione Abrahami*, Philo describes Abraham's migration from Chaldea to the promised land as a migration to the vision of God. A closer reading of Philo's description of Abraham's path to the vision of God reveals that this is described as a migration to the noetic aspect of the Logos. Hence, in brief, Philo describes the vision of God as a moment of inspiration that causes Abraham's mind or thoughts to be aligned with the divine logos, that is with the divine mind, thoughts or rationality.

The fact that Philo not only describes Abraham's faith as something that is associated with the completion of academic studies, but also as a gift that must be ascribed exclusively to God reveals that divine and human agency are related to one another in a non-contrastive way. Hence, divine agency is not configured as something that obliterates human agency. The thesis proposes that in Philo's account of Abraham's path to virtue, divine inspiration is configured as something that causes Abraham to be aligned with the divine aspirations and values, for which reason Abraham's own pursuit of, aspiration for, and attainment of virtue is configured as something that is ultimately caused by God. Hence, divine and human agency are configured as something that are related by kinship, insofar as Abraham zeal for virtue springs from divine inspiration and hence from what he has in common with God.

Paul's reading of the Abraham story is obviously very different, as Paul's reading does not presume that virtue is something that is gained from education. However, Paul has in common with Philo not only that he draws a connection between God's promise to Abraham and contemporary experiences of the Spirit, but also that he refers to the gift of the Spirit as something that causes virtue to sprout in the human soul (Gal 5:22–23). Moreover, a closer reading of Paul's account of what kind of role the Spirit assumes in the lives of those who believe reveals that Philo and Paul have more in common than the fact that they both associate human virtue with God's gift of the Spirit. Thus, Paul also describes divine inspiration as something that establishes a relationship of kinship between the believer and God, for which reason Paul also describes divine inspiration as something that causes the human spirit or the human heart to be aligned with the divine Spirit. Moreover, Paul, like Philo, describes divine inspiration as something that causes a certain divine mindset (φρόνημα) to be established in those who believe, that is, in those who follow in footsteps of Abraham's faith. It follows from this description that also in Paul's account of what kind of role the Spirit

assumes in the lives of those who believe divine and human agency are related to one another by kinship and hence in a non-contrastive way.

However, it should be mentioned that Paul refers to God's Spirit as the Spirit of the Son. Hence, divine inspiration is something that causes humans to relate to God in the manner of God's Son, for which reason divine inspiration manifests itself as humans participate in the Son's cry, Abba Father. It follows from this description that whereas Philo describes divine inspiration as something that causes the believer to be aligned with the mindset of the divine Logos, Paul describes divine inspiration as something that causes the believer to be aligned with the mindset of the Son (Phil 2:5). Thus, Philo and Paul have in common that they both align their views regarding the nature of the gift of inspiration with their views regarding the pattern of God's grace. Hence, Philo defines the goal of life in terms of being conformed to the image of the Logos, whereas Paul defines it in terms of being conformed to the image of God's Son. Philo describes the Logos from the perspective of his Jewish belief that God is the creator and provider of the cosmos, for which reason virtue is defined as a life lived in accordance with the pattern of God's grace as manifested in God's providential care for the cosmos. Paul describes God and God's Spirit from the perspective of the death and resurrection of God's Son, for which reason virtue is defined as a life lived in accordance with the pattern of God's grace as manifested on the cross of Christ.

Hence, Paul's reading of the Abraham story distinguishes itself from Philo's not so much in the fact that Philo's reading is concerned with describing Abrahamic faith in terms of virtue whereas Paul is not. The differences rather manifest themselves in their respective convictions regarding the question not only of how virtue is attained, but also of what virtue implies.