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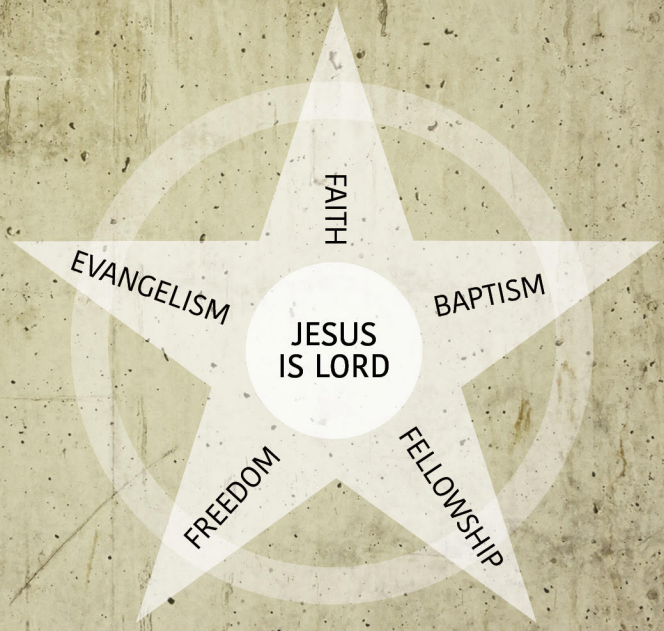

Issue 8 (2023)

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Editorial

Simon Woodman

Baptists have long declared their reliance on scripture, confidently centring themselves on the word of God as it is revealed through the Bible. Yet curiously, this has on occasion manifested itself as a suspicion of the discipline of 'Biblical Studies', almost as if there were something un-Godly about anything other than a 'plain-reading' approach to the biblical text. Yet the Baptist tradition has nonetheless generated many fine biblical scholars, and the current generation of Baptist biblical scholarship is no exception. In this issue we are pleased to publish five articles which demonstrate the breadth of biblical engagement in our churches and Colleges.

Helen Paynter explores the ways in which the conquest of Canaan is represented in three 'exodus psalms' (78, 106, 135), each of which marginalises the events of the conquest within its overall narrative framework. Paynter intriguingly suggests that this may reflect a moment in Israel's post-exilic history when those who had themselves been traumatised at the hands of the Babylonians chose to downplay the commemoration of trauma suffered by others at the hands of their ancestors.

Marion Carson uses a careful study of suffering and hope in Romans 5.1-5 to show how biblical scholarship can inform the work of practical and pastoral theologians. Whilst recognising that for many seeking or offering pastoral care the biblical text is a source of direct comfort, Carson moves beyond 'foundationalism' (what is the Bible telling me to *do*?) to a 'character ethics' approach (who is the Bible calling me to *be*?). In dialogue with Stanley Hauerwas, a reading emerges that challenges individualism, and emphasises instead the importance of community in understanding perseverance through suffering as a virtue shaped through hopeful relationship with Christ by the Spirit.

Tim Carter stays with the epistle to the Romans for his analysis of the divisions in the Roman Christian community over Sabbath observance and food laws. Drawing on the work of Robert Jewett, Carter sees in Paul's writing to the Romans a call for Christians to address issues of division with tolerance rather than separation. Carter applies this ethic of tolerance to the divisive contemporary issue of same-sex relationships within the church. Carter suggests that differences of approach to scripture lie at the heart of both the ancient debate in Rome, and contemporary debates around sexuality, and that unity in our time might be found in heeding the call for tolerance that Paul issued to the Roman church.

Amanda Higgin turns our attention to the Epistle to the Hebrews, inviting us to engage this early Christian homily 'on its own terms' in its use of the language of 'perfection'. Higgin suggests that this concept is a fundamental principle for the thought-world of the author: not as the end-goal of a call to ethics, but as the starting-point for the Christian journey of discipleship. According to Hebrews, perfection has already broken into the present through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, and so the Christian community is called to strive faithfully towards that perfection, even as they endure the imperfections of the present world. Higgin suggests that this affects the way Hebrews engages the stories of Jewish scriptural heroes, reading them not *typologically* but *teleologically* - their imperfection is perfected in Christ. Higgin suggests that such a *teleological hermeneutic* has much to say to contemporary debates around scripture and ethics.

Anthony Clarke locates the current differences among Baptists on attitudes towards human sexuality as being not primarily a disagreement about what the Bible teaches, but of how to read the Bible in the first place. In other words, it is a difference of hermeneutics. In dialogue with four authors who have written on sexuality, Clarke pays particular attention to the differences between their hermeneutical approaches. He concludes with a warning: '*As Baptists continue to discuss the status of same-sex relationships it is vital that we are able to think carefully and deeply about our own hermeneutical approaches and convictions and not assume our approach is either universal or simply correct.*' This

is then followed by 12 key questions for Baptists to consider as they reflect on how their socialisation within their interpretive communities affects the ethical conclusions they draw from scripture.

These five essays speak to the strength of Baptist biblical scholarship in our time, and also of the importance of such scholarly efforts to contemporary theological and ethical debates. The fears of those who might see Biblical Studies as a distraction from a more pure spiritual reading of the Bible are allayed, as the Word of God revealed through the diligent study of scripture continues to speak afresh to the church that Christ calls into being.

That the Next Generation Might Remember: The Conquest of Canaan in Israel's Collective Memory and in the Psalms

Helen Paynter

Abstract

Several of the psalms contain significant allusions to the events of the exodus. Some of these offer detailed and prolonged retellings, with attention given to quite minor parts of the narrative as recorded in Exodus – Numbers. By contrast, these psalms appear to pay scant attention to the events of the conquest of Canaan. This question has not so far received significant attention in the scholarly literature. The present paper uses three psalms (78, 106 and 135) as a test to evaluate this hypothesis, and offers some tentative proposals to shape the ongoing investigation.

Keywords: Hebrew Bible, exodus, conquest of Canaan, collective memory, psalms

Introduction: exodus and conquest beyond Exodus – Judges

The story of the exodus from Egypt is told, retold, and alluded to around 120 times in the Hebrew Bible beyond the narrative in the book of Exodus itself.[1]

Much work has been done on the exodus traditions that are found throughout the Hebrew Bible. In particular, Linda Stargel's book *The Construction of Exodus Identity in the Texts of Ancient Israel* takes a social-scientific approach to consider how the retellings of the exodus

[1] Linda Stargel, *The Construction of Exodus Identity in the Texts of Ancient Israel*, (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2018), xviii.

contributed to the shaping of the national identity. Another significant contribution to the literature is the collection of papers in the book edited by Michael Fox, *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture.*[2]

Many of the direct references to the exodus are found in the Psalter, where a number of psalms (which I will henceforth refer to as *exodus psalms*[3]) make reference to events from the exodus story for hymnic or didactic purposes, 'that the next generation might know' (Ps 78:6). Four of the most extensive studies of these have been performed by Linda Stargel,[4] Susan Gillingham,[5] Alviero Niccacci[6] and Daniel Estes.[7] However the exodus events which they seek to identify are different. These are broadly set out in the table below.

Linda Stargel	**Susan Gillingham**	**Alviero Niccacci**	**Daniel Estes**
The adversity experienced by the Hebrews in Egypt.	The escape from Egypt.	The plagues.	The deliverance at the Red/Reed Sea.
The supernatural intervention of God.	The role of Moses in leading the people out of Egypt.	The parting of the sea.	The destruction of Pharaoh's army.
God bringing the people out of Egypt.	The crossing of the Red/Reed Sea.	The defeat of the Egyptians.	The rejoicing of Israel.

[2] R. Michael Fox (ed.), *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).
[3] This is not intended to suggest that the exodus is necessarily the main theme of the psalm.
[4] Stargel, *The Construction of Exodus Identity.*
[5] Susan Gillingham, 'The Exodus Tradition and Israelite Psalmody.' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52.1 (1999): 19-46.
[6] Alviero Niccacci, 'The Exodus Tradition in the Psalms, Isaiah and Ezekiel.' *Liber annuus* 61 (2011): 9-35.
[7] Daniel J. Estes, 'The Psalms, the Exodus, and Israel's Worship' in Fox (ed), *Reverberations of the Exodus in Scripture*, 35-50.

Daniel Estes applies his criteria separately, using each in turn to identify psalms where it finds resonance. The other three scholars look for clustering of psalms where their three selected motifs coexist, in order to identify the principal exodus psalms. Using their different criteria, Stargel, Gillingham and Niccacci have identified between seven and nine psalms which contain a significant element of exodus retelling. These are set out in the table below.

	Exodus psalms identified								
Stargel	77	78			105	106	114	135	136
Gillingham	77	78	80	81	105	106	114	135	136
Niccacci		78	80	81	105	106	114		136

Undoubtedly the exodus event is a major element in the foundational story of Israel, and it is unsurprising to encounter it in the nation's psalmody. However, another momentous event in the narrative of the Hebrew Bible is the conquest of Canaan (henceforth simply 'the conquest'), which of course is the natural sequel to the exodus. This paper represents part of an ongoing project which is examining the ways in which the conquest is portrayed in the Bible beyond the books of Joshua and Judges.[8]

Here, as a test case, we will consider three of the exodus psalms: 78, 106 and 135. These three have been selected because they represent different types of psalm, and because they appear to handle the conquest in different ways.

This brings us to a note about terminology. Following Stargel's practice, I will refer to the exodus and conquest narratives contained

[8] See also Helen Paynter, 'Matthew's Gadarene Swine and the Conquest of Jericho: An Intertextual Reading', *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* 14.2 (2019), 13-24; Helen Paynter, 'Land, Seed and Promise: Jacob as Mise-en-Abyme to Israel' in Trevor Laurence and Helen Paynter (eds), *Violent Biblical Texts: New Approaches* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022), 68-90; Helen Paynter, 'Erasing the Troubling Teens? What Happens to the Conquest of Canaan When the Non-Deuteronomistic Biblical Writers Tell the Story?' in Michael Spalione and Helen Paynter (eds), *Map or Compass? The Bible on Violence* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2022), 36-55.

within the Pentateuch and Joshua/Judges as the 'primary' narrative. Stargel takes pains to point out that the designation of this narrative as 'primary' does not imply chronological priority, but rather reflects its omniscient, eye-witness style, and its presentation as the dominant narration of Israel's journey from Egypt to the desert.

Likewise, this enquiry makes no presupposition about the relative date of the psalmist's and the Deuteronomist's time of writing. As we will see, some of the psalms appear to demonstrate close textual relationship with parts of the Pentateuchal and Deuteronomic writings, while others may be working on the basis of similar but slightly different sources, including oral traditions. Although some forms of intertextual study presuppose literary dependency of one text upon another, it is equally possible to consider two texts which emerge in conversation with one another during long periods of oral transmission,[9] and this synchronic approach is the one I am employing.

In methodological terms, then, this study will consider the three psalms identified as test cases, and will seek to find where they refer to the conquest, or to conquest-related events. Once the conquest *motifs* have been identified, the way in which the conquest is represented will be considered, in relation to the theme and structure of the whole psalm. The key question that this paper is seeking to understand is *how* the conquest is represented in the exodus psalms, although it will conclude with a brief discussion of *why* this might be so.

The conquest in Psalm 78

The form and dating of this psalm have received extensive treatment in the literature, but there is no consensus. The dating of the psalms is

[9] This would be a reasonable conclusion to draw from David Carr's influential account of how the Hebrew Bible came to be in written form. See David Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

'notoriously difficult',[10] and while this may well have a pre-exilic origin, it almost certainly underwent significant post-exilic editing.[11]

The psalm is second in length only to Psalm 119, and has been described as 'an extended and impressive instruction or sermon on matters of faith and loyalty to Israel's God'.[12] It is self-designated as a *maskil*, which has an uncertain meaning. A clue may be present in 2 Chronicles 30:22, where a group of Levites with liturgical responsibilities are described as *maskilim*. It may, therefore, be a psalm specifically composed for such a group. It clearly has a didactic purpose. Its stated intention is to 'tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the Lord' (v.2), and it contains a frank account of Israel's moral failures, 'that they should not be like their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation' (v.8).[13]

There is also no clear consensus on the structure of the psalm, but broadly speaking it contains two recitals of Israel's failures and God's goodness, with the break occurring between verses 39 and 40. The recitals show extensive intertextual crossover with the Pentateuchal tradition of the exodus and wilderness wanderings, particularly Exodus 15 (the Song of the Sea) and the desert events of Numbers 11.

After an extended introduction (vv.1-8), the first stanza begins by making reference to an unidentified act of cowardice by Ephraim. Then there is a brief reference to the splitting of the Red/Reed Sea (v.13, cf. Ex 15:8) followed by a lengthy account of the wilderness wanderings. These are shown in the table, alongside their locations in the primary account.

Stanza 1	
Event recorded in Psalm 78	**Equivalent in primary account**
Act of cowardice by Ephraim (vv.9-11)	*uncertain*

[10] Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*. Vol. 20. (Word Biblical Commentary; Dallas: Word, 1998), 284.
[11] Robert P. Carroll, 'Psalm LXXVIII: vestiges of a tribal polemic.' *Vetus Testamentum* 21.2 (1971): 133-50.
[12] Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* The Forms of the Old Testament Literature, Volume XV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 93.
[13] Biblical quotations are from *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

Splitting of the Red/Reed Sea (v.13)	Ex 15:8
Splitting rocks in the desert (vv.15-16)	Ex 17:6; Num 20:8-11
Manna (vv.24-25)	Ex 16:4
Quails (vv.24-29)	Ex 16; Num 11:31
Fire in the camp (v.21)	Num 11:1
Plague (vv.30-31)	Num 11:33
Deaths in the desert (v.33)	Num 14: 29-35

The second stanza makes more detailed reference to the exodus event, with seven of the plagues listed, although not in the same order as the primary narrative. This is followed by brief reference to the Red/Reed Sea. The strongest candidate for a retelling of the conquest is found in next two verses (vv.54-55). The psalmist then continues with post-conquest events.

Stanza 2

Event recorded in Psalm 78	**Equivalent in primary account**
River of blood (v.44)	Ex 7:14-25
Flies (v.45)	Ex 8:20-32
Frogs (v.45)	Ex 8:1-15
Locusts (v.46)	Ex 10:1-20
Hail and lightning (vv.47-48)	Ex 9:13-35
Plague (v.50)	Ex 9:1-7
Death of the firstborn by the destroying angel (vv.49,51)	Ex 11:1-12:36
Red/Reed Sea (v.53)	Ex 14:19-31
Conquest? (vv.54-55)	various
Israel's rejection of the Shiloh cult (v.58)	various
Capture of the ark in battle (vv.60-62)	1 Sam 4

It will be readily seen that this lengthy recitation of Yahweh's mighty acts and Israel's rebellions and failures gives little attention to the act of acquiring and settling in the land of Canaan. Here are the two verses where this is covered.

> And he brought them to his holy land,
> to the mountain which his right hand had won.
> He drove out nations before them;
> he allotted them for a possession
> and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents.
> vv.54-55

The first of these verses shows similarity to the Song of the Sea in Exodus 15, which the psalmist has already drawn upon.

Ps 78:54	Ex 15:17
And he brought them [*hiph* of בוא] to his holy land, to the mountain [הר] which his right hand [ימין] had won.	You will bring them in [*hiph* of בוא] and plant them on your own mountain [הר], the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode, the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands [יד] have established.

The following verse employs vocabulary which is commonly used of the conquest: the *piel* of גרשׁ. This is a verb frequently employed to refer to the displacement of the peoples of Canaan. The subject of the verb is usually Yahweh's hornet (Ex. 23:28, Josh 24:12), or Yahweh himself or his angel (Ex 23:29; 33:2; 34:11; Josh 24:18). Within the conquest texts, Israel is only once the subject of the verb (Ex 23:30).

> He drove out [*piel* of גרשׁ] nations before them;
> he allotted [*hiphil* of נפל] them for a possession [נַחֲלָה]
> and settled the tribes of Israel in their tents. (Ps 78:55)

Second, the verse states that Yahweh has allotted to Israel a 'possession', or 'inheritance' [נַחֲלָה]. The word נַחֲלָה is so central to the apportioning of conquered land to the tribes in Joshua 13-19 that it amounts to a *Leitmotif*, occurring 44 times (as the noun, e.g. Josh 13:6, or its cognate verb, e.g. Josh 13:32).

Within the long historical recitation of Psalm 78, then, the conquest is clearly marked. However, there are two striking features of the psalm's treatment of the conquest.

First, the brevity and paucity of detail is surprising. In comparison with the lengthy treatment of the exodus and wilderness wanderings, the conquest is described in just two verses, and in general terms. While Egypt, Shiloh and Zion and even the narratively insignificant Zoan are named (vv.12, 42, 60, 68), the places of the great battles of the

conquest are not. The murmurings of Israel are recounted in direct speech (vv.19-20), with a detailed account of many desert incidents and of the plagues. By contrast Joshua and his deeds are unremembered. There is one reference to the nations who were displaced by the conquest, but unlike the Egyptians, they are not identified. If the psalmist's purpose is to recount the mighty acts of Yahweh and the peoples' unfaithfulness, failure to recount the conquest events would seem like a missed opportunity.

Second, the emphasis of the psalmist is firmly upon the actions of Yahweh rather than upon human endeavour. The conquest is told in a brief sequence of four *wayyiqtol* verbs,[14] with Yahweh as the subject of each of them.

ויביאם ... ויגרֶשׁ ... ויפילם ... וישכן

> He brought out… he drove out… he apportioned… he settled

We might consider this to be in keeping with the psalmist's emphasis upon God's mighty acts. However, by doing this, psalm is failing to reflect the difference between the two narratives that we encounter when we read the primary accounts of the exodus and the conquest. The primary account of the exodus strongly emphasises divine activity. Human action is framed in terms of obedience and faith. By contrast, the primary account of the conquest balances both divine action and human activity.

A naïve reader of this psalm could be excused for concluding that the conquest took place without human participation; that Yahweh simply handed the land over to the people of Israel, just as he had simply parted the Red/Reed Sea for them. Of course, the psalm would have been operative within the broader framework of an oral history and perhaps by then written accounts of the conquest, and in this sense such a naïve reader is not in the psalmist's mind. For now, we will simply note these things and move on to Psalm 106.

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[14] *Wayyiqtol* verbs form the backbone of Hebrew narrative, with action generally described in terms of sequential action (he did this and he did that…) rather than using subordinate clauses.

The conquest in Psalm 106

Psalm 106 is another *maskil*, this time attributed to Asaph. It is a lengthy retelling of Israel's history, again emerging from a particular setting which is now obscure.[15] It focusses mainly upon the exodus–wilderness portion of Israel's story, employing the narrative to make a corporate confession and community lament. To do this, the psalmist narrates multiple instances of sin and rebellion, presenting a narration of Israel's early history in a series of cycles. Once again, the events are not presented in the same order as the primary narrative. The structure of the psalm can be summarised as follows:

1-3 Doxology
4-5 Plea for mercy

Cycle 1: Ex 14
6-8 Confession: failure to remember Yahweh by the Red/Reed Sea
8-12 Salvation: parting of the Red/Reed Sea, inundation of the enemy
Cycle 2: Num 11
13-14 Confession: the people complain of hunger in the desert
15 Punishment: wasting disease
Cycle 3: Num 16
16 Confession: the rebellion of Korah
17-18 Punishment: earthquake and fire
Cycle 4: Ex 32 (and Deut 9:25)
19-22 Confession: golden calf
23 Punishment: averted by prayer of Moses
Cycle 5: Num 14
24-25 Confession: failure to enter the land
26-27 Punishment: a generation dies in the desert
Cycle 6: Num 25

[15] Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, 'Book Three of the Psalter: Psalms 73–89.' In E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (eds) *The Book of Psalms* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 624.

28 Confession: Baal worship at Peor
29 Punishment: plague
30-31 Salvation: plague arrested by Phinehas
Cycle 7: Num 20
32-33 Confession: grumbling at Meribah
Cycle 8: Deuteronomistic history
34-39 Confession: syncretism with Canaanite idolatry, including child sacrifice
40-42 Punishment: falling into the hands of the nations
43-46 Salvation: God remembers his covenant, deliverance and pity

47 Prayer for mercy
48 Doxology [which concludes book IV of the psalter]

Once again, a substantial amount of space is given to the Red/Reed Sea and wilderness accounts. The people's refusal to enter the land is made explicit (vv.24-25). But the conquest itself is hardly mentioned. In fact, it simply appears in negative relief, in verse 34:

> They did not exterminate [*hiphil* of שׁמד] the peoples,
> as the Lord had said to them.

The instruction which Israel is described as violating is found several times in Deuteronomy, particularly in chapters 7 and 20. The verb employed is frequently חרם rather than שׁמד but שׁמד is also used, as in this example from Deut 7.

> But the Lord your God will give them over to you and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed [*niphal* of שׁמד]. And he will give their kings into your hand, and you shall make their name perish from under heaven. No one shall be able to stand against you until you have destroyed [*hiphil* of שׁמד] them. (Deut 7:23-24)

The psalmist is bringing together key moments of rebellion in the history of Israel, including their refusal to enter the land, their failure to destroy the peoples of the land, and their consequent syncretic practices. Events which do not support this narrative are largely folded out, and the timeline is partially collapsed.

But not all events are folded out of the account. As we have seen, the exodus tradition receives some treatment. The conquest, however, does not. In narrative terms, the psalmist takes us from the refusal to enter the land (v.24), via the two desert stories of the idolatry of Peor (v.28) and the grumbling at Meribah (v.32), to the failure to drive out the nations (v.34). Once again imagining a naïve reader, they would not even know that the conquest had happened.

The conquest in Psalm 135

This is a hymn of praise, and has become part of the Great Hallel. It is widely considered to be late post-exilic, due in part to the density of its intertextual allusions, which implies the pre-existence of at least early forms of several texts from the Hebrew Bible.[16] It has been shown to occupy a neat chiastic structure.[17]

Hallelujah (v. 1a)
A summons to praise (vv. 1b–4)
A celebration of God's sovereignty over all other gods (vv. 5–7)
A recounting of God's acts on behalf of Israel (vv. 8–14)
The gods of the other nations compared with God (vv. 15–18)
A summons to bless God (vv. 19–21a)
Hallelujah (v. 21b)

The central portion of the psalm (vv.8-12) contains a retelling of key moments in Israel's history, which is where reference is made to the exodus and conquest traditions:

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[16] Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150 (Revised)*. Vol. 21. (Dallas: Word, 2002), 288.
[17] Nancy deClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth Tanner, 'Book Three of the Psalter: Psalms 73–89.' In E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. (eds) *The Book of Psalms* The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 943.

He it was who struck down [*hiphil* of נכה] the
firstborn of Egypt,
both human beings and animals;
he sent signs and wonders [cf. Deut 6:22; 11:3;
34:11; Neh 9:10]
into your midst, O Egypt,
against Pharaoh and all his servants.

He struck down [*hiphil* of נכה] many nations
and killed mighty kings—
Sihon, king of the Amorites,
and Og, king of Bashan,
and all the kingdoms of Canaan—
and gave their land as a heritage,
a heritage to his people Israel.

Unlike the other two psalms we have considered, here the conquest portion is slightly longer than the exodus one. Both have an emphasis on the Lord "striking down" (*hiphil* of נכה) the enemy; identified as Egypt in verse 8, and 'many nations and mighty kings' in verses 10-11.

However, in the conquest part of this psalm the Canaanite kings – that is, the kings whose territories were within the land of Canaan – are unnamed, although the primary narrative identifies a number of them. See, for example, Judges 1:4-12, and Joshua 10:3-15, which name King Adoni-Zedek of Jerusalem, King Hoham of Hebron, King Piram of Jarmuth, King Japhia of Lachish, and King Debir of Eglon.

The kings whom the psalm does identify are Og and Sihon, two Amorite kings whom the Israelites encountered during their desert wanderings, their territories lying east of the Jordan. Israel's defeat of these kings is described in Numbers 21 and Deuteronomy 2-3, and took place under Moses, so this is not a reference to the conquest proper. The two kings are mentioned five times within the book of Joshua, but only as back-story.

In the primary narrative, Og and Sihon are separated from the main conquest in three ways: geographically, narratively and chronologically. Geographically, the Jordan sits between the kings' territories and Canaan proper. In narratological and chronological terms, between the

defeat of these two kings and the conquest are interposed four very significant events:

- Joshua's formal assumption of the leadership with the liturgical exhortations to courage and faith (Josh 1)
- The parting of the Jordan (Josh 3)
- The circumcision of the new generation (Josh 5:1-9)
- The divine 'handover' of the people from dependence on manna to enjoyment of the fruit of the land in conjunction with the first Passover in Canaan (Josh 5:10-12)

Why the prominence given to the defeat of these two kings, whose overthrow does not appear to be of especially strategic significance in comparison with the other threats faced by Israel between the Red/Reed Sea and the conclusion of the conquest of Canaan? As I have argued elsewhere,[18] there are two features in particular which distinguish these kings. First, unlike many of the other conquered peoples, they were the aggressors against Israel. In Numbers 21 and Deuteronomy 2, rather than permitting the people to move peaceably through his territory, Sihon aggressively attacks them, as he has Moab in the past. Og is also the aggressor in Numbers 21 and Deuteronomy 3.

The second feature that distinguishes these kings, particularly Og, is that they appear to have become the focus of an ancient mythology. In Deuteronomy Og is described as a man of gigantic proportions, requiring a fourteen-foot-long iron bedstead or sarcophagus (Deut 3:11). In the same verse he is coupled with the Rephaim, an ancient near-Eastern mythological trope employed in biblical narratives, as 'a general designation of the mythical inhabitants of southern Syria and Transjordania, before the settlement of the Ammonites and the

[18] Paynter, 'Erasing the Troubling Teens?', 36-55.

Moabites'.[19] The category of 'Rephaim' also appears to overlap with the Anakim and Nephilim, other quasi-mythical people (cf. Num. 13:28-29, 33).

In support of this impression that Og is somehow paradigmatically monstrous is the later Jewish tradition. In the Tannaitic midrashim (c.10-220 CE) and the Amoraim (c.200-500 CE), he is viewed as a giant with mythical longevity.

If the postulated post-exilic setting for this psalm is correct, the psalmist is crafting his hymn in the context of the threat posed to the people of God by religious plurality in the post-exilic world. In order to promote worship of Yahweh alone, he has composed a recital of many of his 'signs and wonders' (v.9). At the heart of these is an approximately balanced account of the signs and wonders of the exodus, and the conquest of Canaan, but with the foregrounding of mythical rather than naturalistic elements. Once again, there is no reference to human action in any of the conquest events.

Marginalisation of the conquest: an under-appreciated phenomenon

This relative marginalisation of the conquest within the three psalms we have examined has not been the subject of much scholarly attention. In part, this is perhaps because any one particular psalm may have any number of reasons for omitting the conquest. Psalm 106, for instance, is preoccupied with the rebellions in the desert, so perhaps Israel's moral failures once they cross the Jordan are of less interest. Examined on its own, then, each psalm might offer a plausible reason for marginalizing the conquest. But when these three exodus psalms are considered together, a trend seems to be emerging. Further study is needed to evaluate the other exodus psalms to test the pattern further.

The phenomenon largely escapes comment by the scholars who have focused upon the exodus psalms. This is probably because, by drawing their inclusion criteria tightly around the exodus events, they have methodologically excluded the discussion of the conquest. For

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[19] H. Rouillard, 'Rephaim', in K. van der Toorn, *et al* eds., *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (2nd ed.; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 697.

example, in identifying her three core elements of the exodus account, Stargel makes reference to the conquest as a minor, or secondary, plot feature.[20] However, because she excludes it from her core diagnostic criteria, she places the discussion of the conquest beyond the purview of her study and therefore offers little consideration of its absence.[21]

Alviero Niccacci notes that the prophetic literature operates with a three-phase approach to the exodus: leaving Egypt; wandering in the desert; and entering the land.[22] He also notes that in the psalms this same pattern does not tend to be present, and there is less focus upon entering the land and the events of the conquest. The explanation Niccacci advances for this is that the hymnic or didactic purpose of the psalms lends itself to certain elements of the exodus account more than others. However, it is not clear to me that this explanation is sufficient. The dramatic events of the conquest, particularly the battle of Jericho, would lend themselves very aptly to the hymnic purpose, and an emphasis upon the decisive capture of the land or Israel's moral failure (through Achan, for example, Josh 7) would serve the didactic purpose very well.

'Forgetting' in a memory psalm

In this paper we have examined, as a test case, three exodus psalms, with the explicit question of how they each represent the conquest tradition. In each case, the human activity of the conquest is omitted altogether, and the conquest itself is relatively marginalised. In Psalm 78, there is only a very brief mention of conquest events, with the focus being on the land as gift from Yahweh. In Psalm 106, the conquest is folded out of the account entirely. In Psalm 135, there is a focus on the direct action of Yahweh in taking the land, with the foregrounding of mythic rather than naturalistic[23] elements.

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[20] Stargel, *The Construction of Exodus Identity*, xix.
[21] Stargel does briefly note that the non-primary narrative retellings of the story tend to omit the conquest. Stargel, *The Construction of Exodus Identity*, 99.
[22] Alviero Niccacci, 'The Exodus Tradition in the Psalms, Isaiah and Ezekiel.' *Liber annuus* 61 (2011): 9-35 (9-10).
[23] I use this word to denote a naturalistic type of content, rather than – necessarily – comment on its historical 'accuracy' (which, in any case, is an

We might consider the relative marginalisation of the conquest to be surprising, because in canonical terms, the conquest of Canaan could be considered inextricably linked with the exodus account, for both narrative and theological reasons.

In narrative terms, the conquest is the climax to the exodus account because of its centrality within the divine promise to the patriarchs.

> I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess… Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions… And they shall come back here in the fourth generation. (Gen 15:7,13-14,16)

Genesis 15 is the first time in the Pentateuch that the exodus from Egypt and the possession of the land of Canaan are coupled together. As the narrative moves from Genesis to Exodus, the coupling of the two events occurs again in Yahweh's opening words to Moses in their encounter at the burning bush.

> I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. (Ex 3:8)

This promise continues to have potent force throughout the exodus events and the desert wanderings, and when the conquest is fulfilled, the events and land allocation records of the book of Joshua are

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anachronistic question). In other words, this is a genre question rather than one that need exercise scriptural apologists.

framed by reference to that promise made by Yahweh to the patriarchs and Moses.

> Arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. (Josh 1:2-3)

> Thus the Lord gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there… Not one word of all the good promises that the Lord had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass. (Josh 21:43,45)

If the conquest is positioned as the fulfilment of divine promise, it is also the climax of Israel's 'coming of age'. William Propp considers the exodus event to function in Israel's memory as its rite of passage, but unlike rites of passage in traditional societies (where a young man, for instance, will leave the settlement a boy, and return to it a man), this has a linear direction of movement: Egypt – Sinai – desert – land.[24]

In narrative terms, then, coming to possess the land of Canaan was the natural conclusion of the exodus events. What would be the point in being redeemed from slavery in the land of Egypt, if the people were to wander in the desert for the rest of their lives? (Indeed, this question underlies the people's complaints for water in Exodus 14:11 and 17:3.)

This fulfilment of promises has not just narratological import, but also deep theological significance. As Yahweh's character was consistently predicated on his faithfulness to the covenant, so the conquest of Canaan was one important proof of that faithfulness. It even lies at the heart of the covenant record in Exodus.

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[24] William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 2. Anchor Yale Bible. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 35.

> When my angel goes in front of you, and brings you to the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, and I blot them out, you shall not bow down to their gods, or worship them, or follow their practices, but you shall utterly demolish them and break their pillars in pieces. (Ex 23:23-24)

The downplaying of human activity in these three psalms' accounts of the conquest is also surprising, given the emphasis placed upon Joshua's conquering action in the primary narrative.[25] I referred earlier to a notional 'naïve reader' of the psalm, who would not be able to deduce from it that there was any difference between the conquest event and the exodus event, in terms of the mode of divine or human action. While, as we noted, such a naïve reader is unlikely to have been in the psalmist's mind, nonetheless, in the light of the significant pedagogical effect of the psalms, this is striking.

The use of tradition in the psalms: three proposals

Texts are a product of the concerns of the writer, which in turn are shaped by the collective concerns of his culture. 'History does not come neat or plain in these writings; the Hebrew Bible consists in large part of interpretations and reflections on history—more a midrash on the times than the times themselves.'[26]

The concerns of a culture are shaped by its *collective memory*. Collective memory is a term used by Maurice Halbwachs for a particular set of memories held by a group.[27] These are memories that have passed well beyond intergenerational transmission, into the collective consciousness, and so extend hundreds or even thousands of years

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[25] As one example among many, see Joshua 11:10–11. 'And Joshua turned back at that time and captured Hazor and struck its king with the sword, for Hazor formerly was the head of all those kingdoms. And they struck with the sword all who were in it, devoting them to destruction; there was none left that breathed. And he burned Hazor with fire.'

[26] Ronald S Hendel, *Remembering Abraham: culture, memory, and history in the Hebrew* Bible (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

[27] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (trans. Lewis A. Coser; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992 [1941, 1952]).

beyond the life of eye-witnesses. Such a collective memory is orientated to the needs of the present generation; it does not prioritise historical 'accuracy' over the current needs of the group. Halbwachs's work was developed further by Jan Assmann, who used the term *cultural memory* to refer to 'that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image'.[28]

Collective memory and cultural memory are overlapping categories; here we will use Halbwach's term 'cultural memory', or 'tradition', while noting Assmann's emphasis on the way that such memories help to shape a culture's self-understanding.

So why is the conquest marginalised in the psalms? I suggest that explanations fall into three possible categories, although these may not be mutually exclusive in any given instance.

The unconscious reproduction of a deficient collective memory

In the light of the above, we can view the psalms as a faithful reflection upon the present and historical preoccupations of the author's own time, which are shaped by the collective memory of his culture. The psalmist does not construct his historical retellings out of thin air, but draws deeply upon existing tradition to do so.

But which tradition is the psalmist using, and how good is it? At times, as we have seen, there appears to be formal intertextual dependency upon the primary history; at other times the psalmists appear to draw upon other traditions, or collective memories, which are similar but not identical to those in the primary history. One possibility, then, is that in the cases we examined, the psalmists were drawing upon a different tradition from that of the Deuteronomist, and that the one they are employing is 'deficient', in that it does not recall the stories of Joshua.

Collective memories do not retell history in an even fashion. Certain events hold a much greater prominence in a nation or society's collective memory than others. This phenomenon of the variable

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[28] Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique* 65 (1995), 132.

expression of historical events in the collective mind is termed 'mnemonic density'. The variability of mnemonic density reflects the way that a collective memory, and hence identity, has been constructed within a culture. The stories which are told and retold are stories of triumph or trauma; stories that in some way have captured the popular imagination and have shaped the culture.

So it is possible that the collective memory which is present in our psalmists' milieux is one that overlooks Joshua, foregrounds the exodus over the conquest, and views both events as pre-eminently acts of divine sovereignty. If this is the case, we might speculate as to the reason. We will return to this question shortly.

Such conjecture of divergent traditions can find support in the psalmists' representation of the exodus itself. As we briefly noted above, they refer to fewer than ten plagues, and do not represent them in the same order as the primary narrative. This is still true even if the Exodus account is split into its putative J, E and P sources. [29] However, although there may be some validity to such a reconstruction of the psalmists' world, this falls short as an entire explanation.

As Marvin Tate writes,

> It is sometimes argued that Ps 78 represents the oldest version of the tradition and Ps 105 and Exod 7–12 are variants. Of course, if source analysis of Exod 7–12 is accepted, the J, E, and P accounts would be as old or older on this basis. However, this kind of argumentation inspires little confidence. It is much more probable that the plague traditions were relatively fluid and malleable enough to be fashioned in different ways for different contexts.[30]

[29] Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 292.
[30] Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 292.

Unless we posit two communities which are isolated from one another, one producing the psalms and one producing the Deuteronomistic history, we still need to account for the psalmist drawing upon a different tradition than the one which informs the narrative writers – and explain why that might be.

Positive promotion of the exodus narrative

This idea of traditions being consciously manipulated for a rhetorical purpose directs us towards a second possible explanation. As the memory theorists Zerubavel and Zerubavel write,

> Socially "marked" historical periods occupy much more mnemonic "space" than one would expect... This variable density of historical intervals constitutes a significant semiotic code.'[31]

Therefore, perhaps the psalmists are intentionally promoting the exodus narrative.

Each of these three historical psalms constitutes, to use Claus Westermann's term, the 're-presentation' of history.[32] The collective memory is not simply replicated, but also presented. The psalmists' purpose is not simply the telling of history for its own sake, but for a rhetorical purpose. Depending on the genre, this might be as a credo, to extol Yahweh and declare his mighty deeds, to evoke lament and repentance, and so on. These psalms therefore have both a doxological and pedagogic, or 'traditioning' function.

But what is true of individual psalms is more strikingly the case with the entire psalter, whose liturgical repetitions shape the theology and memory of the people by what Walter Brueggemann calls a 'pedagogy of saturation', which is 'constitutive of reality.'[33] In other words, the

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[31] Eviatar Zerubavel and Yael Zerubavel. *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 27.
[32] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* Trans. Keith R. Crim and Richard N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 214-49.
[33] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 722.

psalter is both shaped by, and shapes, the imagination of the people of God.

In this reality-constituting function, the exodus events, and in particular the Red/Reed Sea narrative, assume paradigmatic significance, both within and beyond the psalms. Aarre Laurer argues that both in the imagination of the community and in its cultic reenactments which the psalms help to shape, the *motif* of the sea swallowing Pharoah forms a paradigm for the hope of eschatological renewal.[34] Certainly this would be borne out by biblical-theological study of the two testaments, especially that which focuses upon the themes of creation and new-creation, since these draw heavily from the exodus and Red/Reed Sea traditions.[35] Perhaps this helps to explain the prioritizing of the exodus tradition over the conquest one.

Demotion of the conquest

But might it be that the psalter is not so much prioritizing the one as downplaying the other? Might there be an intentional marginalisation of the conquest, or at least, of certain elements of it? Evidence for this might be found in the ways that even when the conquest was represented in one of our test psalms, it was portrayed as the result of direct divine rather than human action, as defensive rather than aggressive warfare, or as victory over an enemy that was more mythic than naturalistic. None of these choices would seem to be directly linked to a prioritisation of the exodus tradition, but rather the converse.

The telling of history, indeed, the act of remembering, is not a morally neutral act. It establishes an ethical relationship with past events.[36] We referred above to the work of Zerubavel and Zerubavel on mnemonic density. They point out that the variability of mnemonic density in a

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[34] Aarre Lauha, 'Das Schilfmeermotiv im Alten Testament.' In International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, *Congress Volume Bonn, 26-31 August 1962* (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 32-46.
[35] See, for example, the use of the Red/Reed sea motif in Isaiah 11:10-16; 43:14-21; 51:9-11.
[36] D. Bell, 'Introduction: Violence and memory'. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 38.2, (2009): 345-360 (356).

text is a communicative act. It may be that we are here glimpsing an ancient theological or ideological current which preferred to view the land as gift rather than battle prize, and elects, then, to tell history that way.

Is this implausible? History is written by the victors, as the familiar saying goes. Writings, especially ideological ones, tend to amplify their territorial claims and promote their version of history, especially battle conquests. Does the down-playing of human battle conquest but the promoted narrative of divine gift strengthen or weaken the claim upon the land? Does the absence of Canaanites from the psalmic narratives silence the victims, or might it possibly represent an unease of memory in the tradition of the victors?[37]

We might expect a people who have been dispossessed from their own land in the exile (or who face that threat) to trumpet their claims to it. But they do not; at least, not by means of the retelling of battle triumphs. Is it possible that a people who have experienced the trauma of exile might be demonstrating some reluctance to commemorate the trauma of others?

Towards a conclusion

The exodus *motif* is common throughout the Hebrew Bible, not least in the psalter. However, in our test study of three exodus psalms, the conquest of Canaan appears to have been marginalised in several different ways. This is particularly true of the naturalistic elements of the conquest: the slaughter of actual Canaanites by actual Israelites. These findings are broadly consistent with the results of similar studies in other parts of the Hebrew Bible.[38]

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[37] Such a theory has been proposed by Robert Hubbard, whose work on Old Testament allusions to Joshua also identifies this relative eclipse of the warrior leader from the narrative. Hubbard poses the question, 'Does the OT itself, whose prophets foresee a final international harmony under Yahweh, betray any wrestling with the problem [of the conquest]?' Robert Hubbard, 'Only a Distant Memory: Old Testament Allusion to Joshua's Days', *ExAud* 16 (2000): 131.

[38] Helen Paynter, 'Erasing the Troubling Teens?', 36-55.

Identifying this trend (at least in this limited way) and explaining it, are two very different matters, however. In this preliminary exploration, three broad possibilities have been set out. One possibility is that the psalmist was acting on the basis of the traditions he knew; traditions that themselves marginalised human activity in the conquest. A second is that the psalmist was deliberately choosing to prioritise the exodus story for his rhetorical and theological purposes. A third explanation postulates the deliberate down-playing of the conquest events, especially their historical, human side. If any element of this third explanation has credibility, then it raises further questions about the psalmist's intentions, and the theological purpose that he was pursuing. If the first explanation is preferred, then similar questions are pushed back onto the collective memory of Israel. Why had the blood and gore of the conquest receded from at least one strand of its tradition?

It is hoped that future scholarship will shed further light on this unexpected and under-investigated issue.

Notes on Contributor

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Suffering, Perseverance and Hope: Two Views of Romans 5:1-5 and their Implications for Pastoral Care[1]

Marion L.S. Carson

1. Introduction

In 2000, Stephen Pattison wrote of an "almost absolute and embarrassing silence" with regard to the use of the Bible by practical theologians writing on the subject of pastoral care.[2] As Pattison noted, this was in large part due to the predominance of the historical-critical method, whose focus on word study and historical context tended to take attention away from contemporary application. Recently, however, practical and pastoral theologians have begun to discuss the place of the Biblical text within their discipline.[3] The need for serious in-depth study on the use of the Bible in pastoral theology has been recognized and begun to be addressed, most notably in a series of studies overseen by Stephen Pattison and David Spriggs.[4] In addition, the growth of interest in hermeneutics within the academy has considerably ameliorated the situation: feminist, liberationist, and cross-cultural hermeneutics (amongst others) have opened up the text for contemporary application in new and fruitful ways. It is good to note that some Biblical scholars are beginning to explore how these

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[1] This is a revised and expanded version of an article which appeared in Czech in "Utrpeni, naděje a svatost: Dva pohledy na Ř 5,1-5 a jejich důsledky propastoraci" Teologicka Reflexe 24 (2018): 57-68.

[2] Stephen Pattison *A Critique of Pastoral Care* (3rd ed.; London: SCM), 106.

[3] See Mark J. Cartledge "The Use of Scripture in Practical Theology: A Study of Academic Practice" *Practical Theology* 6 (2013): 271-83; Zoē Bennett *Using the Bible in Practical Theology* (London: Routledge 2013); see also the collection of papers in *Contact* 150.1 (2006).

[4] Paul Ballard and Stephen R. Holmes, *The Bible in Pastoral Practice: Readings in the Place and Function of Scripture in the Church* (London: DLT, 2005). Gordon Oliver, *Holy Bible, Human Bible: Questions Pastoral Practice Must Ask* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Stephen Pattison, Margaret Cooling, Trevor Cooling, *Using the Bible in Christian Ministry: A Workbook* (London: DLT, 2007).

ancient texts might be able to address contemporary pastoral issues, for example in the areas of disability and bereavement.[5]

In this paper, I wish to contribute to this growing area of interest by considering the pastoral implications of one Biblical passage, namely Romans 5:1-5. In it, Paul begins to explore the consequences for believers of having been justified by faith and what it means to be a new creation in Christ. Believers have access to God through Jesus Christ, and have hope of sharing in the glory of God (5:1-2). On this basis, they can rejoice when they suffer for suffering will lead to perseverance, character, and ultimately, to hope (5:3-4). Furthermore, they will not be disappointed in that hope, because God's love has been poured into their hearts
(5:5).

Clearly this passage, in which suffering and hope are directly linked, is a rich resource for those involved in the pastoral care of people who are experiencing difficult times. But how is it best understood and applied in pastoral situations? In my experience, many if not most "ordinary" readers of Scripture instinctively look to the Bible to provide them with the knowledge and instruction they need to live their lives.[6] This way of approaching Scripture has its roots in foundationalism, which looks for certainty with regard to the truthfulness of beliefs. Grenz and Franke write:

> According to foundationalists, the acquisition of knowledge ought to proceed in a manner somewhat similar to the construction of a building. Knowledge must be built on a sure foundation. The Enlightenment epistemological foundation consists on a set of incontestable beliefs or unassailable first principles on the basis of which the pursuit

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[5] Examples include Grant Macaskill *Autism and the Church: Bible, Theology and Community* (Waco: Baylor University Press 2019); Sarah Melcher, Mikeal C. Parsons, Amos Yong (eds) *The Bible and Disability: A Commentary* (London: SCM 2018); Walter Brueggemann "The Formfulness of Grief" *Interpretation* 31 (1977): 263-75.

[6] By "ordinary" I mean Christians who have little or no theological education. See Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Learning and Listening in Theology* (London: Routledge 2002), 56.

> of knowledge can proceed. These basic beliefs or first principles must be universal, objective and discernible to any rational person.[7]

When it comes to the use of the Bible in pastoral care, it is common, from this foundationalist perspective, for readers to look to the text to provide an appropriate word or instruction which can be given to the person being cared for, much as a physician might prescribe medication.[8]

In recent years, the idea that human beings can have absolute certainty has become discredited.[9] Moreover, the emphasis on proposition and instruction which is so prominent in foundationalist thinking has been challenged by character ethicists who are more interested in what kind of people we should be rather than what individuals ought to be doing. From this perspective, the question the reader asks of the text becomes "what kind of people ought we to be?" rather than "what ought I to do?". The focus is on character and narrative rather than proposition and law.

Here, I would like to consider Romans 5:1-5 from both perspectives in order to compare how they influence its use in the pastoral setting. I shall first explore the passage from a foundationalist perspective and highlight certain limitations and drawbacks of this hermeneutic with regard to pastoral application. I shall then conduct a second interpretation, this time using Stanley Hauerwas' character ethics as a hermeneutical lens, and suggest that this approach offers us a more nuanced and compassionate understanding of how the text might inform pastoral care. Before exploring the text using these two hermeneutical lenses, however, it will be valuable to set the passage in its literary and historical context and present an initial exegesis.

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[7] Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 23.
[8] Marion Carson, 'Deep Heat and Bandages? Historical Criticism, Bounded Indeterminacy, and Pastoral Care', *Evangelical Quarterly* 82 (2010): 340-52.
[9] See for example Amos Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit: Christian Reason and Theological Method in the Third Millennium* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press 2014), 19-46.

2. The content of Romans 5:1-5

The statement that suffering leads to hope comes in the context of an argument in which Paul tells the believers in Rome that salvation is on the basis of faith. He has been keen to ensure that the Roman believers do not fall into the all too human trap of thinking that adherence to a moral code or religious observances is the way to be righteous in God's sight. What is important is an interior attitude of faith which he describes as "circumcision of the heart" (2:29). Here, Paul is preparing the way for his attempt later in the letter to tackle just such a problem which has arisen in the Roman church (14:1-15:13).[10] Having argued this case, he now says that followers of Christ are justified, declared "innocent of all charges", and so they have peace with God.[11] They have access to God himself and stand in a "state of grace". They also have hope – hope of the glory of God. While we might be tempted to conclude that suffering is incompatible with this new way of being, it is in fact something to rejoice in, for perseverance in suffering leads to a tested character, which leads to hope. We will now begin to unpack this rather compressed train of thought.

The first important term is *thlipsis* which means trial or trouble. Paul may well have had persecution in mind here, as the church in Rome struggled to survive in a hostile environment. However, the term can refer to trials and hardships of all kinds, and so it is legitimate for us to understand it here as referring to suffering in general.[12] Suffering, he says, brings about *hupomonē*, which the NRSV translates as

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[10] Here I will not enter into the debate as to the relationship between the church and Judaism in Paul's thought. The point I wish to make is that Paul sees the temptation to elevate religious observance over faith as one to which all religious people are prone. See further Marion Carson 'Circumcision of the Heart: Extrinsic and Intrinsic Religiosity in Romans 1–5', *Expository Times* 128 (2017): 376-84.

[11] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1996), 298. Along with most commentators, I understand *exomen* and *kauxometha* to be indicative rather than subjunctive.

[12] W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker *Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and Other Early Christian Literature* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 362.

"endurance". This seems to denote a "moral strength" in which we do not allow trouble to defeat us. If we are able to get on with our lives in the midst of trials without collapsing under the strain, we are enduring, or persevering. And as we persevere we will become stronger. The next term is *dokimē*, which probably should be understood as "tested character".[13] However, this is problematic for the word has no referent. Traditionally, it is understood to mean that perseverance brings about a tried and tested character in believers. John Ziesler, however, thinks it refers to "God's constant support", which is "tested and found adequate". He thus translates, "endurance proves God's sustaining power".[14] Nevertheless, since the subject of suffering and perseverance of which Paul has been speaking is best understood as referring to human beings, it seems reasonable to say that that this applies to *dokimē* too.

Persevering in suffering produces people who are strong, resilient and productive. We speak of people who consistently make good moral decisions, who have integrity, as having "strong character." If they are believers we would also say that they are able to hold on to their faith, despite the problems and suffering they experience. These are the strong people whom others respect, whose good example we follow, and whose lives are attractive and coherent. "Weak" characters are those who crumble under the strain, who seize up. Clearly, without perseverance, the "tested" character to which Paul refers here cannot become evident.

At the end of this process, hope comes about. But what is this hope? On one level, it may refer to a kind of expectation that our desires will be fulfilled. Learning from experience, we see that setbacks need not be crippling, that things can improve, and so we are able to keep going. Hope is therefore a positive attitude of mind which enables us to carry on from day to day. However, it would be wrong to limit the idea of hope to this psychological understanding. Paul is working in the Jewish

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[13] Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 303. Cf. Robert Jewett *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2007), 354-5 who thinks it refers to a faith that has been tested and found authentic.

[14] John Ziesler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM 1989), 138-9.

wisdom tradition which taught that people of faith would encounter trials, and so be strengthened.[15] For example, Sirach 2:4-6 says,

> Accept whatever befalls you,
> and in times of humiliation be patient.
> For gold is tested in the fire,
> and those found acceptable, in the furnace of humiliation.
> Trust in him, and he will help you;
> make your ways straight, and hope in him.

Paul, like the author of Sirach, sees this positive attitude as grounded in faith. Withstanding trials, with the attendant strengthening of character, leads to a deepening in faith, in the sense of an ability to trust in God. So perseverance in suffering leads to stronger character both in a moral and a spiritual sense. Hope therefore is based on the knowledge of God's love for us – not only because of what he has done through Christ in the past but because of our experience of what he continues to do in the present through the work of Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5). It is this that spurs us on from day to day – it is this that makes life worth living.

However, for Paul hope is not simply a state of mind, it has a specific content. In 5:2, Paul speaks of one day sharing in the glory of God, which he explains further in 8:18-25. Our current knowledge is only partial; one day the full glory of God will be revealed *eis hemas* (8:18). The NRSV translates this as "the glory of God will be revealed to us", but it can also be translated as "in us" (NIV). All the might, honour and splendour that belongs to God, and which human beings were originally intended to reflect (Psalm 8:1,5-6), will one day be revealed in us too.[16] In the meantime, both we and the world groan, and the Spirit groans alongside us. Thus hope, as John Webster puts it, "is the confident longing for full realisation of life in Christ".[17] However, the

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[15] E.g., Wisdom 3:5-7; *T.Jos.* 2.7; 2 Maccabees 6:12-16. Proverbs 17:3; Cf. also James 1:2-4; 2 Tim 2:12.

[16] Jewett, *Romans*, 510.

[17] John Webster, 'Hope' in G. Meilaender, & W. Werpehowski (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 302.

eschatological hope concerns not only people, but the world as a whole:

> The originally intended glory of the creation shall yet be restored, including specifically the glory we humans were intended to bear.[18]

All of creation will be redeemed by God and returned to its original splendour.[19] And in the meantime, we can stand firm, sure of the hope we have "because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (5:5).[20] For Douglas Moo,

> it is this internal, subjective – yes, even emotional – sensation within the believer that God does indeed love us – love expressed and made vital in real, concrete actions on our behalf – that gives to us the assurance that 'hope will not disappoint us'[21]

That is to say, believers do not seem to have to rely solely on their own ability to develop the kind of hope Paul speaks of here, but they have the help of the Holy Spirit, who assures them of God's love for them in the present.

3. A "foundationalist" approach

This reading of Paul's teaching about suffering and hope has important pastoral implications. It suggests that suffering is not to be avoided, denied, or disparaged, but is to be rejoiced in for it has eschatological significance and purpose in the life of the believer. Our lives in the present are of a "larger reality", to use N.T. Wright's phrase.[22] But how does it help believers as they try to cope with the reality of

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[18] Jewett, *Romans*, 510.
[19] See further Edward Adams *The Stars Will Fall From Heaven: Cosmic Catastrophe in the New Testament and its World* (London: T&T Clark 2007).
[20] J.M. Everts, 'Hope' in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Leicester: IVP 1999), 416.
[21] Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 305
[22] NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection and the Mission of the Church* (London: SPCK 2012), 174.

suffering in the present time? How is the idea that suffering can lead to hope to be applied pastorally?

As we have seen, readers adopting a "foundationalist" hermeneutic look for propositions which provide certainty – a foundation for belief and right action.[23] Thus, the purpose of reading Scripture is to discover what we should know and what we should be doing. From this perspective, this passage reminds us of the basis of our faith, of our future hope, and of the love of God in our lives and so provides the certainty that we need in order to withstand difficult times. According to Douglas Moo, for example, there is little doubt that Paul here wants to encourage "any who are faltering or downhearted to contemplate again what he or she has in Christ".[24] From this perspective, then, no matter what individuals might be going through, they need to be reminded of these truths in order to help keep them from giving up. If someone is struggling and finding hope difficult to maintain, the pastoral carer's responsibility is to remind them of the faith that is theirs, the future that they can look forward to, and that the Holy Spirit is, at this very moment, pouring love into their hearts.

Now there is little doubt that in certain circumstances a reminder of the basis of faith and of our future inheritance may be sufficient to help someone who is going through a difficult time. For some, the simple act of hearing the passage read may be enough to bring comfort and encouragement. However, it is worthwhile exploring some possible implications of such an approach. First, this interpretation suggests that there is an implied imperative within the indicatives in this passage: Christians ought to be able to persevere in suffering and hold on to hope, because of their new relationship with God.[25]

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[23] See further, Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy set the Theological Agenda* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International 1996).

[24] Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 314.

[25] For many scholars, following Rudolph Bultmann, this is the correct way to understand Paul's writings. Rudolph Bultmann, 'The Problem of Ethics in Paul' in *Understanding Paul's Ethics: Twentieth Century Approaches* ed B.S. Rosner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1995), 195-216. For Victor Furnish, for example, the dynamic of indicative and imperative lies at the centre of his thought. Others, however, point out that it is only one aspect of Paul's ethical thinking.

However, periods of profound distress such as bereavement, dislocation or serious illness can bring about severe spiritual crisis. In such circumstances, the ability to hold on to a future hope can be well-nigh impossible. There is a need for tangible reassurance now – not just a promise of something that is to take place at the end times. It is hard enough to battle through from day to day let alone hang on for an eschatological promise which can, in Ernest Bloch's words, seem to be "empty promises of another world."[26]

Second, it is easy to infer that if someone is not rejoicing or being hopeful there must be something wrong with that person's faith. If hope (along with faith and the love of God) are things that believers ought to be sure of, then any loss of certainty in times of crisis becomes a pastoral problem which needs to be fixed. The responsibility of pastoral care then must be to dispense the spiritual medicine which will correct the problem. Pastoral care becomes a matter of reminding, exhorting and perhaps even rebuking those who are failing to do what God requires of them. [27] An unequal relationship is established between the pastoral carer and the one who is struggling, for it follows that those who are untroubled by lack of certainty must be superior Christians to those who are. Further, there is a risk that those who are struggling feel their suffering compounded (however unintentionally on the part of the pastoral carer) by an additional burden of shame and guilt. As in all pastoral care, so much depends on personalities, life stages and circumstances, and religious or traditional

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See, for example, Volker Rabens, "'Indicative and Imperative" as the Substructure of Paul's Theology and Ethics in Galatians? A Discussion of Divine and Human Agency in Paul' in Mark W. Elliott, Scott J. Hafemann, N.T Wright and John Frederick (eds) *Galatians and Christian Theology: Justification, the Gospel, and Ethics in Paul's Letter* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2014), 285-305.

[26] Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* Volume 1. Translated by Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice & Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986).

[27] For this approach to the use of the Bible is pastoral counselling see for example, Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counselling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

background.[28] We cannot and must not assume that any one approach can be used as a "blanket" solution for every situation.

4. Character ethics and Paul

It would be easy to fall into the trap of using this text insensitively, thus adding to the burden of suffering. There is, however, an alternative to the moralistic tendencies of foundationalist-influenced hermeneutics which, I believe, can help us move towards a more compassionate understanding of how this passage might inform pastoral care. Due to the influence of Alistair McIntyre's work, character (or virtue) ethics is increasingly prominent in many walks of life from philosophy to psychology and medicine.[29] Instead of focussing on what we should do in any given situation, character ethics urges us to think about what kind of people we ought to be. Instead of emphasising command and rules (although we should not dispense with these completely), character ethics suggests that we should be asking how we can become people of good character, for in that way we will be more disposed to ethical conduct, rather than simply be people who "do what they are told**".** Important in this way of thinking are the ideas of virtue, community and narrative.[30] The virtues are habits of mind and behaviour which are developed over time and enable us to become people of character who can build up stable and thriving communities. Virtues such as fortitude (i.e. perseverance), temperance, prudence and justice are acquired through habit and practice. They can be developed - learned, according to Aristotle, through doing.[31] Without them we would live selfishly, pleasing only

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[28] See, for example, James W. Fowler *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987) and Donald Capps *The Decades of Life: A Guide to Human Development* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox 2008).
[29] See, for example, Christopher Peterson & Martin E.P. Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification* (NY: OUP 2004); Rita Charon, *Narrative Medicine: Honoring the Stories of Illness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2006).
[30] Alistair McIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Virtue* (3rd Ed.; Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 2007).
[31] Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* II, 1, 1103a33, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, (ed) Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 952.

ourselves.[32] Further, in Roman Catholic tradition (but less familiar to most Protestants), faith, hope and love are "theological virtues" given to us (infused) by God.[33] Importantly, for Aquinas, the aim of exercising the virtues is not to live happy lives, as it was for Aristotle, but to live righteously, and have union with God.[34]

Stanley Hauerwas, who is currently the most prolific and influential proponent of character ethics in Christian theology, is concerned that Christians have fallen into the trap of individualism, becoming preoccupied with their own personal morality and salvation.[35] We are in danger of losing a sense of community (and may even have lost it already). In his view, Christian communities are made up of people who know they have a part to play in the story or narrative brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ. Scripture is the sourcebook of that story and from it we learn of the values (or virtues) which are important our communities to flourish and be the "communities of character" which they are meant to be.[36]

In the next section we will bring these ideas to bear on Romans 5:1-5. Before we do this, however, we need to ask if it is appropriate to do so. Are the ideas of community, virtue and narrative compatible with Paul's thinking? Recent scholarship, particularly that influenced by social-scientific criticism, has shown clearly that community, and community formation, are central to Paul's thinking. He writes as a pastor to small groups, helping them to live and work together in often hostile environments.[37] But what of the virtues as the basis of good

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[32] Daniel C. Russell, 'Introduction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2013), 1.
[33] See Augustine *Enchiridion;* Aquinas *Summa Theologica*, I-II 55.
[34] Aquinas *Summa Theologica* I-II.63.3.
[35] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1981), 96.
[36] On the importance of the link between character, community and story see further Richard Bondi 'The Elements of Character' *Journal of Religious Ethics* 12 (1984), 201-18.
[37] For an account of the rise in scholarly interest in the earliest Christian communities see David G. Horrell 'Social-Scientific Interpretation of the New Testament: Retrospect and Prospect' in *Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Intepretation* (ed.) David G. Horrell (London: T&T Clark 2000), 3-28.

character? We know that the virtues were important in philosophies contemporary to Paul, but are they a feature of the apostle's thought?

The dominance of Protestant biblical scholarship over the last couple of centuries has meant that the idea that Paul might have had the virtues in mind has largely gone unconsidered. While the idea of the virtues was very important in ancient and medieval philosophy and theology, it fell into disuse amongst Protestant Christians after the Reformation.[38] The suspicion has been that to embrace the virtues is to veer too much toward the idea of acquiring merit, and a reliance on personal goodness rather than on God's grace. [39] Gilbert Meilaender notes that the notion of character seems to suggest

> habitual behaviour, abilities within our power, an acquired possession. And this in turn may be difficult to reconcile with the Christian emphasis on grace, the sense of the sinner's constant need of forgiveness, and the belief that we can have no claims upon the freedom of God.[40]

Such reservations, together with the Enlightenment emphasis on law and principle rather than the virtues, produced a climate in which the idea that the virtues were part of Paul's thought was either suspect or uninteresting, and so it dropped out of the interpretive picture altogether. In recent years, however, Pauline scholars have become aware that the virtues do play an important part in the apostle's thinking. Paul does think that traits such as temperance and courage are important in Christian life. In 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, for example, he urges temperance, patience, prudence, amongst others, albeit in negative form (cf. also Romans 1:29-31; 1 Cor 5:10-11; 2 Cor 12:20).

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[38] For Luther, 'Almost the entire Aristotelian ethics is fundamentally evil and an enemy of grace"' Martin Luthers *Werke* (Hermann Böhlau) vols 1 and 2 , 1883. Vol1 p226 sententia 41. 'The Historic Decline of Virtue Ethics' by Dorothea Frede in *The Cambridge Companion to Virtue Ethics*, 124-49.

[39] Jean Porter, 'Virtue' in *The Oxford Handbook of Theological Ethics* edited by Gilbert Meilaender and William Werpehowski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 205.

[40] See Gilbert Meilaender, *The Theory and Practice of Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), x. But cf. Thomas O'Meara OP 'Virtues in the Theology of Thomas Aquinas', *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 254-85, who emphasises grace as the source of the virtues.

This line of thinking is particularly in evidence in Galatians 5:19-23, where he speaks of the fruits of the spirit as including perseverance and self-control.

There is, however, an important difference between Paul and ancient philosophical schools such as the Stoics for whom the virtues were important.[41] Ancient thinking about the virtues was concerned with what kind of attitudes would make a person a good citizen, and ultimately, what makes for a good society (Aristotle: *polis*). For Paul, on the other hand, the primary aim was to have a greater knowledge of Christ and to share in his death and resurrection (Phil 3:10-11).[42] Since believers live in the "now and not yet", life is full of struggle against the principalities and powers; in Paul's thinking the virtues are important character traits for members of the community to have if they are to be able to live well as disciples of Christ.

It is also important to notice that these ideas were not confined to Greek thought. The virtues (although they are not called such) were to be found in the wisdom tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures. According to Ellen Davis, we can understand Old Testament Wisdom literature, especially the book of Proverbs, as an exegetical base for renewing a biblically informed virtue tradition. For Paul, she writes,

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[41] Troels Engberg-Petersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 2000); Jennifer A. Herdt, 'Frailty, Fragmentation, and Social Dependency in the Cultivation of Christian Virtue' in (ed. Nancy E. Snow) *Cultivating Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 227-49. Note, too, that in the Stoic tradition, hope for the future should be rejected: the wise man concentrates on the present, "so as not to be disturbed by prospects of the future which eludes his control." Bernard N. Schumacher, 'Is there still Hope for Hope?' In *Hope. Claremont Studies in the Philosophy of religion Conference* 2014 edited by Ingolf U. Dalferth & Marlebe A. Block (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2016), 215.

[42] Daniel J. Harrington & James F. Keenan *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield 2010), 104-5. On the virtues in Paul see further, Joseph J. Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press 1996), 119-31.

> schooling in the virtues is simply one form of the work his ancestors called "teach[ing] the fear of YHWH (Ps 34:11; cf Prov 1:7).[43]

We are, then, justified in seeing the ideas of community and the virtues in Paul's writings, but what of narrative? It must be admitted that it is far from obvious that Paul is operating within what we would now call a "narrative framework", and for years, many scholars would have said that it is foreign to his thought. Of late, however, there has been a growing appreciation that story is, in fact, very important for Paul. Indeed, everything he writes to his congregations has its basis in the story of what God has done in history through the person of Jesus Christ. Not only that, he sees this story as the central part of the history of the Jewish people – from the creation of the world, through the patriarchs, the Exodus, the giving of the Law and the teaching of the prophets. When he writes to his congregations, then, part of his aim is to help his churches to understand where they fit into the story of God's redemption of the world. [44]

It is easy to lose sight of this, for rather than spell it out, Paul often assumes that his readers will know it.[45] Nevertheless, as we look more closely, it becomes evident that this metanarrative is very important in all his epistles, not least the letter to the Romans. Paul's message of the gospel, and his understanding of the justification of believers, is set in the story of creation, of God's dealings with the Jewish people, of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Messiah has come, and the

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[43] Ellen F. Davis 'Preserving Virtues: Renewing the Traditions of the Sages' in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community and Biblical Interpretation* edited by William P Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2002), 184.

[44] See N.T. Wright *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: SPCK, 2013); Richard B. Hays *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1993).

[45] See the collection of essays in Bruce W. Longenecker (ed.), *Narrative Dynamics in Paul: A Critical Assessment* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002); Richard B Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*(2nd Ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002 [1983]); Stephen E Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of the Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus* JSNTSup 36 (Sheffield: JSOT Press 1990).

period of the "now and the not yet" has begun as we wait for the completion of the story at the end times.[46]

5. An alternative interpretation

It is, then, quite in order for us to bring these ideas to bear on our passage in Romans. Narrative and the virtues, although not necessarily to the fore in Paul's writing, form part of his intellectual and cultural world, and play an important role in the fabric of his thinking. While we cannot by any means say that Paul himself thought in the same way as modern character ethicists such as Hauerwas do, we can say that elements of what we now call character ethics are to be found in his writings. In other words, we cannot describe Paul as a character ethicist, but we can say that these central ideas are not foreign to his thinking and indeed were part of the cultural and intellectual air (both Jewish and Hellenistic) which he breathed.

These ideas provide a quite different hermeneutical lens through which to view Romans 5:1-5 from that of foundationalism. What message does our passage contain when we see perseverance as a virtue (rather than merely an act of obedience), character in terms of community wellbeing as well as personal obedience, and faith, hope and love as theological virtues? First, perseverance becomes not so much an act of the will as a God-given capacity. Thus, perseverance is no longer solely a matter of gritting our teeth - we already have the ability to learn and practise it. Further, our ability to persevere cannot be divorced from the Christian narrative. As Hauerwas and Pinches remind us in their book *Christians Among the Virtues*,

> Christians can endure because through Christ they have been given power over death and all the forms of victimization that trade on it. The ultimate power of Christ is the victory over death that makes possible the endurance of suffering: we can endure because we have confidence that though our

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[46] Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2001).

> enemies may kill us they cannot determine the meaning of our death.[47]

The ability to persevere rests on the fact that God has acted in history through Christ's death and victory, and that believers have a changed relationship with God. It is because of this that we are enabled us to withstand the trials which will and indeed must come our way as we participate in the continuing story of Christ's work in the world (8:17).

Second, we have seen that from a foundationalist perspective the character of which Paul speaks (understood in terms of moral and spiritual strength) results from obedience to the implied imperative to cling on to faith and persevere. Now, it is true that such strength is a mark of being a new creation in Christ. But how does it come about and what happens when we fail or make mistakes? According to Barth, God in his grace allows us continually to make mistakes and continually restores us - over and over again.[48] However, this seems to suggest that Christian life is static, a matter of repeated failure and divine rescue. A character ethics perspective, on the other hand, encourages us to think in terms of the Christian life as a journey. The believer is *homo viator* – on a journey of spiritual and moral growth into maturity and wisdom.[49] Moreover, this takes place in community. While it is true that personal holiness is important, as we have seen, the virtues are practised not for our own benefit primarily, but in and for the sake of the community, and indeed humanity, as a whole.

Third, when faith, hope and love are understood as theological virtues (in Aquinas' terms), the emphasis moves away from the idea of an act of will, to that of divine gift. Certainly, the belief that Christ has been raised from the dead is the foundation for our ability to persevere in

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[47] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1997), 123.
[48] Karl Barth *Church Dogmatics* II/2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 644-45 cited in Hauerwas and Pinches *Christians Among the Virtues*, 113-28.
[49] Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*. Translated by Emma Craufurd (London: Gollancz 1951). See also Gilbert Meilander 'The Place of Ethics in the Theological Task', *Currents in Theology and Mission* 6 (1979): 199.

suffering and cling on to hope. We choose to believe that God has acted in Christ and we maintain that belief as an act of will. The same may be said for trust – we choose to trust that God continues to work through the Holy Spirit. But also important is the idea of faithfulness – of our being faithful to God as he is faithful to us. The crucial point is, though, that we are given the grace to be believing, trusting and faithful people and these God-given characteristics enable us to shoulder the responsibility of discipleship. As we participate in the continuing story of Christ's work in the world, we grow in our understanding of the nature and implications of our belief, learn how to trust more fully and are enabled to be faithful.

Hope too becomes something that we are given – the expectation of the end time vindication and glorification is a gift from God. It is something that Christians have, as part of their identity, and they have it only in community. As Gabriel Marcel notes, "there can be no hope which does not constitute itself through a we and for a we… all hope is at bottom choral".[50] Further, as the mean between the extremes of triumphalism (sometimes called presumption) and despair, this hope enables us to continue on our journey in the "now and not yet". According to Pieper,

> Despair means that the wayfarer no longer believes that the journey is doable. Presumption means that the journey is doable, but that we do not need to rely on God. In neither vice do we in fact rely on God. God is beyond our needs for the journey.[51]

We may be tempted to despair that we will never be able to get to the end of the journey, or to presume that we are able to carry on without God. The mean between these two extremes is a realistic view both of our own abilities in avoiding these temptations and of our relationship to God.

Lastly, besides being a subjective assurance of God's love for us, *agapē* is a gift which must be exercised, and it is through this that hope of the

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[50] 'The Encounter with Evil' in *Tragic Wisdom and Beyond* (trans.) Stephen Jolin and Peter McCormick (Evanston: North Eastern University Press 1973), 143.
[51] Harrington & Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics,* 104-5.

future glory is glimpsed. The phrase "the love of God" in 5:5 may be understood not only as God's love for us but as our love for God.[52] Moreover, our response of love for God must also express itself in love for others. God has already revealed this hope to us, in the person and work of Jesus Christ, whose example of kenotic love is one which his disciples should imitate (Phil 2:1-11). Moreover, whenever believers exercise this gift of *agapē* love, the pervading pattern of power-seeking and selfish behaviour which characterises the world is challenged and undermined. In our weakness, and indeed because of it, we are bringing the kingdom of God into the here and now. We are bringing something of the future hope of God's justice and the revelation of his glory into the present time.[53] In the expression of Christ-like love, imperfect though it may be, we see something of how things will be when the full glory of God (who is love) is revealed. In the love which believers demonstrate, within their own community and to those who are outside, glimpses of the eschatological hope which we have can be seen in the present.

In this interpretation, then, when Christians encounter suffering, they are able to persevere, grow in character and hold on to hope because of the gifts they have been given. They are able to withstand the suffering which is part and parcel of being a part of God's story because of the "distinctive excellences" which characterise their communities. Certainly, these gifts must be used on the journey towards the time when God will be all in all. However, from a character ethics perspective, faith, hope and love become less a matter of obedient assent and grim determination, than one of using the gifts we have been given and being changed "into his likeness" (2 Cor 3:18) as we do so.

From a character ethics perspective, then, how might this passage inform pastoral care? We have seen that, when the question "what ought I to do?" is asked of the text, implicit imperatives to hold on to

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[52] Augustine, *The Spirit and the Letter* 5.3. See Gerald L. Bray & Thomas C. Oden, *Romans: Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture. New Testament* Volume 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP 2005), 126.
[53] See Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 1964).

the tenets of faith and to the eschatological hope are found within it. When trouble comes, then, individuals need to hold on to certainties as a matter of obedience, and if this is proving difficult, pastoral care involves reminding of and reinforcing what is already known. A character ethics approach changes our understanding of the passage and also of our understanding of the nature of pastoral care. Now, rather than looking for instruction, we are looking to Scripture to help us be the kind of people God wants us to be. From this perspective, Romans 5:1-5 tells us that we are a community of people who have been given the gifts we need in order to be resilient in times of trouble. Called to a journey of participation in the continuing story of Christ's work in the world, we have the resources we need to shoulder this responsibility together. Pastoral care is a matter of accompaniment and mutual support along the way. If and when some find it difficult to exercise their gifts of faith, hope and love in times of trouble, the community can support them and provide for their needs, drawing wisdom and encouragement from the Scriptures as it does so. As those who find it difficult to hold on to hope are cared for by the community, they may well catch glimpses of God's future hope in the here and now and so find strength for the journey.

Conclusion: Suffering, hope and pastoral care

We began by noting an increasing interest in the use of Scripture in writing on pastoral care, and the importance of hermeneutics for that endeavour. Here, as a contribution to this still nascent interdisciplinary work, I have undertaken a study of Romans 5:1-5, asking how it might inform the pastoral care of people who are struggling to hope in the midst of severe crisis. I have offered two interpretations, one informed by foundationalist hermeneutics and another by character ethics. I have suggested that a foundationalist hermeneutic is unconsciously adopted by many readers of the Bible, who read in order to find out what they should be doing in their everyday lives. A character ethics informed hermeneutic, on the other hand, is less concerned with doing than with being: what kind of people ought we to be? We have seen that the hermeneutical standpoint adopted by the reader has the potential to influence not only how the text is interpreted and used in the pastoral setting, but how pastoral care itself is understood and carried out.

From a foundationalist viewpoint, Romans 5:1-5 might suggest that the onus is on individuals to persevere in suffering, and to cling on to faith, love and hope as a matter of obedience. While there is some truth in this, as far as pastoral care is concerned, there could be a risk that the passage is used merely as a means for reminding people of propositional truths and of the necessity of obedience to inferred imperatives. There is, in turn, a danger that those who, for whatever reason, are unable to do this will be deemed to suspect and in need of exhortation or even rebuke. For those who are struggling, this could add a burden of guilt and shame to an already heavy load, and might even suggest that their suffering is incompatible with their faith.

An interpretation of this passage from the perspective of character ethics helps us avoid these pitfalls. Its focus on being rather than doing, on narrative and the virtues rather than rule and obedience, and community rather than individualism, means that the Christian life becomes a matter of growing in character in community, rather than of individual effort. When we apply this hermeneutical lens to Romans 5:1-15, we see that the passage is still full of encouragement. But rejoicing in the link between suffering and hope is less a matter of what we ought to be doing than something we are enabled to do because of the gifts we have been given by God: Christians are faithful, hopeful and loving people. As we participate in Christ's redemptive sufferings, and learn from our experience, we reach out to others in *agapē* love. The community of faith suffers, endures, grows together. Pastoral care becomes a matter of accompanying rather than of prescription and instruction, of sharing rather than attempting to fix perceived problems. When some find it difficult to trust or hope in times of suffering, the community of faith, through the exercise of *agapē* love, dares to do so on their behalf.

Notes on Contributor

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'Welcome One Another': Applying Romans 14.1-15.13 to the Debate on Same-Sex Relationships

Tim Carter

Introduction

'Welcome one another, as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God' (Romans 15:7). With those words Paul concludes his address to the strong and the weak groups of Christians in Rome who were bitterly divided over the question of Sabbath observance and food laws. In his study advocating tolerance as an authentic expression of faith in God, Robert Jewett has argued that this call to welcome each other 'was to accept others into full fellowship, to put an end to the hostile competition, and to admit the basic legitimacy of the other sides.'[1] For Jewett, tolerance is not the consequence of a lack of conviction: on the contrary, a vital faith should issue in a 'strenuous tolerance', one which goes beyond a passive recognition of another's point of view, and instead actively reaches out to include them in one's circle.[2] The call to welcome each other as Christ has welcomed us indicates that the tolerant ethic of Romans is a practical outworking of the grace of the gospel, inasmuch as we are called 'to pass on the same unconditional acceptance to others that we ourselves have already received.'[3] Whereas churches frequently respond to those with whom they disagree by severing connections, skirting round divisive issues, insisting on conformity or setting out to win the fight; Jewett argues that Paul's call to welcome each other means that churches should actively encourage expressions of difference, so that believers can

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[1] Robert Jewett, *Christian Tolerance: Paul's Message to the Modern Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1982), 29.
[2] Jewett, *Tolerance,* 35.
[3] Jewett, *Tolerance*, 37.

respect the integrity of the other and in mutual love rejoice in their diversity.[4]

In this paper, I want to follow Jewett's line of argument and explore how the principles of tolerance set out in Romans 14-15 can be applied to the question of how we debate today's contentious issue of same-sex relationships,[5] an issue which divides the church today as much, if not more than the issue of food laws divided the Christians in Rome when Paul wrote his letter to them. It is clear that in the Roman congregations those of each persuasion were equally devoted to honouring the Lord (14:5-6), but they were fundamentally at odds over the question as to whether it was legitimate for believers to eat unclean food. We get an insight into the mutual acrimony from Romans 14:2-3, where those who eat meat despise those who eat only vegetables, and those who abstain from meat sit in judgment on those who eat it.

Whereas for us the issue of unclean food is largely irrelevant, for some Jewish believers in Rome it was a matter of practical obedience to the clear stipulations set out in Leviticus 11. Others, however, interpreted Scripture in such a way that they felt, with a clear conscience, that they were not bound by the food laws. Underlying the question of what one was allowed to eat was the hermeneutical question as to how to interpret and apply the requirements of Torah in the light of the Christ event. On the one hand, there were those whose faith was inextricably tied to the clear and unambiguous teaching of authoritative scripture, and on the other, there were those whose faith was robust enough for them to interpret scripture in a very different way, resulting in a very different lifestyle.[6]

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[4] Jewett, *Tolerance*, 122-26.

[5] Within the Anglican Communion, Reinhard has applied Jewett's work to the human sexuality debate: K.L. Reinhard, 'Conscience, Interdependence, and Embodied Difference: What Paul's Ecclesial Principles Can Offer the Contemporary Church,' *ATR* 94 (2012): 403-28. Cf. the response by J.C. Olson, 'Idol food, same-sex intercourse, and tolerable diversity within the church,' *ATR* 95 (2013): 627-47.

[6] Suggesting that the 'strong' and the 'weak' were 'liberal' and 'conservative' in their interpretation of scripture, Zerbe astutely argues that, 'Romans is primarily about resolving a crisis of relationships in the community of Christ's faithful', G. Zerbe, 'Welcoming as Christ has welcomed: Paul's challenge to

Seeing the issue in these terms invites us to revisit Romans 14-15 and to read these chapters, not as an appendix to the doctrinal body of the letter, written to resolve an arcane dispute over food laws, but rather as a pastoral call to believers, who were divided by very different approaches to Scripture, to accept each other. The differing approaches to Scripture in Paul's day resulted in very different attitudes towards one of the most basic of bodily functions, namely that of eating. Sexual activity is another basic bodily function,[7] and churches today are deeply divided as to whether physically intimate relationships between people of the same sex can be compatible with the Christian faith. This essay seeks to explore how Paul dealt with the issue of unclean food in Romans 14-15, with a view to exploring whether there are lessons to be learned from his pastoral approach in Romans for a church at odds with itself over the issue of sexuality today.

This study will proceed by identifying the strong and the weak and the issues that divided them, and why those issues mattered, before going on to explore the implications of the probable social context of the Roman church for the exegesis of Romans 14-15, and then applying the findings to the issue of the debate over sexuality.

Identifying the Strong and the Weak in Rome

The identity of the strong and the weak has been a matter for extensive debate, but an important key to resolving this issue lies in noting that in 15:8-12 Paul turns straight from addressing the strong and the weak to addressing the relationship between those who are circumcised and the Gentiles. Unless there is a sudden jump in the

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Christians in Rome,' *Vision* 17 (2016): 78-86 [78]; cf. Jewett, *Tolerance*, 29-30; J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas; Word, 1988), 803; J.A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (Geoffrey Chapman: London, 1992), 686-88.

[7] Eating and sex are not just bodily functions: both involve crossing bodily boundaries, and their regulation plays an important part in preserving the integrity of both somatic and social identity. Cf. M. Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2003), 122-29; C.M. Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning, and Power* (London: Routledge, 1999), 61-63.

focus of his attention at the end of 15:7,[8] this suggests that the weak and the strong were divided, if not actually along ethnic lines, then at least in terms of their level of Torah observance.[9] It is easy to see how keeping the Sabbath, prescribed as it is in the fourth commandment, was unambiguously a matter of Torah observance, but abstention from meat is less obviously accounted for in this regard. Yet if it was difficult to procure clean, *kosher* meat in the markets in Rome, or to be sure whether the meat or wine for sale had not previously been used in the worship of an idol, observant Jews would likely have followed the example of Daniel and his friends in Babylon and restricted their diet to vegetables and water (Daniel 1:8-16).[10] Thus, there are good grounds for understanding the issue Paul addresses in Romans 14-15 as being one of Torah observance and devotion to God.[11]

Towards one end of the spectrum there would have been believers who held that all Christians were bound to observe the prescriptions of Torah concerning circumcision, Sabbath, and food laws; moving across the spectrum, others would have seen these laws as binding on

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[8] For a defence of Romans 15:1-13 as an integral part of Paul's original letter, cf. R.N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 1010-12.

[9] P. Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 340-44; cf. Longenecker, *Romans,* 993-96, 1010-13.

[10] Cf. also Esther 14:17 LXX; Josephus, *Vita* 13-14, and other references in C.H. Talbert, *Romans*, (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 311-15.

[11] In 1 Corinthians 8:4-13, Paul uses the term 'weak' to denote those who struggled to accept that an idol has no real existence, and who consequently refused to eat meat that had been sacrificed to idols because it was against their conscience. Paul's concern is that their fragile faith could be jeopardised if they were encouraged to follow the example of those who felt free to eat in the temple of an idol on the epistemological basis that the idol was not real. It is likely that the weak vegetarians in Rome shared similar dietary scruples over idolatry as the weak in Corinth, and it may have been on this basis that Paul feels able to use the same nomenclature in both letters. However, we may not legitimately infer from his repeated use of the term that he is addressing the same scenario in each case. We must deduce what he means by 'the weak' in Romans from the context in this letter, and Paul would have expected his audience in Rome to be able to make sense of his words without needing to have read 1 Corinthians beforehand.

Jews but optional for Gentiles; others again may have felt that believers in Christ, whether Jewish or Gentile, were not required to observe Torah, but may choose to do so; still others, at the far end of the spectrum, seem to have felt that any observance of Sabbath, food laws and circumcision betrayed a lack of assurance that justification was solely a matter of faith in Christ, and so may have labelled as 'weak in faith'[12] those who had scruples about keeping the works of the law.[13] There was a tendency among the strong to despise those whose Torah observance was perceived as a sign of weak faith, whereas those labelled as weak were judging and condemning the strong who did not observe the law. Thus the unity and fellowship of the different congregations in Rome was under serious threat.

Indeed, it can be argued that the matter was of such importance to Paul that the entire letter to the Romans was composed to address this issue.[14] He begins by establishing that justification is a matter of faith not works of the law (1-4), and then demonstrates that it is the eschatological Spirit of Christ, rather than the law, which effectively deals with the problem of the power of sin and so effectively directs the ethical life of believers (5-8). Subsequently he addresses the

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[12] Dunn suggests that, 'In this case the weakness is trust in God *plus* dietary and festival laws, trust in God *dependent* on observance of such practices, a trust in God which leans on the crutches of particular customs and not on God alone, as though they were an integral part of that trust' (*Romans 9-16*, 798).
[13] However, Barclay has argued convincingly that, rather than supposing that 'weak' was a disparaging term of reference adopted by those in Rome who saw themselves as those who were comparatively 'strong', it was Paul who coined the terms 'strong' and 'weak': contra Dunn (n.12), he argues that the weak are those whose faith is vulnerable because it is integrally connected to cultural norms, whereas the strong have been able to ground their faith solely in the gospel, rather than in any cultural norm or value: J.M.G. Barclay, "Faith and Self-Detachment from Cultural Norms: A Study in Romans 14-15,' *ZNW* 104 (2013): 192-208.
[14] C.f. Jewett, *Tolerance*, 23-29; J.P. Sampley, 'The Weak and the Strong: Paul's Careful and Crafty Rhetorical Strategy in Romans 14:1-15:13,' in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne Meeks* (eds. L.M. White, O.L. Yarbrough; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 40-52; T.L. Carter, *Paul and the Power of Sin: Redefining 'Beyond the Pale'* (Cambridge: CUP, 2002), 124-45; C.N. Toney, *Paul's Inclusive Ethic: Resolving Community Conflicts and Promoting Mission in Romans 14-15* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 49-90.

arrogance of Gentiles who wrongly supposed that what they saw as Israel's misguided pursuit of the law meant that they had missed out on the grace of God (9-11) before setting out how believers should relate to each other and to those who oppose them (12-13).[15] Then, in chapters 14-15, we find the practical, pastoral outworking and application of his theological argument up to this point.[16] Many reasons have been put forward as to why Paul wrote Romans,[17] but the single pastoral issue of the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers[18] and the interpretation and application of Old Testament food laws has the capacity to make sense of the letter as a whole, and correspondingly this means that we do well to pay particular attention to what Paul says in Romans 14-15.[19]

Why Unclean Food Mattered So Much

Because the questions of Sabbath observance and food laws are not particularly relevant to us today, it is tempting to categorise them as *adiaphora*,[20] matters of relative indifference, and we may

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[15] Jewett suggests that these chapters prepare the ground for what follows in Romans 14-15 (*Tolerance*, 107-120). Cf. also J-W. Lee, *Paul and the Politics of Difference: A Contextual Study of the Jewish-Gentile Difference in Galatians and Romans* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2014), 141-46,

[16] Cf. Toney, *Paul's Inclusive Ethic*, 120-24.

[17] Cf. K.P. Donfried (ed.), *The Romans Debate* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); A.J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

[18] K.B. McCruden contests the view that Paul was addressing a specific pastoral situation in Romans, but suggests that the weak and the strong serve as literary theological models, demonstrating God's impartiality towards both Jews and Gentiles: 'Judgment und Life for the Lord: Occasion and Theology of Romans 14,1-15,13,' *Biblica* 86 (2005): 229-44.

[19] Reasoner cogently argues, on the basis of his analysis of Romans 14-15, that the letter is 'thoroughly occasional': M. Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1-15.13 in Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

[20] Longenecker (*Romans,* 1001) describes *adiaphora* as 'matters having to do primarily with social background, personal opinion or personal preference...that are neither required of nor prohibited to believers.' It is on the basis that the passage refers to such matters that he proposes how it can be contextualised for today (1018-19). Käsemann insists that 'Paul is not formulating a doctrine of adiaphora here': E. Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 375. According to Jewett, Paul frames his

correspondingly feel it is strange that Paul would devote so much attention to what is for us such a minor issue. But in the second century BCE, during the Maccabaean crisis, Jews had been tortured, martyred, and slaughtered in battle because of their allegiance to the food and Sabbath laws.[21] Consequently these commandments came to be regarded as badges of faithful allegiance.[22] As Barclay has cogently argued, the issue of *kashrut* may have been a matter of indifference to the strong, whose faith was less tied to the cultural and ethical demands of Torah, but for those who were weak, the kosher and sabbath rules were 'so closely interwoven with their faith-response to Christ that to depart from them would be, for them, an abrogation of that faith.'[23]

For Torah-observant believers, keeping the requirements of Torah would been bound up with notions of holiness: they were to be holy because the Lord is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7-8). The charge to keep the Sabbath holy was one of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15), and the command to distinguish between clean and unclean food was inextricably bound up with what it meant to be holy to the Lord and to be distinguished from all the other nations in the world.[24] In Leviticus 20:24-26, the same verb (**בדל** *hiphil*) is used four times as the Lord says, 'I am the LORD your God, who has **separated** you from the peoples. You shall therefore **separate** the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have **set apart** for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me, for I the

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argument in such a way as to prevent the drawing of any distinction between what is essential and non-essential (*Tolerance*, 31-32).

[21] 1 Maccabees 1:41-64; 2:31-38; 2 Maccabees 6:1-13; 4 Maccabees 4:15-6:30; 8:1-12:19.

[22] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 800-801.

[23] Barclay, 'Faith and Self-Detachment,' 200-201. Barclay shows (204) that it was precisely because the food laws were a matter of indifference to the strong, but of vital importance to the faith of the weak that Paul puts the onus on the strong to curtail their behaviour in order to avoid destroying the faith of the weak (Romans 14:20-23).

[24] C.f. G.J. Wenham, 'The Theology of Unclean Food,' *Evangelical Quarterly* 53 (1981): 6-15.

LORD am holy and have **separated** you from the peoples, that you should be mine.' It is incumbent upon God's holy people, who have been separated from the peoples of the world, to distinguish clean from unclean food: diet both symbolises and expresses holiness. Furthermore, the refusal to eat food commonly consumed by other nations actively hinders commensality and thereby actively increases social isolation. The food laws set Israel, as God's holy people, apart from the other nations.

Yet Paul understood that through the gospel of Christ his God-given priestly ministry was to present the Gentiles as an offering sanctified and made holy by the Holy Spirit to the Lord (15:16). Thus, for him, the nations themselves had been made holy in Christ. This shared holiness meant that there was no longer the social need to maintain the distinction between clean and unclean that the food laws symbolised and reinforced.

We see from the incident in Antioch (Galatians 2:11-16) that Paul was convinced that commensality between believing Jews and Gentiles was God's will in Christ, and in his eyes to expect Gentiles to observe Jewish food laws was a denial of the gospel. In Romans we see Paul arguing that no food was inherently unclean: rather it was only unclean for the person who regarded it as such (14:14).[25] This way of re-

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[25] Horrell suggests that this approach to morality could be described as 'a constructivist realism: things really are such, to the one who reckons them so': D.G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 205. As Engberg-Pedersen astutely observes, it is the attitude – the presence of faith or its absence – that decides whether or not a sin is committed, and he appeals to the Stoic distinction between the objective value of a thing or an act and the value people ascribe to it to elucidate this. For the Stoics, the wise person sees that God has made all things in accordance with nature, but the unwise person, who is insufficiently directed towards God, may mistakenly suppose that an object is bad, in which case it actually becomes bad for them. Paul applies this principle to the strong, who rightly perceive that apart from God's action in Christ, everything is a matter of indifference: T. Engberg-Pedersen, 'Everything is Clean' and 'Everything that is not of Faith is Sin': The Logic of Pauline Casuistry in Romans 14.1 – 15.13,' in *Paul, Grace and Freedom. Essays in Honour of John K. Riches*, (eds. P. Middleton, A. Paddison, K. Wenell; London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2009), 22-38.

interpreting the Levitical food laws gave Paul the freedom to eat any food and to honour God by giving thanks for what he ate (14:6). However, those who considered themselves bound by the requirements of the law would be quite incapable of eating such food in honour of the Lord (14:6). On the contrary, to eat food that they regarded as unclean would be to commit a sin, since they were not acting in accordance with their faith (14:22).

Paul was convinced that it was vitally important that each person should be convinced in their own mind (14:5). Those who abided by the food laws were bound by their clear sense of authoritative Scripture, but for Paul, the law in its entirety was effectively fulfilled in the love commandment (13:8-10) and therefore individual commandments were open to interpretation. These differing approaches to Scripture underlay the controversy in Rome, but on the basis that the strong and the weak were acting in accordance with their faith, Paul calls on both groups to refrain from judging each other or despising each other (14:1-3, 10).

The Social Context and its Implications

Paul was also particularly concerned about the impact that the behaviour of the strong could have on the weak (14:13-23). The strong should not cause a brother or sister to trip up or fall by placing an obstacle, hindrance, trap or a stumbling block in their way (14:13). Whereas the strong may regard the food as inherently clean (14:14), if they upset, injure or cause distress to someone, then they are not walking in love and so are not fulfilling the law; while food was of little consequence to them, the strong needed to take account of the fact that their food could destroy or ruin someone for whom Christ died (14:15).

When Paul asks the strong to moderate their behaviour, he is not merely asking them to refrain from eating unclean food in the presence of the weak so as to avoid upsetting them or causing offence.[26] The strong are not required to abstain from unclean food merely on the grounds that the weak find this objectionable. When Paul talks about

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[26] J. Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 2.190-91.

destroying another person, he is referring to the far more serious matter of leading them into sin; this is not about the conscience of the weak being offended by the behaviour of the strong, but about the strong causing the weak to act against their own conscience. Romans 14:23 makes it clear that this happens when someone ends up eating something which is against their scruples; because they are not acting in accordance with their faith, their own doubts condemn them. How does such a situation arise?

It is important to remember that, in talking about food, Paul is in fact talking about meals, and meals were shared social occasions.[27] We know from Romans 16:5, where Paul greets the church that meets in the house of Prisca and Aquila that at least some of the Christians in Rome gathered in each other's homes. This suggests that there is a practical dimension to Paul's imperative προσλαμβάνεσθε ἀλλήλους, καθὼς καὶ ὁ Χριστὸς προσελάβετο ὑμᾶς (15:7): 'Welcome each other, just as Christ has welcomed you.' Paul is not referring to passive acceptance of each other's point of view, but rather calling the groups to show hospitality to each other, by welcoming each other into their homes. The semantic range of προσλαμβάνω includes the meaning, 'receive or accept in one's society, into one's house or circle of acquaintances,'[28] Dunn cross-references 2 Maccabees 10:15, which refers to taking in refugees from Jerusalem, Acts 28:2, which refers to the welcome extended by the inhabitants of Malta to Paul and his companions when they were shipwrecked, and to Paul's own injunction to Philemon to welcome Onesimus as he would Paul

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[27] Although Paul instructs the strong to abstain from behaviour which would cause the weak to stumble, Barclay observes that this probably only applied in the context of shared meals; he did not require a complete change in their dietary habits. The weak are permitted to keep food and sabbath laws, but are required to accept and associate with brothers and sisters in Christ who did not do so. Thus the strong are required to moderate their behaviour as the occasion requires, but the weak have an obligation to welcome and accept those with whom they fundamentally disagree. Cf. J.M.G. Barclay, "'Do we undermine the Law?" A Study of Romans 14.1-15.6,' in *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 37-60.

[28] W.F. Arndt, F.W Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (London: University of Chicago, 1979), 717.

himself (Philemon 17).[29] As Esler observes, 'Rom. 14:1 "Welcome…but not for disputes about opinions," seems to envisage some such welcome into a specific place, and the most likely place is the house of the one being urged to do the welcoming.'[30]

In Graeco-Roman culture, sharing food was one of the most powerful symbolic expressions of fellowship.[31] Accordingly, the appropriate social expression of welcoming each other would and should have been a shared meal.[32] However, rather than being occasions where the fellowship was built up, the gatherings had degenerated into arguments over different opinions and mutual recrimination (14:1-3), and the meal had become a source of grief and distress and even destruction for those whose faith was weak (14:15).

Paul commands, μὴ τῷ βρώματί σου ἐκεῖνον ἀπόλλυε ὑπὲρ οὗ Χριστὸς ἀπέθανεν: 'by your food do not destroy one for whom Christ died.' When it comes to translating τῷ βρώματί σου, ESV and NRSV opt for '[by] what you eat'; NIV goes for 'by your eating'. These translations all assume that 'your food' is the food on your plate that you consume. However, when guests are invited to someone's house for a meal, they eat the food that the host provides. If we suppose that Paul is addressing the host of a dinner party, then the phrase 'your

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[29] Dunn, *Romans*, 798.

[30] Esler, *Conflict*, 347.

[31] This subject is thoroughly explored in Plutarch's Table Talk, where consideration is given to the question as to 'Whether people of old did better with portions served to each, or people of today, who dine from a common supply': *Moralia: Quaestiones Convivales* 2.10 (LCL 424:183-19; 5642E-644D). Cf. L. Jamir, *Exclusion and Judgment in Fellowship Meals: The Socio-Historical Background of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2017), 1-5, 62-64.

[32] Coutsoumpos argues that shared meals would have taken the form of the *eranos,* a meal where all the guests brought food to share between them: P. Coutsoumpos, *Community, Conflict and the Eucharist in Roman Corinth: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 14-21. However, his sources (Homer, Aristophanes, Xenophon) are all far too early to have relevance. At the end of the second century CE, when Athenaeus explains that *eranoi* are gatherings made up of people who all bring something to contribute towards the cost of an event, he indicates that this is how people spoke of meals in ancient times rather than in his own day (*The Learned Banqueters* 8; LCL 235:160-161.).

food' refers not to the food that you eat but to the meal you set before your guests. This reading of τῷ βρώματί σου has far-reaching ramifications. It means that 'your food' has the capacity destroy another person, not merely because they witness you eating it,[33] but because you have provided it, and either they eat it without realising that they should not have done so, or they eat it because social constraints deter them from refusing to partake of the meal.[34] Paul is not concerned about the weak being upset when they see the strong eating food, but about the strong inviting a weak to a meal where the weak are served food, which, were they to eat it, would have catastrophic consequences for their faith.[35]

Is it plausible that those who were strong would be so inconsiderate as to invite the weak to a meal and serve unclean food? In Romans 14:3, 10 Paul uses the verb (ἐξουθενέω) to warn the strong not to despise the weak and treat them with contempt as if they were of no account. To invite the weak to a meal where unclean food was served would be a vivid expression of the utter disdain with which the strong regarded the scruples of the weak,[36] and it is easy to see how, if this were happening, the meal would degenerate into arguments and acrimony.

Furthermore, this scenario also suggests that where Paul mentions putting a stumbling block (πρόσκομμα) in someone's way (14:13), he is actually referring to the food provided at the meal, which causes the downfall of the weaker brothers and sisters. In 14:20, Paul asserts that all things are clean, but he goes onto assert that it is bad for the one who eats διὰ προσκόμματος ἐσθίοντι. There is some debate as to whether the phrase describes how one person's act of eating can give

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[33] It is likely that our interpretation of Romans 14:15 has been unduly influenced by 1 Corinthians 10:28, but since the readers of Paul's letter to the Romans would not have read 1 Corinthians, we should once more be wary of using the latter to understand the former.

[34] 'When we are invited to a drinking party we enjoy what is before us, and if one should bid his entertainer to serve him fish or cakes, one would be thought eccentric' (*Fragments from Arrian the Pupil of Epictetus* 17).

[35] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 821, 827.

[36] It would also be a further example of counter-cultural behaviour on their part, using the meal as an opportunity to court controversy, rather than to promote harmony.

rise to an offence in someone else's eyes, or whether the offence is that committed by the person who eats because they regard the food as unclean.[37] The meaning of the preposition διά is significant here:[38] with the genitive, διά can denote 'attendant circumstance', in which case the one who eats does so in a situation where a stumbling block occurs. However, the construction can also denote 'means or instrument' or 'efficient cause', in which case the person eats as a result of some kind of stumbling block. This would suggest that it is not the act of eating which creates a stumbling block; on the contrary, it is the stumbling block which causes someone to eat. A literal translation would be, '…it is bad for the person who eats through [an occasion] of stumbling.'[39] If someone serves a guest food which the guest regards as unclean, the host has put a stumbling block in their way. If the guest eats that food, it is bad for them, and the food they eat is what makes them stumble.

Having said that food is bad (κακόν) for anyone who eats 'through stumbling' (14:20), Paul goes on to say that it is good (καλόν) not to eat or drink or do anything that causes another to stumble. The contrast here is rhetorically unexpected: the strong may have anticipated that Paul would say that food was bad for someone who deemed it so and good for the person who deemed it so, but instead he says that for the sake of the weak in faith it is good for the strong to abstain from meat or wine. The food may be good for the strong, but the wellbeing of the other is paramount,[40] and so they are to keep their faith[41] between themselves and God (σὺ πίστιν [ἣν] ἔχεις κατὰ σεαυτὸν ἔχε ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ (14:22). Again, the social context of host and guest determines the import of Paul's meaning here: he is not

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[37] Dunn (*Romans 9-16*, 826) argues in favour of retaining the ambiguity, as does R. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2007), 867.
[38] Arndt & Gingrich, *Lexicon*, 180.
[39] Murray, *Romans*, 2.195; U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer*, 3 vols. (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978-1982), 3.95.
[40] Horrell makes the point that in Paul's argument the discernment of what is right and wrong can only be specified in the context of human relationships (*Solidarity and Difference*, 207).
[41] This designates 'the peculiar form of faith that each group has been given by God, which includes the cultural and theological factors that govern each group's service to its Lord,' (Jewett, *Romans,* 870).

saying that one should keep one's freedom to eat and drink a secret; rather he is saying that the strong have a faith that is right for them, but they should keep it to themselves in the sense that they should avoid imposing or inflicting it on others. Each group should act in accordance with their own faith:[42] those who can eat freely are blessed because they have no reason to judge themselves for behaviour of which they approve, but those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because if the act of eating is not an expression of faith for them, then for them it is a sin (14:23). What is good and right for one group is bad and wrong for the other and tolerance entails recognising and respecting this.

In the above analysis I have suggested that a specific social situation could lie behind Romans 14-15, namely one where the strong were inviting the weak to meals and serving food which took no account of their scruples.[43] As a result meals, which should have been a focus for building up the fellowship, had become an occasion for dissension. Paul chides the strong for serving food which could be a stumbling block to the weak, not because the weak might be offended by the freedom of the strong to eat such food, but because the strong were expressing contempt for the scruples of the weak by serving them such food in the first place. If the weak ended up by eating the food against their conscience, their faith was vulnerable to being seriously damaged through what they regarded as the sinful consumption of unclean food. It is because of these vital considerations that Paul urges the strong to abstain from serving meat when the weak were present,

For the strong, the freedom to eat any meat was an expression of their faith whereas for the weak, the need to abstain from unclean meat was a vital expression of their faith. Paul calls on both parties to stop judging and despising each other, and genuinely to welcome each

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[42] Jewett argues that Paul does not permit 'mutual conversion' between the adversarial groups in Rome (*Romans*, 857).

[43] There is perhaps a considerable amount of reading between the lines in reconstructing this scenario: Paul refrains from addressing the issue explicitly, perhaps because he has played no founding role in the church in Rome, but the length of the list of greetings in Romans 16 indicates that he knew enough people in Rome who would have been able to give him a clear picture of what was going on.

other, respecting each other's differences, as Christ has welcomed them.[44]

Application to the Debate over Sexuality

The above exploration of Romans 14-15 and its possible social context has attempted to demonstrate how deeply held convictions about food led to dissension and controversy within the church, of such a serious nature that this may have prompted Paul to write his letter to the Romans in order to address it. Underlying the controversy in Rome were different hermeneutical approaches to Scripture. For the weak, the authority of Scripture led them to accept that the food laws had binding validity on their diet, whereas the faith of the strong gave them the liberty to interpret scripture in such a way that they could regard all food as inherently clean. The issue of food laws may be arcane to us today, but how Paul addresses the resulting divisions has profound relevance to a church deeply divided today over the question of sexuality. In our own context we find deeply held convictions based on differing approaches to scripture which threaten the unity of the church and the faith of many believers.

For many Christians today, for whom the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the plain sense of the text in both the Old and New Testament leads them to the conclusion that LGBTQ relationships are sinful in the sight of God, and condemning those who live this way is a natural (though not a necessary or automatic) consequence of that. In terms of their attitude to Scripture their stance corresponds to the weak in Rome, who were bound to live in accordance with the literal sense of the food laws.

Is it appropriate to describe the faith of such believers as weak? The appellation will be as unwelcome to them as it would have been to the

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[44] J.M.G. Rojas argues that Paul employs an inclusive rhetoric to extend the scope of his argument in Romans 14:1-15:13 beyond the dietary matters affecting the community in Rome to any issue which could cause someone else to stumble: the apostle recalibrates the thinking of his audience, moving them beyond the categories of 'weak' and 'strong' in order to create a communal 'we', engaged in mutual respect and universal praise: *Why do you Judge your Brother? The Rhetorical Function of Apostrophizing in Rom 14:1-15:13* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2020).

weak believers in Rome. Yet it could be argued that such faith is vulnerable in the sense that it is inextricably tied to a particularly high view of the authority of Scripture. For some, faith can be threatened or undermined by arguments that significant parts of the Bible are culturally conditioned or that the plain sense of the text is historically untrue. Consequently, for those who are committed to this way of understanding the Bible, a huge amount is at stake. For those whose faith has been grounded in a set way of interpreting the Bible, a hermeneutical shift of such seismic proportions is entailed in rethinking their stance on human sexuality that it has the potential to cause a crisis of faith. There is the scope here to see an element of weakness in their faith, and it is important that this is recognised by those who can be frustrated by and dismissive of those who are tied to what they might see as a hermeneutically naïve and literalistic understanding of the text; such people may well need to heed Paul's injunction not to despise those who do not share their views.

Can this second group be perceived as being strong? Like the strong in Rome, it could be said that their hermeneutical freedom to depart from the traditional interpretations of Scripture on this issue is an indication of a robust faith. Yet it has to be said that the term 'strong' does not transfer well from the first to the twenty-first century. In Rome, those whom Paul refers to as being strong were the socially dominant group, whereas members of the LGBTQ community are frequently marginalised within the church. Correspondingly, whereas in Romans 14:1 Paul urges the strong to welcome those who are weak in faith, the onus in today's church is undoubtedly on the mainstream church to makes sure that a genuine welcome is extended to members of the LGBTQ community – a welcome they have not always received. Thus, in terms of their social location, gay or lesbian believers cannot be described as strong.

Could they, though, be described as being 'strong in faith', even though Paul never uses this phrase in Romans 14-15?[45] Paul says of Abraham that he did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was as good as dead, but was rather was strengthened in

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[45] The phrase 'weak in faith' (14:1), does however, imply a contrast with those who are 'strong in faith'.

faith when he held fast to the promise that he would have a son: that was the faith that was reckoned to him as righteousness (4:19-23). Thus it is a 'strong' faith that holds fast to God's promise in the absence of supporting evidence, and it may fairly be said of LGBTQ believers that their belief in God's acceptance of them, despite the negative experiences so many of them have undergone in church, is evidence of a strong faith. It could also be said that those who can affirm with integrity that they are LGBTQ and Christian, and that same-sex, committed, loving relationships are sanctified by God[46] are in a position of strength, since their assurance that God does not condemn them for who they are or the way they live places them in a position to receive the blessing to which Paul refers in Romans 14:22.

If Romans 15:1 is read in accordance with this hermeneutic, then Paul's urging the strong not to please themselves, but rather to put up with the weaknesses of those who lack power could be re-interpreted, somewhat against the grain, as a plea to the LGBTQ community to bear with the failings of the mainstream church and to see its tendency to judge them as a sign of its own weakness, in contrast to their strength. The reality is that God has welcomed them (14:3), which means that there is no scope for others to pass judgment on them: 'Who are you to pass judgment on the servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand' (14:4 NRSV).

Paul opens his consideration of this contentious subject in Romans by calling those who are convinced that they are right to welcome those they are sure have got it wrong, and to make sure that they do not do so in order to prove their point or to win the argument. This call to mutual acceptance needs to be heard by a church where the debate has often been deeply polemical in tone, fracturing the Body of Christ. For both sides a huge amount is at stake: for conservative Christians this issue is fundamental because it pertains to the Word of God on which their whole faith is based, whereas for believers in the LGBTQ community it is nothing less than their own personal identity which is

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[46] M.S. Piazza, *Holy Homosexuals: The Truth about Being Gay or Lesbian and Christian* (Dallas; Sources of Hope, 1997) is a book written for the 'thousands of lesbian and gay people who have discovered how to become the happy, healthy and holy people God created them to be' (6).

on the line. So it is no surprise that the controversy has engendered a great deal of anger and pain on both sides –but to both sides in a divided church, Paul issues the call to welcome each other, as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God (15:7). To a deeply divided church, Paul makes it clear that the priority must not be winning the argument, but rebuilding relationships. Without mutual acceptance, discussion of differences tends to lead to deeper polarisation, but acceptance of the other provides a basis for dialogue and mutual understanding

Of course, we know that Paul adopts a very different tone in Galatians, a letter which is all about circumcision and law-observance, the same issues he addresses in Romans. But, whereas in Romans Paul is the careful mediator, in Galatians he is the arch-polemicist, castigating the Galatians for abandoning the gospel and heaping invective on those who have led them astray. And what is the difference between Galatians and Romans? When he wrote Galatians, Paul was angry that outsiders had come into the church, preaching a different gospel; he was deeply hurt that the Galatians had listened to them so readily, and he was frightened about what the final outcome might be. If nothing else, Galatians is a lesson in how differently we express ourselves when negative emotions take over.

We should beware, though, of simply supposing that Galatians permits justifiable anger when it is a matter of defending the gospel against those whom we see as overturning its central truths: Galatians is a two-edged sword. The reason why Paul was so angry was that the teachers were trying to persuade his Gentile converts to embrace the law, saying that their faith in Christ was not enough; they needed to come within the fold of Torah-observance.[47] A radical application of Galatians to the sexuality debate would see righteous anger being directed at those who claim that to be accepted by Christ it is necessary to abandon one's LGBTQ identity and come within the heterosexual fold. Paul's anger is directed at those who want to persuade the Galatians to change because it serves their own theological agenda and purpose (Galatians 4:17).

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[47] Jewett argues that Galatians should be read as Paul's repudiation of the intolerance of the Judaisers (*Tolerance*, 14).

In our discussion of the food laws in Romans, we have seen that a believer could be destroyed (14:15) if they are persuaded to eat food which they believe to be unclean. So Paul urges people to abstain from meat or drink or anything that could cause someone else's downfall (14:22). I have argued that he is not talking about merely upsetting someone or causing offence. If that principle were applied to the field of same-sex relationships, then it would be a misappropriation of Paul's advocacy of abstention from meat to suggest that gay Christians should practise celibacy or stay in the closet so as to avoid causing offence to others in church. Paul's concern is that a believer could come into condemnation if they are pressurised into acting against their own convictions. For an LGBTQ person, that could entail being persuaded to undergo conversion therapy to change their orientation, or succumbing to social pressure or the expectations of others by entering into a heterosexual marriage, so causing a deep-seated conflict with their convictions or their awareness of their own identity. Equally, where someone has accepted their LGBTQ identity and is convinced that it is their calling to stay celibate, to pressurise them into abandoning that conviction can be destructive if they sin against what they believe. Each has to find their own way of living with integrity in a way that is in accordance with their own faith, and we need to heed Paul's injunction that this is a matter between ourselves and God (14:22), not in the sense that we keep it secret, but in the sense that we do not try and impose it upon others, because to do so is to run the risk of destroying their faith.[48]

Respecting difference in the other is crucial here.[49] Just because I am utterly convinced as a Christian that something is right or wrong for me, that does not mean that it is necessarily right or wrong for you. This does not cast us all adrift on a sea of ethical relativism, because Paul supplies us with two anchors. The first is that however one behaves, that behaviour must genuinely be in honour of the Lord

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[48] Cf. Käsemann, *Romans,* 379: 'Christ remains the only measure for all. No one must make his faith a norm for others as the seek to serve Christ. The weak want uniformity by making their law binding for others, and the strong seek it too by forcing their insight on the weak. We thus try to make others in our own image and in doing so sin, since faith has to do always and exclusively with the image of Christ.' Cf. Jewett, *Tolerance*, 132, 137.
[49] Cf. Lee, *Paul and the Politics of Difference*, 146-61.

(14:6).[50] Because there can be and are drastically different opinions over how very different lifestyles can honour the Lord,[51] this principle needs to be supplemented by the love commandment,[52] which governs relationships of difference and unambiguously interdicts the domination of others.

Of course, I am aware that the Achilles' heel in this whole approach is that Paul is not talking about same-sex relationships in Romans 14-15 and Galatians. He is talking about circumcision and food laws. Would Paul have accepted extending his arguments in Romans 14-15 so that they apply to the modern, contested issue of same-sex relationships? The kind of language he uses in his letters about homosexuality suggests that he probably would not have done so. We might say that Paul's faith was strong and robust when it came to interpreting Scripture with respect to the food laws, but when it came to sexual ethics, Paul's faith looks decidedly weak, inasmuch as he instinctively follows the moral code of Torah.[53] Many would argue that we simply do not have the liberty to cross a moral boundary that Paul has put in place. Yet, if Paul, as a pastor, were writing to the church today, where Christians are divided over the issue of sexuality, what might he have written? Would it have been so very different to what we read in Romans 14-15?

Might Paul say that same-sex relationships are wrong only for those who see them as wrong, and they are not to pass judgment on those who read the Scriptures differently? Maybe Paul would not instruct us to abandon our own convictions, or to reject those who do not share them. On the contrary, each of us should be fully convinced in our own mind and at the same time welcome and accept those who fundamentally disagree with us, neither judging them nor rejecting and excluding them. Centuries after he wrote Romans, it feels as if Paul is

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[50] Cf. Jewett, *Tolerance*, 33-34; *Romans*, 860.
[51] While he does not apply Romans 14-15 to the issue of sexuality, Dunn argues that, 'the overarching concern and priority in [this passage] is that a church should be able to sustain a diversity of opinion and lifestyle as an integral aspect of its common life' (*Romans 9-16*, 799); cf. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 203-208, 303-304.
[52] Cf. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 217.
[53] Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, 170-71; 308.

praying for us all: 'May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God' (Romans 15:5-7).

Notes on Contributor

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‘Not Without Us’: Perfection as a Hermeneutic in the Letter to the Hebrews[1]

Amanda Higgin

Introduction

This particular work of biblical studies finds us in The Letter to the Hebrews, a comparatively neglected text of the New Testament corpus which, at 13 chapters, dwarfs its canonical neighbours Philemon and James. We do not know who wrote Hebrews.[2] While it was tentatively claimed by some in the early church that it was by Paul, we have no evidence to back up this claim, and doubt about its authorship starts very early.

We should not be deterred, however, by the author’s anonymity. It offers us an opportunity to approach their text on its own terms, without preconceptions. Personally, I love to imagine that Hebrews is a sermon by that Priscilla whom we hear of as one of Paul’s fellow workers, accompanied by her husband Aquila, in Romans and Acts.[3] Perhaps the text remained anonymous because of prejudice against her gender? Reserving judgement, however, I will be referring to the author using the singular ‘they’ throughout this paper.

In my studies, I have found Hebrews to be one of the most fascinating texts of the New Testament. Although we are used to calling it ‘The Letter to the Hebrews’, Πρὸς Ἑβραίους is closer in style and form to a sermon or homily than a letter or epistle. The logic of the homily is profoundly Jewish, drawing on shared traditions of Hebrew Scripture, Temple cult, and Israelite cultural identity with a level of assumed

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[1] This article was presented first as a paper at Theology Live in January 2022.
[2] Harold Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: a commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 1-6.
[3] Romans 16:3; Acts 18.

literacy that is fitting for a Christ-following congregation with a strong Jewish heritage.[4]

Other than that, however, we don't know much about the community who first heard Hebrews. Historical criticism and contextualisation can only take us so far before we return to engaging this text as we have received it, and encountering the author on their own terms and through their own words.

Perfection

Let us turn, then, to perfection: 'the quality of being as good as it is possible for something of a particular kind to be.'[5] In modern English, we think of perfection as a qualitative descriptor: something perfect is without error or flaw, without capacity for improvement. Of human beings, therefore, perfection is an ethical or moral virtue, the achievement of the highest standards of human behaviour in the eyes of God and of humankind. The language has this significance when, in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew's Jesus instructs those who hear, 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.'[6] As I shall go on to show, however, this modern definition does not account for Hebrews' multifaceted use of both the concept and vocabulary of perfection.

There can be no doubt in our minds that the concept of perfection is deeply important for the author of the Letter to the Hebrews: a frequency analysis shows us that the verb *teleioō*, meaning 'I make perfect', and its cognates are used 23 times in the text, from its first appearance in 2:10, 'It was fitting that God… should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through sufferings' through to 12:23, '[you have come] to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect.'

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[4] Attridge, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 9-21.
[5] Collins Dictionary; online.
[6] Matthew 5:48.

That is the exhaustive figure, which includes multiple words which use the *tel-* root without being directly derived from *teleiōsis*: *telos, sunteleia,* and *epitelein*, meaning 'end', 'culmination', and 'to carry out' respectively. If we only count forms of *teleioō* and *teleiōsis*, they appear 13 times, but that's still overwhelmingly common compared to the frequency in other books of the New Testament – in Matthew, for example, they appear only twice. This analysis is superficial, but it immediately tells us that Hebrews is talking a lot about perfection.

Furthermore, it is important to note that there is no single section which accounts for Hebrews' use of *teleiōsis* language, but that it occurs throughout the text: *teleiōsis, teleioō* and their cognates are used in exhortation passages, in doctrine, and in Christology. Not being reserved for ethical material, therefore, we begin to get the impression that perfection is a fundamental principle for Hebrews' thought, in the same way that we know there is a mat of mycelium just underground by the mushrooms which pop up all over the place.

Hebrews cares deeply about perfection, and we might therefore expect that it therefore cares as deeply as, for example, Matthew's Gospel about the ethical and moral virtue of its audience. As previously noted, it is generally agreed by scholars that Hebrews is not a letter at all but a sermon or homily.[7] Its Greek title *Pros Hebraious*, 'to the Hebrews', only tells us about the text's first audience; and even then, the title was not part of the original text, so in fact it only indicates what the first readers *thought* about the text's original audience. Hebrews lacks all the usual elements of a letter, except for the sign-off at the end of chapter 13. It is crafted like a homily, exegeting key Scriptural texts such as Jeremiah 31, Psalm 110, and perhaps Exodus 31, and the author is acutely aware of their audience whom they address frequently: 'let *us* hold fast', 'let *us* take care', 'let *us* approach'[8] et cetera. It might make sense, therefore, to assume that Hebrews makes the same exhortation

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[7] See for example, Thomas G. Long, *Hebrews* (Westminster John Knox, 1997), D. Stephen Long, *Hebrews* (Westminster John Knox, 2011), 1.
[8] Respectively Hebrews 4:14; 4:1; 4:16, italics added.

to perfection as the first evangelist writes in The Sermon on the Mount.

However, I have become convinced that this would be an overly simplistic summary of perfection in Hebrews. Perfection pervades Hebrews' reasoning as they discuss not only exhortation, but also doctrine, and Christology. Plenty of scholars have published on perfection in Hebrews; significantly in 1982, David Peterson published a book entitled *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews"*;[9] from its title, one might expect that to be an exhaustive treatment of the subject. However what Peterson does, as do many others, is to write primarily about the perfection of Christ through sufferings and then follow up with the perfection of the believer in imitation of Christ, suggesting that the perfection motif in Hebrews is exhausted by this ethical or moral interpretation. I have discovered, however, that perfection, in Greek *teleiōsis*, has a more significant function in Hebrews than merely ethical or moral virtue, and that it is a governing principle for Hebrews' interpretation of Jewish Scriptures and traditions.

Challenging the Standard Interpretation

In order to demonstrate this, let me turn to the passage which first inspired this project, and from which the title 'Not Without Us' is taken. These verses conclude Hebrews chapter 11, possibly the most famous passage from the text (except for every pastor's favourite quotation, 'And let us not neglect meeting together, as is the habit of some').[10] Chapter 11 is the catalogue of faithful witnesses, a list of those who 'by faith' pursued the promises of God without seeing their fulfilment, whose lives illustrate the opening verse of chapter 11, 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.' Our focus, however, is not on the first verses of chapter 11 but on the last:

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[9] David Peterson, *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the "Epistle to the Hebrews"* (SNTS Monograph Series 47; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
[10] Hebrews 10:25.

> Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect. (Heb.11:39-40)

The catalogue of the faithful, which includes Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and others, is the referent for the verb *teleiothōsin*, 'be made perfect', such that 11:40 tells us 'that the heroes of the Scriptures might not be made perfect without us, the present community of Christ.'

If 'perfection' here meant merely ethical or moral progress, then Hebrews would be accusing the faithful witnesses of the Hebrew Bible of being morally deficient. On the contrary, these 'faithful' characters are presented as exemplars to the text's listeners for their persistent pursuit of God's promises even without seeing their fulfilment. The perfection which they lack, therefore, is the fulfilment of those promises, the future culmination which they failed to achieve through no fault of their own, but rather because *God* had prepared something greater that could only be achieved in the time of the text's audience, after the coming of Christ.

Perfection performs this same function throughout Hebrews, as an ultimate future principle which is the fulfilment of God's plans. In 7:19, for example, Hebrews abruptly comments, *ouden gar eteleiosen ho nomos* – 'for the law made nothing perfect'. But did the Law intend to make anything perfect? I would suggest not, because as Hebrews observes the Law provides for a constant annual cycle of offerings, prayers, and rituals, for which priests serve day after day, offering again and again the same sacrifices (cf. 10.11-15). These sacrifices can only cease now that Jesus has made the perfect offering of his own blood *ephapax* – once and for all – a favourite phrase of the author's (7.27; 9.12, 26; 10.10). By offering a single sacrifice, Jesus fulfils the divine plan which the sacrificial rituals of the Law could follow only well, not perfectly.

The semantic root of perfection in Greek, the *tel-* root of *teleiōsis*, is fundamentally eschatological: oriented towards the end-times and the

ultimate purpose of God's creation. Its most simple incarnation, *telos*, simply means 'end'. That Hebrews is aware of this is demonstrated very nicely by 12:2, which describes Jesus as 'the pioneer and perfecter of faith', in Greek, *ton tēs pisteōs archēgon kai teleiotēn Iēsoun*. 'Beginning and end' in Greek would be *archē kai telos*, and those semantic roots echo here in *archēgon kai teleiotēn*; Jesus the beginning and the end, the forerunner and the completer. 11:39-40 prepare the audience for this Christological revelation in 12:2, which presents Jesus as the culmination of the hopes which the Old Testament faithful never saw fulfilled. These verses stand at the fulcrum of the author's thought, putting perfection at the centre of the trajectory from past, exemplary faithful, through the present community, onward to the perfection exemplified by Christ. The faithful of old could not be perfected, but Jesus is the perfecter who has been perfected, and the present community strives towards perfection.

As the end of chapter 11 shows, therefore, Hebrews' understanding of Christ as the perfecter has shaped their understanding of the faithful heroes of their Jewish heritage. Rather than understanding them as the exemplars *par excellence,* models of all righteousness, Hebrews understands them through no fault of their own as falling short of the ultimate standard of God's perfection. This is only possible because the author sees this perfection achieved in Christ, the pioneer and perfecter.

The Wandering Motif

This future-oriented understanding of perfection is exemplified by the motif of wandering which permeates Hebrews, as the author develops an allegorical motif from Israel's 40 years in the wilderness as they moved towards the promised land. In 1939, Ernst Käsemann published 'Das wandernde Gottesvolk', *The Wandering People of God.*[11] This book, published in English in 1984, examines the imagery of

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[11] Ernst Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews*. Translated by Roy A. Harrisville and Irving L. Sandberg (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984).

wilderness wandering which begins in Hebrews chapter 3, where the author develops themes from Psalm 95, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness.'

According to Käsemann, the language which Hebrews uses of *epangelia*, meaning 'promise', and *katapausis*, meaning 'rest', represents the future goal of the wandering period, reinterpreting Israel's geographical arrival in the Promised Land as a metaphor for striving towards God's true, eschatological rest. The language of *pistis*, 'faith', and *parrēsia*, 'boldness', describes the text's exhortation to its audience to persevere in their wandering, to pursue that divine promise and ultimate rest despite present hardships.

Käsemann's text highlights the way wandering language permeates the entirety of Hebrews, being introduced in chapter 3 but recurring throughout the text. Chapter 11 is no exception, as Hebrews emphasises Abraham's leaving his homeland and living a nomadic life in tents, and Moses' decision to leave Egyptian luxury to follow God's call into the wilderness. In fact, Hebrews fits *all* the characters of chapter 11 into the pattern of wandering; they comment:

> All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland… they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them (Heb.11:13-16).

Their not receiving the promises and their not being perfected are identical in Hebrews' understanding, so that the perfection they sought was a 'better country', the Promised Land which Israel achieved geographically but which still awaits God's people eschatologically.

As we have seen, the statistics for Hebrews' use of the words *teleioō* and *teleiōsis*, are an indicator of how important perfection is for the

author. It would be a mistake, however, to presume that Hebrews' treatment of perfection is limited to their use of this vocabulary, and the persistent use of the motif of wilderness wandering clearly demonstrates this. Without once using the words *teleioō* or *teleiōsis,* the author presents a vision of progress towards an ultimate goal, using the Israelite's journey towards the Promised Land as a pattern for the church's endurance towards the perfection exemplified by Jesus. The language used is promise, *katapausis* rest, and *sabbatismos* sabbath rest, but the fundamental view is the same.

Teleological Interpretation

What Hebrews offers us, therefore, is a model of biblical interpretation where perfection, specifically perfection as it has been achieved by Christ, is their key hermeneutical principle. Their concern is not what the original authors of Scripture thought, nor how those texts are illuminated by their original context, but rather how these texts and traditions have reached their ultimate fulfilment in the life and work of Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. Hebrews makes constant reference to Hebrew Scriptures and traditions, including but not limited to Jeremiah 31, Psalm 95, Psalm 110, and the Sinai narrative. Whenever they quote from these texts, the historical author of the text is irrelevant; Hebrews usually introduces citations with the formula 'he said', referring to these words of Scripture as words from the mouth of God. This is known as prosopological exegesis, reimagining the speaker of the text.[12] Psalm 110, for example, is a royal psalm for the coronation of a king and praise of his role as the chosen one of God; but for Hebrews, however, the psalm is a word spoken by God that can speak about Jesus, the perfect priest-king chosen by God (Heb.1:13).

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[12] For more on this see Madison N. Pierce, *Divine Discourse in the Epistle to the Hebrews: The Recontextualization of Spoken Quotations in Scripture* (SNTS Monograph Series 178. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).

A number of those who have written about perfection in Hebrews, notably Christopher Richardson and Richard Ounsworth,[13] have described the text's use of what they call 'typological interpretation.' Richardson points to Hebrews' use of the words *tupos* and *antitupos* in 8:5 and 9:24 respectively, as well as to the phrase borrowed from Psalm 110:4, 'according to the order of Melchizedek'; this phraseology suggests a typological pattern of thinking where the author discerns figures and themes from the Scriptures as foreshadowing for Christ. Ounsworth, meanwhile, describes how Joshua in particular is used as a typological foreshadowing of Jesus, who cosmologically leads believers into the heavenly realm just as Joshua geographically led believers into the Promised Land. Both of these commentators suggest typological interpretation is particularly evident in chapter 11, where the figures described in the body of the chapter prepare for Jesus at the head of the list, in the beginning of chapter 12.

To develop an example, chapter 11 presents Abraham as a typological allegory of Jesus when it says, '[Abraham] considered the fact that God is able even to raise someone from the dead—and figuratively speaking, he did receive him back' (Heb.11:19). That phrase 'figuratively speaking' is in Greek *en parabolē* – 'as a model', or 'as a figurative type' – suggesting that Hebrews interprets Abraham's act as an allegorical model of a future resurrection from the dead: Christ's.

I would like to alter Richardson and Ounsworth's idea, however, and describe this not as typological interpretation but as *teleological* interpretation. By this I still mean that Hebrews orientates their reading of the Hebrew Bible towards a future ideal form of the present pattern, but suggest that this is part and parcel with their use of *teleiōsis* language, as their interpretation looks forward to a future, perfect form. Thus, it is not so much that the figures of chapter 11

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[13] Christopher Richardson, *Pioneer and Perfecter of Faith: Jesus' Faith as the Climax of Israel's History in the Epistle to the Hebrews* (WUNT 2.338. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012); Richard Joseph Ounsworth, *Joshua Typology in the New Testament* (WUNT 2.328. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012).

foreshadow Christ as that their lack of perfection has been remedied *by* Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Teleological interpretation, 'perfection as a hermeneutic,' consistently underpins Hebrews' approach to Jewish Scripture and traditions throughout the text. The figures of chapter 11 are not made perfect without us. Going back to the text's introduction, what was spoken to our ancestors through the prophets is now told to us by the one son;[14] in chapter 4, the Sabbath rest that Israel could not enter still remains for the people of God;[15] chapters 5-6 describe Melchizedek the priest-king as a model of a higher kind of priesthood embodied by Jesus. We are told in chapter 7 that the Law could not make anything perfect,[16] but Jesus' blood does, and in chapters 9-10 that the Levitical priesthood repeated their ordinances day after day and year after year but now Jesus has made his offering once and for all.[17] Perfection is even a controlling principle in Hebrews' encouragement to their audience to delve deeper into their faith, 'Therefore let us go on toward perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying the foundation again.'[18]

Consequences for the Modern, Baptist Reader

Hebrews offers us an example of the Bible reading itself, as the many authors that wrote the many texts that make up the canon of Scripture critically and insightfully reflected upon each other. Hebrews' exegesis is creative, imaginative, and Christ-focussed, always looking eschatologically towards the coming perfection that Christ has exemplified by his ministry, death, and heavenly enthronement.

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[14] Hebrews 1:1-2.
[15] Hebrews 4:9.
[16] Hebrews 7:19.
[17] Hebrews 10:11-13.
[18] Hebrews 6:1.

This is not only a work of biblical interpretation but of identity formation, as the community of Hebrews, who are both Christ-following and of Jewish heritage, negotiate their identity as believers in the first century after Christ. We learn in chapter 10 that the community has suffered some form of persecution, although it is uncertain what provoked this or to what extent their sufferings have been emphasised for rhetorical effect. This work of interpretation is, therefore, also a work of survival, as the author of Hebrews seeks to show their audience that they can hold on to both the Scriptures of their tradition and their faith in Christ. They do not need to abandon the texts they know, because those texts are the spoken word of God and continue to speak in the present tense about Christ. Nor do they need to abandon their faith in Christ and return to the safety of their tradition, because Christ is the perfection of that tradition, the fulfilment of everything it anticipated.

At the end of the catalogue of faithful witnesses, Hebrews brings everything together with perfection as the fulcrum:

> Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (Heb.12:1-2)

Christ is the epitome, Christ is the perfecter.

As biblical interpreters, in all the different ways we have been called to, I present the Letter to the Hebrews as an example for us all.

Notes on Contributor

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Questioning our Commitments: Exploring Hermeneutical Practice in Discussions of Human Sexuality

Anthony Clarke

Introduction

Protestants have a problem; and non-Conformists perhaps the biggest problem of all. We have no magisterium. The Reformation stress on Sola Scriptura – Scripture as the final, although not the only, authority, often expressed in terms of infallibility – has intentionally downplayed tradition and the position of church authorities. This, of course, has led to some other very significant tensions: we have wanted the Bible to be clear; we have believed it to be sufficient; we have invested in the Bible significant authority. But historical study on virtually any issue shows huge diversity of interpretation and sometimes little consensus. For Baptists in Great Britain this has been exemplified in the Declaration of Principle, which asserts that Christ 'is the sole and absolute authority in all matters pertaining to faith and practice, as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, and that each Church has liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His laws.' Baptists, as other Protestants, have thus found themselves in the position of holding significant disagreements about how Scripture should be understand and interpreted on a variety of issues.

It seems clear that the most significant contemporary church issue where disagreement in biblical interpretation has created ongoing conflict is human sexuality. Having read quite widely on this issue, led seminars for students and engaged in numerous conversations, what strikes me is that the underlying challenge is not that we disagree on what the Bible teaches, which we obviously do, but that we are instinctively reading the Bible in different ways. We disagree because

our whole way of reading the Bible is different; we practise different hermeneutics. And, further still, these hermeneutical commitments which we all have, while sometimes explicitly owned, often are left implicit and unexpressed. This means it is difficult even to have a good conversation together because my presuppositions about the Bible are different to yours and when we try and talk about what we think the Bible means, our conversations keep missing each other. This of course is not just true of human sexuality, but the existential significance of this issue must push us to think more carefully and explicitly about our hermeneutics. My desire in this paper is not to offer one more perspective on what the Bible means, but to offer a contribution to the debate by exploring our deeper presuppositions about how the Bible is to be read and to use sexuality as a pressing case study.

What I offer, below, is a discussion of four authors who are all biblically trained scholars and who have written on sexuality. They represent a variety of theological positions on sexuality, but more importantly for this paper take different hermeneutical approaches to the biblical text, and in different ways look to discuss explicitly these hermeneutical issues. I am very aware that these four authors are all white and male, and this may be a reflection of my own implicit bias but may also reflect where the focus of attention in this issue lies. Much of the discussion I have read, for example from female authors, reflects broader theological and pastoral interests rather than more narrow exegetical ones.[1] An exception would be the very detailed

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[1] There is material in Mona West, 'Coming Out and the Bible Interpretation', *A Journal of Bible and Theology* 74.3 (2020): 265–274; Robert Goss and Mona West, *Take Back the Word* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim, 2000); Megan de Franza, 'Journeying from the Bible to Christian Ethics: in Search of Common Ground in Preston Sprinkle (ed.), *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016); Bernadette Brooten, *Love Between Women: Ealy Christian Responses to Female Homoeroticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1996) offers a very detailed discussion of Romans 1; Susannah

discussion of the Hebrew of Genesis 2:24 and its intertextuality in an article by Megan Warner.[2] I will briefly consider each author in turn and then offer some conclusions, mainly by way of questions that we need to ask about our own hermeneutical commitments. If we are going to try and have a good conversation about human sexuality there is a pressing need to understand, to own and at times to question our particular underlying hermeneutical commitments.

Wesley Hill

Wesley Hill, in his contribution to the book *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church,* suggests that since the early patristic period (he references Irenaeus) there has been a shared understanding that the Bible has a *centre* and that this should be understood Christologically.[3] For Hill there seem to be two fundamental components to this hermeneutical approach: first that the Bible is an essential unity and Hill will look to play down diverse voices within Scripture in order to concentrate on unity, and second that this unified reading is found through Christ. So Hill writes '… the properly Christian way to read the Bible was as a two-testament canon whose various parts were not to be played off against each other but read synthetically with Jesus Christ as their orientating center.'[4] What is particularly helpful about

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Cornwall, discusses same sex relationships and the Bible in *Theology and Sexuality* (London: SCM, 2013) but mainly reporting what others think.

[2] Megan Warner, '"Therefore a Man Leaves His Father and His Mother and Clings to His Wife": Marriage and Intermarriage in Genesis 2:24', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136.2 (2017): 269-88. Warner does not here argue as such for same-sex relationships, but rather that the historical context of Genesis 2:24 is about the intermarriage of Jewish men with non-Jewish women and that it is meant to function in a descriptive and not normative way. Thus it does not rule out same-sex marriage.

[3] For Hill's further work see *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010) which is something of a theological memoir, and 'Washed and Still Waiting: An Evangelical Approach to Homosexuality', *JETS* 59.1 (2016): 323-38.

[4] Wesley Hill, 'Christ, Scripture and Spiritual Friendship' in Sprinkle (ed.), *Two Views on Homosexuality,* 127.

Hill's account is his explicit desire to ground his contribution in a clear hermeneutical principle – a Christological centre that shapes our reading of the whole; but there are a number of reasons why the hermeneutical approach of the chapter as a whole is in fact not so straight forward.

First, there seems to be another, more implicit hermeneutical principle at play which while sympathetic to a Christological centre, at times stands in tension with it. Hill refers a number of times to something like a canonical shape of Scripture and is using what might be best described as a kind of canonical criticism. So the Genesis narratives retain pride of place because of their canonical placement as well as their subsequent prominence in the Gospels;[5] the canonical primacy of the Genesis account means that Leviticus 18 and 20 read in this light must proscribe all same sex relationships because they do not have a place in male and female marriage;[6] and Augustine's theological vision of marriage is formed from the New Testament's final canonical shape.[7] But what is missing from Hill's account of canonical primacy is, for example, any historical-critical discussion of the way that Genesis and Leviticus may relate together, with the possibility that Genesis may indeed have been written later. Now such historical-critical considerations need not be definitive – after all they are a commitment themselves – and there are some reasoned arguments for canonical criticism. But it is a committed position that is assumed not argued for.

What is also missing from Hill's account is any sense on how the canonical primacy of Genesis relates to the Christological centre of Scripture, and so how reading Scripture with this *centre* might relate to this canonical approach. These Christological and canonical hermeneutics both reject any 'flat' approach to Scripture but instead

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[5] Hill, 'Christ, Scripture and Spiritual Friendship', 128.
[6] Hill, 'Christ, Scripture and Spiritual Friendship', 133.
[7] Hill, 'Christ, Scripture and Spiritual Friendship', 131.

Hill insists that the shape of the Bible as a whole affects our interpretation, but might there be a tension between affirming the primacy of Genesis in a canonical reading and looking for a Christological centre? Should Genesis 1 shape what follows in the canonical shape or is it reshaped by the life and ministry of Christ? For Hill, with his stress on the unity rather than diversity of Scripture, there seems a clear tendency to play down any such tension, with an implied expectation that his canonical and Christological approaches will agree.

Second, while drawing on Augustine as a positive source Hill then engages with the work of Robert Song as a critical dialogue partner.[8] Hill is very respectful of Song's work and the dense, rich and coherent exegesis he offers; but ultimately Hill profoundly disagrees with him. What is interesting for our purpose is that Song offers a reading of Scripture that also has a deep Christological centre, perhaps more so than Hill himself, and this leads Song to significantly relativise marriage in the light of the resurrection of Christ. Hill recognises this, that Song's account is Christologically shaped – 'sex BC is not the same as sex AD' – and there highlights two important aspects of Hill's contribution to the debate.

While summarising Song's argument, Hill makes no comment on the fact that they still come to very different conclusions despite the fact that they share a similar hermeneutical commitment; even a significant degree of a shared hermeneutics does not guarantee similar conclusions. But Hill is able to have a clear and respectful discussion with Song, and the fact that they share a commitment to a Christological centre may mean they can engage in better theological discussion. Hill critiques Song for the particular shape that he sees in Scripture and the way that he feels Song therefore prioritises one particular strand of New Testament teaching – the diminished place of

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[8] Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* (London: SCM, 2014).

procreation and the new place for celibacy. Thus Hill concludes that 'Song loses the linkage between the three Augustinian goods of marriage'.[9] So while Hill and Song agree about seeing a particular shape in Scripture that must therefore shape our reading in turn, they disagree what this shape is: Hill prioritising Genesis and Song the teaching of Jesus that casts a new light over Genesis. They also disagree as to the amount of diversity that can be seen in Scripture, with Hill committed to the principle of a unified theology and Song open to diverse, even conflicting, approaches. In terms of hermeneutical approach, Hill then criticises Song both for prioritising diversity over the unity of Scripture and also prioritising the wrong shape and not beginning with Genesis 1 and 2.

Preston Sprinkle

Preston Sprinkle, as well as editing *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible and the Church* has also written a more popular book, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is not Just an Issue*. Sprinkle seeks to write sympathetically and pastorally, concerned for the pain of the LGBTQ community, but ultimately comes down very clearly on a traditional interpretation of Scripture on the issue of sexuality. Sprinkle offers less explicit hermeneutical commentary, although some discussion continues in the notes. He takes a critical realist approach, referencing both N T Wright and Kevin Vanhoozer, arguing that while the Bible is not the only authority, it is the highest authority. It is absolute truth, but human interpretation of that truth is fallible.

But despite affirming a critical realist position he still insists 'that a human interpretation, which is performed in community, in dialogue with tradition and under the guidance of God's Spirit can discover and

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[9] Hill, 'Christ, Scripture and Spiritual Friendship', 141. Augustine describes these as *proles* (children or openness to children), *fides* (faithfulness) and *sacramentum* (sacrament).

understand absolute truth'.[10] With such a statement Sprinkle appears to stress the realism much more than the critical engagement, and it is questionable whether his position is in fact of critical realism. He certainly comes to a different conclusion to Wright, particularly with his assertion that human interpretation can understand 'absolute' truth. Wright suggests that 'story telling humans… can find ways of speaking truly about the world'[11] but there is no suggestion here of absolute truth. Wright instead argues for a more narrative based approach in which 'knowledge takes place … when people *find things that fit* with the particular story or (more likely) stories to which they are accustomed to give allegiance.'[12] There is no real place in Sprinkle's book for this discussion of the place of narrative, but a strong reliance on the use of a historical critical method, and linguistic explorations as the basis for this understanding of 'absolute truth'.

There are a number of other hermeneutic assumptions in the book which are not explored, even in the notes, but which raise significant questions. First, like Hill, there is a deep commitment to a unified voice in Scripture based on a very strong view of divine authorship and so the a priori rejection of tension between texts. In discussing the Leviticus texts, he comments rhetorically: 'Did the same God who breathed out Genesis 1 also breathe out Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13? Was he confused?'[13] Sprinkle, for example, rejects any patriarchal reading of the Leviticus texts, because in Wright's language this fits with the particular story to which he gives allegiance. So, while Sprinkle admits that some passages in the Old Testament appear to demean women, he argues that further study suggests it is not clear

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[10] Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), n. 6, 193-4. Sprinkle references NT Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 50-64 and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).
[11] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 58.
[12] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 52.
[13] Sprinkle, *People to be Loved,* 48.

that the Biblical writers considered women to be inferior. His commitment to the one unified voice of Scripture allows no room to see any patriarchy in the text. We find a similar approach in his reading of Ephesians 5 and 1 Corinthians 11, in which he argues for equality, explicitly rejecting any chauvinistic interpretations and reads the texts through a non-hierarchical trinitarian lens.[14] A clear unified voice in Scripture, egalitarian rather than patriarchal readings and trinitarian approach clearly shaped by later development seem to be hermeneutical commitments that Sprinkle brings to the text.

Sprinkle also wrestles with the Leviticus texts and in particular how Old Testament laws might or might not have contemporary relevance. Again, while there is no explicitly stated hermeneutic, there are some clear working assumptions. Overall Sprinkle takes what Adrian Thatcher would describe as a 'guidebook' approach to the Old Testament in which texts have a fixed meaning and provide a timeless ethical framework.[15] Sprinkle is of course aware that not all Old Testament laws will be treated the same, and insists that those, like himself, from a non-affirming position must offer evidence as to why these laws *are* binding and not simply assume this to be the case. Sprinkle then seeks to make such a case. He works on the basis that the most fail proof method is to look for those laws that are repeated in the New Testament.

He then argues further that because the majority (although not all) of Leviticus 18-20 is binding – he gets himself slightly tied up in knots about the law on intercourse during menstruation suggesting there is no evidence that this is not binding on believers – there would need to be good argument to the contrary for the texts on same sex relationships not to be applicable too. Such a position raises a number of hermeneutical questions. First, there is the underlying question about the value of Old Testament law in its entirety in the discussion

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[14] Sprinkle, *People to be Loved,* 37-8.
[15] See Adrian Thatcher, *The Savage Text* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 10.

of Christian ethics. In Sprinkle's account there seems to be simply an assumption that it is highly relevant with little reflection on its contextual setting. Second, Sprinkle recognises that there are some laws, including some of those in Leviticus 18-20, that are specifically culturally bound: not wearing different types of fabric and not shaving the edges of your beard. But on what basis are these deemed culturally bound and so not relevant while the majority are deemed 'applicable either in their full literal meaning or in the principle that drives them? Sprinkle offers no answer to this; it seems to be obvious as common sense, but is a significant hermeneutical commitment.

Dale Martin

Dale Martin gathers his collection of essays, *Sex and the Single Savior*, specifically to discuss hermeneutics. Martin is best described as a post-foundationalist who adopts a reader response approach to texts. Meaning, he insists, does not simply reside in a text; it is not 'there' already waiting to be found and applied to our context. Texts do not have agency, and when we talk about texts 'speaking' we are using highly metaphorical language. The onus is on the reader and meaning is made when we read and interpret.[16] Martin is concerned to undermine and ultimately reject the privileging of both authorial intent as something secure and knowable, and the historical-critical method as the foundational hermeneutical approach. 'Neither a simple reading of 'what the Bible says' nor a professional historical-critical reconstruction of the ancient meaning of the texts will provide a prescription for contemporary ethics.'[17]

This does not mean, though, that there is complete textual anarchy. Martin himself offers two hermeneutical foundations. The first is that the meaning of a text is not controlled by the text itself but by the community of interpretation. Here he is drawing on work by Stanley

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[16] Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 2-4.
[17] Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior,* 38.

Fish, Hans Frei, George Lindbeck, and Kathryn Tanner the latter arguing that historically the 'plain sense' of a text was not something inherent in the text but was established by the community and was a function of communal use.[18] People, Martin insists, do not interpret texts 'any old way' but do so because of the way they have been socialised to interpret, which can be challenged and changed. What is needed is not more careful attention to the text through historical critical study, but a more careful discussion as an interpretive community about the way we have been socialised to read texts; or to draw on N T Wright again, the way we have been socialised to narrate a particular story.

The second is that Martin, like some others, does in fact offer a biblical interpretive 'centre'. In a chapter that discusses the meaning of *malakos* and *arsenakoitos*, mainly in a historical critical style, Martin proposes the double love command of Jesus as this centre: 'Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all.'[19] Martin draws on Augustine but in a way that makes some change to Augustine's point. Augustine's focus was on which texts should be interpreted literally and which needed to be interpreted more allegorically because the literal meaning would violate this double law. Martin seeks to apply this to how *all* texts should be interpreted.

But we need to explore further, indeed question, Martin's fundamental claims. Martin rejects the idea that texts can have any agency and the privileging of authorial intent. But there is always something quite ironic about a very carefully and rhetorically presented piece of work that argues against knowing authorial intent! I would certainly want to take a critical realist approach to such knowledge, but Martin's book seems to offer quite a clear insight into his authorial intent. His

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[18] Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 13.
[19] Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 49.

rejecting of any textual agency has the feel of the full pendulum swing insisting on one view so strongly as to counter its opposite position, of a much more positivist approach that claims certainty in meaning. While it is of course true that the language of a text 'speaking' or 'acting' is metaphorical, this does not rule out agency. Texts 'do' things to us – they can, move, inspire, comfort, repel. This is not to suggest they do this without any reader involvement, but in the interplay between text and reader the text is not simply passive. Hearing Psalm 23, whatever its historical critical background, might comfort me in a moment of despair. This may happen because of the way I read the text shaped by long community interpretation, and may or may not be in line with any authorial intent, but this does not mitigate against the text's agency at that moment.

Martin himself offers such a more balanced view of how texts and readers come together when he privileges the double love command of the Gospel. My engagement with this is shaped by communal interpretation and tradition, but there seems to be more than this happening, which Martin explicitly acknowledges. There is, then, a Christological centre to Martin's hermeneutical strategy, which is rooted more firmly in the text than simply in the interpretive community. It is a more radical Christological centre than, for example, Hill adopts, in that the double love command becomes the basis for understanding the whole of the Gospels, within an overall hermeneutical strategy that gives much more place to the reader than Hill or Sprinkle, but still for Martin this text has agency. The reason that it is this text that has agency and therefore controls interpretation of the rest of Scripture is the complex interplay between it being Jesus' own summary of divine revelation, thus rooted in the text, and the way it resonates with Martin's own traditioned understanding, thus rooted in the reader. But this is as much a hermeneutical commitment as any other approach.

William Webb

William Webb is well known for developing what he describes as a 'redemptive-movement' hermeneutic, although he considers that this works in different ways for slaves, women and those in same sex relationships. His book pays explicit attention to hermeneutic issues and his redemptive-movement hermeneutic has a number of significant features, being built on two explicit commitments: that there is in the Bible cultural and transcultural material and it is possible to distinguish between these; that the Bible might not have the last word or offer a 'finalized ethic'[20] on any given issue but there is evidence in some areas of a progressive trajectory.

In the first area, Webb is very aware that this 'cultural analysis', as he calls it, is not straightforward and it has no clearly established rules.[21] Webb offers first some extensive and carefully thought through criteria for trying to distinguish between the cultural and the transcultural, which he then applies to these three areas. One foundation on which Webb's work is based is a recognition of multiple voices in Scripture because these are culturally shaped. There are he owns, examples of oppressive patriarchy in Scripture that need to be redeemed by Scripture's own trajectory. But there are some other assumptions at play too. Webb begins by asserting that 'our mandate is to figure out which statements from the Bible in their 'on the page wording' you and I should continue to follow in our contemporary setting' because some instructions are only in force in part or in a modified way.[22] This already contains the assumptions that understand Scripture primarily as instruction rather than as narrative, and assumes everything is in force at least in a modified fashion – some aspects of Scripture might need to be redeemed, but ultimately there is here no reading against the text. Webb seems to see Scripture more as a 'guide-book', but one which requires significant translation to a different context.

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[20] William Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 247.
[21] Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals,* 67.
[22] Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals*, 13.

Webb begins the discussion of cultural and transcultural material by establishing eighteen criteria to use when considering what might be cultural aspects of a biblical text. While being carefully argued it has the, perhaps unintended, consequence of immediately establishing biblical hermeneutics, especially in contested areas, as requiring something of a specialist approach. Webb's desire, no doubt, is to help others understand the issues, but the hermeneutical criteria he uses means significantly on the detailed knowledge of experts. Having established these criteria, Webb then explores them with what he describes as a 'neutral' example[23] – slavery – by which he means one that is largely settled, before exploring contested issues. But his use of 'neutral' is interesting, for in contrast to Martin, this approach offers little appreciation of the cultural assumptions any reader of the Bible will bring. Given the way that those from different racial backgrounds and with different cultural histories will respond to slavery, this can be no neutral issue. Webb arguably pays too little attention to the role of the reader. Therefore it remains debatable as to whether, for example, the aspects of the creation account that Webb thinks are culturally bound – farming, six day working week, veganism, even the procreation command[24] – are significantly shaped by our own cultural assumptions and what we bring to the text, rather than cultural or transcultural aspects inherent in the text itself. Despite the real care given to the texts, there are assumptions from the reader that are not owned.

The second foundation of the book, a trajectory reading of Scripture is one that challenges Webb's own background and he acknowledges that this is an area where he has changed his mind on the right hermeneutical approach.[25] This commitment to a movement within Scripture and, in places, a final ethic beyond Scripture, allows Webb to take seriously those 'troublesome texts' rather than ignore them, but to

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[23] Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals,* 68.
[24] Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals,* 126-7.
[25] Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals,* 56.

suggest they are culturally shaped and so not the final word. For Webb the basis of this hermeneutical approach is in the text itself, and is based on the spirit of the text.[26] This is mainly achieved by looking at individual texts and considering, through historical critical study, how they compare with their original context. Webb is looking for signs in this comparison that there is some redemptive spirit that distinguishes the biblical narrative for its contemporary counterparts which then points towards a fuller redemptive pattern in our own culture. Webb does allow for a broader trajectory within Scripture but this is less developed; the emphasis is on the close reading of individual texts to see what might be distinctive about Judaeo-Christian tradition. For Webb the redemptive movement for slaves and women are important examples and the model could be applied to many other areas, although for him the individual texts on same sex relationships have no redemptive spirit. We notice, again, that such work requires significant knowledge of the ancient Near East and Graeco-Roman culture; Webb has a hermeneutical commitment to clarity on what is cultural and transcultural but based strongly on the work of scholarship and expertise.

Questions for our Own Commitments:

I have suggested that in these four authors, who are a representative sample rather than an exhaustive list, we see a variety of hermeneutical convictions, which in turn significantly shape the authors' approaches to same-sex relationships. Some of these convictions are owned, while some seem more assumed; sometimes these convictions are discussed with the specific hermeneutical approach of other writers, as well as their conclusions on same-sex relationships, being analysed and critiqued. As Baptists continue to discuss the status of same-sex relationships it is vital that we are able to and deeply about our own hermeneutical approaches and convictions and not assume our approach is either universal or simply correct.

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[26] Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals,* 53-4.

Based on the above reflections I offer, below, twelve questions we need to ask ourselves as we consider our own commitments, gathered in four areas. There could be more questions, and they could be arranged differently; this is not an attempt to be exhaustive, but to reflect on areas that seem to be both important and contested. These questions all raise major theological issues that would need much longer to discuss in detail. But to describe them in this way as questions forces us to reflect on why we might take a particular view. My own belief is that in all these areas we have implicit commitments which we bring to the text as part of our hermeneutical strategy when we read the Bible (even if we then try and read it in the text) rather than approaches that Bible in anyway teaches. Thus, these questions ask us to reflect on the way we have been socialised in an interpretive community already and to ponder the operant if implicit commitments which shape us.

The nature of the Bible:

Is the Bible a witness or guide book?

These descriptions are used by a number of people, particularly in the context of discussion of same-sex relationships by Adrian Thatcher, who considers them to be antithetical and not combined together.[27] The Bible as witness approach recognises Jesus as the Word of God and the Bible only in a secondary sense, and is very much based on the earlier work of Karl Bath; the Bible as a guide book sees the Bible

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[27] Thatcher, *The Savage Text*, 10-12. Thatcher considers the 2003 report of the Anglican House of Bishops, *Some Issues in Human Sexuality: A Guide to the Debate*, and is critical of it for distinguishing these two and then trying to synthesis them, 26-7. Humberto Maiztegui, 'Homosexuality and the Bible in the Anglican Church of the Southern Cone of America' in Terry Brown (ed), *Other Voices, Other Worlds: The Global Church Speaks out on Homosexuality* (London: DLT: 2006), 236-48 also stresses the Bible as witness approach. For further reflections on the nature of the Bible as a source for ethical decision see John E. Colwell, *Living the Christian Story: The Distinctiveness of Christian Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 69-128.

simply as the Word of God and stresses its nature as a commandment. Thatcher argues that the Bible as witness is the historical, classic and Reformed position. To express the issue so sharply uses a more binary description than is necessary, and it may be better to see these are two tendencies or directions of travel. This raises one of the most fundamental questions about the nature of the Bible and so one of the most fundamental commitments. It touches on issues such as inspiration, inerrancy, progressive revelation.

Is Scripture manifold or one?

To what extent is there a diversity of voices in Scripture that stand in tension with each other and offer different views on an issue, or to what extent does Scripture present a common witness on all issues? We have noticed earlier, for example, that Sprinkle has a very clear commitment to the unified message of Scripture on an issue, with Hill expressing a similar view though less strongly. By contrast, Bernadette Brooten, for example, sees significant tensions, even in the writings of Paul, with gender issues being essential to the argument of Romans 1 while they are of no significance in Galatians 3:28.[28]

Is the meaning of Scripture 'plain'?

The doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture was an important Reformation stress, expressed, for example, in Luther's *The Bondage of the Will* and in the Westminster Confession. These writings contain some caveats, that it is those things necessary for salvation and not necessarily everything in the Bible that is clear, that the use of 'ordinary means' is necessary for understanding, that there may be some ignorance of 'certain terms and grammatical particulars' and that fallen human nature may mean we struggle to understand; but Scripture is fundamentally clear. What is clear from the current literature on same sex relationships is that there is no agreed 'plain' reading of the contested texts, even if some claim their reading is plain. We have also

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[28] Brooten, *Love Between Women,* 265.

seen in Webb a commitment to significant scholarship to distinguish cultural and transcultural issues, although again scholars disagree on the details.[29]

The shape of the Bible:

Does the Bible have a canonical shape?

This is another question about the intrinsic nature of Scripture and its composition over time, but also prompts reflection on our reading strategies. It asks, for example, about the nature of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament, and the value of the Old Testament in Christian theology and ethics. Do we have any coherent and consistent approach to draw on specific Old Testament laws? It also teases out the assumptions we have about the way that the Christian Bible is ordered and the theological significance of this. There is an understandable inclination to read passages that now appear later in the Old Testament in the light of those that appear earlier, without questioning the assumptions this might have about composition.

Does the Bible have a Christological centre?

Within the overall shaping of Scripture we have noticed that two of our four authors, Hill and Martin are working with some kind of explicit Christological centre which then shapes how the rest of Scripture is read. Yes they still differ on what this looks like and Hill engages with a third author, Song, who argues differently again. That there is *a* Christological centre to Scripture does not seem so controversial, which then offers a Christological reading of Scripture as

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[29] Stephen Holmes, 'Kings, Professors and Ploughboys: On the Accessibility of Scripture', International Journal of Systematic Theology 13.4 (October, 2011): 403-15, suggests that such a reliance, indeed overreliance, on scholarship has been dominant in modern accounts of biblical interpretation and argues for a return to something more akin to an older understanding of the accessibility of Scripture as part of ecclesial liturgical practice.

whole. But how this Christological centre is decided – it includes how the whole ministry of Jesus is understood and what is prioritised as well how the life and teaching of Jesus is seen to relate to the Old Testament and then employed – is much more debated.

Does the Bible have a trajectory?

Webb is convinced that the Bible must have some kind of trajectory and few I suspect would disagree with this entirely. That the Bible seems to accept slavery, even if it does not require slavery, without offering a clear and complete condemnation would not seem to be enough and thus there is a requirement for a contemporary theological statement that is nowhere found in Scripture. On Webb's analysis such a complete condemnation of slavery is consistent with the approach and trajectory of Scripture even it is says something beyond what Scripture itself says. But if the Bible does not have the final word on one thing, for example, slavery, does it have the final word on anything? And if there are some areas where Scripture has the final word and some where there is a trajectory which as readers of Scripture we are compelled to follow and complete, how are these distinguished?

The Bible and the reader:

What is the relationship between author, text and reader?

This is, of course, a fundamental question in hermeneutics, and although other classifications are possible, to reflect on the nature of author-centred, text, centred and reader-centred approaches, and the way these three interact, remains helpful.[30] In the authors we have considered Sprinkle offers the clearest authored centred approach and Martin the strongest reader-centred one. But this is also an area in which we will have been deeply socialised and formed by the

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[30] See, for example, Ian Boxall, *SCM Studyguide to New Testament Interpretation*, (London: SCM, 2007), 24-38.

communities in which we first read the Bible offering us probably unreflective patterns which we then adopted.

What agency does Scripture have?

Martin seems concerned that the general Christian tradition has made too much of the agency of Scripture and has not given enough consideration to the metaphorical language used in such expressions. My own sense is that he reacts too strongly to what her perceives as entirely author and text based approaches, because a whole range of texts have agency. It may well be that in considering that they have agency we are in fact giving them agency for us, but that does make the relationships between text and reader more complex. So an individual might go back to a favourite song or recording artist and find the words particularly powerful in such a way that they are moved and challenged in their practice. Does such a song have agency? Surely it does for this individual. This is not to deny of course the way the listener has been involved in constructing meaning but it does suggest that we can rightly speak of texts saying things and doing things. A further matter is one of authority; that is, which texts, with their agency, are given particular weight. But this is built on a prior sense that texts can say and do things. One of the complicated factors in biblical interpretation is that the same text might say or do something different to different individuals. The problem it would appear is not that Scripture as a text does not have any agency, but that the agency it has is complex.

Can the reader ask critical questions about the text?

Here we return to similar ground to our opening question about the Bible as witness or guidebook but from the perspective of the reader. Is the role of the reader simply to 'sit under the text?' Sprinkle, for example, stressing the unity of content and the Bible's nature as like a guidebook, would appear to give little place for critical questions. As

someone who clearly supports an egalitarian approach to gender relationships, he looks to find this approach in all Biblical texts rather than in any way read against the grain of a text. For others, especially from a feminist or other liberationist approach such reading against the grain is essential in exposing what may be cultural aspects and assumptions that need to be questioned.

The Bible and the Church:

What is the relationship between the Bible and the Church?

This is a complex historical question around the formation of the canon, but also an existential one, as the relationship between the Bible and the church remains a complex one. There is clearly a necessity for the Bible to critique the church and for the *semper reformanda* of the church based on new insight from the text. Yet even if there is a formal rejection of a magisterium among Protestants, voices within the church, whether key historical figures or significant contemporary leaders, are afforded greater authority in the interpretation of the text. The freedom that comes without a magisterium is the freedom to choose our own guides.

How does the Church act as a community (or communities) of interpretation?

For Baptist churches in particular this is an essential element of their ecclesiology; it is the local church, as the gathered community that has the liberty, and we might add the responsibility, to interpret Scripture. This means being willing to hear differences but also to engage in this very process of reflection that might then name some of the socialising aspects of that church tradition, or hearing alternative voices form the

margins, and working out an explicit and owned community hermeneutic.[31]

Whose voice is given priority in reading Scripture?

Building on the discussion about being a community of interpretation, the reality is that both in these communities and in the broader community of the wider church some voices have been heard much more loudly and others have been silenced. The challenge of liberation theology, for example, about the way a privileged group may have controlled the interpretation of the community is important to hear.

Conclusion

Reflection on these questions will not of course bring unity of theology or practice; in fact it might reveal greater differences. But in conversations that so often simply go past each other, there is a pressing need to reflect on our own hermeneutical commitments, and be able to name them and own them. I am convinced – and this is naming my commitment – that generally our answers to these questions are prior commitments and pre-understanding we bring to the Biblical text rather than derive from it, and come from the way we as individuals have been socialised and formed in a variety of communities. If we are going to talk well together as individuals and as churches on this or other contested issues then some reflection on our hermeneutics is necessary.

Notes on Contributor

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[31] For a series of reflections on how Baptist Churches might reflect on the Gospel in a variety of contexts see Amy Chilton and Steven Harmon (eds), *Sources of Light: Resources for Baptist Churches Practicing Theology* (Mercer, GA: Mercer University Press, 2020).

Journal of Baptist Theology in Context

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- To encourage the sharing of good theological, biblical and historical research by Baptists
- To support pastor–theologians in academic publishing

- To offer the wider Baptist family thoughtful work which will aid their life and mission

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Cover Image

Designed by Micky Munroe. The image is based on a painting that was for many years displayed in Helwys Hall, Regent's Park College, Oxford and was designed by Henry Wheeler Robinson (College Principal, 1920-44), representing the five principles of Baptist life: faith, baptism, evangelism, fellowship and freedom. See H. Wheeler Robinson, 'The Five Points of a Baptist's Faith' *Baptist Quarterly* 11.2-2 (January-April 1942), 4–14.