

PAUL AMONG LIBERALS AND COMMUNITARIANS: MODELS FOR CHRISTIAN ETHICS*

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Abstract:

This essay first sketches the contrasts between liberal and communitarian approaches to ethics, represented by Jürgen Habermas and Stanley Hauerwas respectively, as a contemporary context in which to read Paul's ethics. Three sample studies in Paul's ethics (Philippians 2, 1 Corinthians 5, and Romans 14-15) then illustrate how the Pauline material offers various points of contact with these contrasting approaches to ethics and the debates between them. Unlike in the recent work of Douglas Harink, here Paul is not seen as clearly and unambiguously affirming the ecclesial ethics of Hauerwas but rather as offering a rather more diverse range of possibilities and points of critical comparison. In the closing sections of the essay three possible models for the contemporary appropriation of Pauline ethics are outlined: one is closest to an ecclesial model, another is closer to a liberal model which looks to foster a wider consensus on moral norms, and a third considers how Paul's approach to ethics might inform a (possibly post-Christian) social ethic.

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The liberal-communitarian debate and its relevance to theology

The liberal-communitarian debate has been described as ‘the central debate in Anglo-American political theory during the 1980s’,¹ one which continues, ‘in one way or another, to inform a great deal of contemporary theory’.² This is not, however, a debate in which two clearly-defined positions battle out their differences. The label, rather, serves conveniently to identify on the one side a rather diverse range of arguments brought against liberalism, from critics such as Alasdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Michael Walzer, and Michael Sandel, and on the other the responses and restatements from representatives of political liberalism such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas.³ Nonetheless, certain key contrasts between the two broadly-defined perspectives can be outlined; they will be illustrated here with specific reference to the work of Jürgen Habermas, described by Stephen Bronner as ‘the great exponent of political liberalism in Germany’,⁴ and of Stanley Hauerwas, whose ecclesial ethics embodies a strident opposition to the presuppositions of political liberalism and shares much of communitarianism’s theoretical basis.⁵

In his attempts to articulate what he calls a ‘discourse ethics’ (*Diskursethik*), Habermas aims to fulfil a key liberal aim: to outline a morality for the public sphere with a rational, universally valid grounding, a *Vernunftmoral*, which transcends the specific

¹ Susan Moller Okin, quoted with approval in D. Bell, *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993) 2.

² S. Mulhall and A. Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (2nd edn; Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) xii. Mulhall and Swift provide a thorough introduction to the perspectives and issues in this debate.

³ Although Rawls tends to dominate the Anglo-American discussions of liberalism, Arne Rasmusson is right to describe Rawls and Habermas as ‘the two leading liberal theorists’ (*The Church as Polis: From Political Theology to Theological Politics as Exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Stanley Hauerwas* [Lund: Lund University Press 1994] 269).

⁴ S.E. Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and its Theorists* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) 284.

⁵ Although Hauerwas does not want to be labelled a ‘communitarian’ (see S. Hauerwas, *Dispatches from the Front: Theological Engagements with the Secular* [Durham, NC & London: Duke University Press, 1994] 156-63), since he sees his project as a specifically theological one, he does not deny the accuracy of his being aligned with the communitarian position: ‘I generally share their historicist starting point as well as their more communitarian and anti-liberal political and social theory’ (S. Hauerwas, ‘Will the Real Sectarian Stand Up?’, *Theology Today* 44 [1987] 87-94, here p. 92).

justifications provided by particular traditions. In this, he stands firmly in the Kantian and deontological tradition, but seeks to reformulate Kant's categorical imperative such that it depicts the agent as situated in a communicative context rather than as monologically reflective: 'Only those norms can claim to be valid that meet (or could meet) with the approval of all affected in their capacity as participants in a practice discourse'.⁶ For Habermas, at least in the public sphere, ethics cannot any longer be justified by appeal to 'the authority of unquestioned traditions'.⁷ The only means by which ethical norms can be tested, and thus found valid (or not), is through rational argumentation. And the principles of discourse ethics, are, Habermas argues, implicit in the very presuppositions of human argumentation: that communication and understanding are possible through participation in real discourse; that reasons can be presented for following certain courses of action; and that what alone should be persuasive is 'the unforced force of the better argument'.⁸

While traditions, and specifically the Judaeo-Christian tradition, have been, and remain, immensely important in generating substantive moral values, the task of philosophy is to translate these moral claims into the language of public reason, such that they can be accepted and affirmed (or not) on the basis of rational insight.⁹ Indeed, '[e]very morality', Habermas suggests, 'revolves around equality of respect (*Gleichbehandlung*), solidarity, and the common good (*allgemeines Wohl*)', given the requirement simultaneously to protect both the individual and the well-being of the community to which they belong.¹⁰ 'To these two aspects correspond the principles of justice and solidarity' where the first principle 'postulates equal respect and equal rights for the individual whereas the second postulates empathy and concern for the well-being

⁶ J. Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990) 66.

⁷ J. Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993) 151.

⁸ Habermas, *Justification*, 23.

⁹ Cf. J. Habermas, *Religion and Rationality: Essays on Reason, God, and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002) 162-63; *idem*, 'Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World', in D. Browning and F. Schüssler Fiorenza, eds, *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) 226-250, here p. 237.

¹⁰ Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 201; *idem*, *Erläuterungen zur Diskursethik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991) 17.

of one's neighbour'.¹¹ The crucial argument Habermas then makes is that these moral principles are fundamental ideas which can be traced back to the conditions of symmetry and expectations of reciprocity basic to communicative action, that is to say, that they are already implicit in the presuppositions of human communication, can be discerned in everyday practices orientated to understanding.¹²

Hauerwas, by contrast, is clearly and polemically opposed to the 'false universalism of liberalism'¹³ and to any notion that liberal political democracy represents a kind of social order that Christians should seek to legitimate and sustain.¹⁴ Far from being a regime in which Christianity can flourish — protected in the name of 'freedom of religion' — liberalism requires an acceptance that religious convictions are essentially a private matter and subject to legitimate freedom of choice, which in effect empties Christianity of its integrity, while making the liberal world-view determinative. Hauerwas's theological, ecclesial ethics represents a counter-liberal project which embodies many of the characteristics of the communitarian critique of liberalism (Alasdair MacIntyre is an especially notable influence). Against the liberal notion of the 'unencumbered self' — a self capable of free and rational reflection — Hauerwas insists, with other communitarians, that our identities and moral convictions are profoundly formed by our communities of nurture, by the stories and traditions that make us who we

¹¹ Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 200.

¹² Habermas, *Erläuterungen*, 17: 'Alle Moralen kreisen um Gleichbehandlung, Solidarität und allgemeines Wohl; das sind aber Vorstellungen, die sich auf die Symmetriebedingungen und Reziprozitätserwartungen des kommunikativen Handelns zurückführen, d.h. in den wechselseitigen Zuschreibungen und gemeinsam Unterstellungen einer verständigungsorientierten Alltagspraxis auffinden lassen'.

¹³ S. Hauerwas, *After Christendom? How the Church Is to Behave If Freedom, Justice, and a Christian Nation Are Bad Ideas* (Reissued with a new preface; Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1999) 16.

¹⁴ Cf., e.g., S. Hauerwas 'Where Would I Be Without Friends?' , in M. Thiessen Nation and S. Wells, eds, *Faithfulness and Fortitude: In Conversation with the Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 313-332, here p. 325: 'Christians have no stake in Western civilisation nor should we try to rescue the epistemological or political forms of liberalism... The reason Christians should not underwrite the epistemology and politics of liberalism is very simple: they are not true'. Similarly, *idem*, *After Christendom*, 35, *et passim*. For a penetrating critique of Hauerwas's anti-liberal rhetoric, see most recently J. Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (New Forum Books; Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004) 140-61.

are.¹⁵ In this respect, liberalism is subject to criticism on two counts: first, in that it insists that such traditions ‘do not matter’, that they can and must be set aside insofar as they are trumped by the tradition-transcendent values of liberal democracy; second, in that it masks its own particular story about the character of human identity in a universal claim to rationality.

These comments already indicate how for Hauerwas, as for MacIntyre and others, narrative, or story, is crucial as the mode in which identity and community are formed. Moral virtue and moral character are defined in tradition-specific ways, and cultivated through participation in a story-formed community. What this means for Christians is, negatively, that they have, according to Hauerwas, allowed their values and character to be decisively formed by the story which liberalism offers, and positively, that their task is to be a community whose practices and ethics are shaped by its own (true) story, the story of God’s redemption of the world in Jesus Christ.

The church is where the stories of Israel and Jesus are told, enacted, and heard, and it is our conviction that there is literally nothing more important we can do. But the telling of that story requires that we be a particular kind of people if we and the world are to hear the story truthfully. That means that the church must never cease from being a community of peace and truth in a world of mendacity and fear.¹⁶

¹⁵ See discussion in, e.g., S. Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992) 3, 71-76; Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 11; Bell, *Communitarianism*, 4-6. Hence it is relevant for Hauerwas to mention, in illustrating this point, that he is a Texan: ‘Because I was raised Texan... I knew I was never free to be “modern” and “self-creating”. I would always be, for better or worse, Texan. It was my first lesson in particularity; as some would put it, being Texan made me realise early that the foundationalist epistemologies of the Enlightenment had to be wrong... I prefer simply to have a Texan epistemology’ (S. Hauerwas, ‘The Testament of Friends’, *Christian Century* 107 [1990] 212-216, here p. 214). See further G.H. Albrecht, *The Character of Our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon 1995) 29-32, where she discusses Hauerwas’s ‘Texan Epistemology’.

¹⁶ S. Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983) 99-100.

The Church's task, indeed, is to stand as a 'political alternative', 'an alternative politics to the politics that so dominate our lives'.¹⁷

These contrasting approaches, and the debate they represent, are important for theology since they concern the different ways in which the political and ethical tasks of theology might be conceived, or, put differently, the different models by which theology might understand its relationship and engagement with 'the world'. The alternatives are perhaps most concisely represented in Arne Rasmusson's terms as 'political theology' versus 'theological politics', where the former envisages the theological task as one of engaging with the wider political context, mediating the Christian message to the wider world, while for the latter, the position represented by Hauerwas, 'it is the politics of the church and not the politics of the world that forms the primary context'.¹⁸ On the former model, theologians might expect to make a contribution to public debate on ethics, with their claims, like all others, on Habermas's model, being subject to rational testing through public processes of argumentation. They might hope, even expect, to discern areas of common ground in ethics, which might form part of what John Rawls calls an 'overlapping consensus', the kind of public consensus that can sustain the common political and social life of groups of people committed to diverse traditions and visions of the good.¹⁹ On the latter model, a model which Rasmusson labels a Radical Reformation theology, the incommensurability, even opposition, between church and world is much more forcefully stressed. Liberal visions of public consensus, to which theologians might make some contribution, represent a secular politics, in which theology allows its fundamental orientation to be determined by the story of secular reason and thus compromises its own story about the church and the world.²⁰ Hauerwas rejects the notion that Christian social ethics might involve a search for 'moral generalities... that provide the basis for common moral commitment and action' and challenges 'the very idea that

¹⁷ Hauerwas, *After Christendom*, phrases from pp. 35 and 6 respectively.

¹⁸ Rasmusson, *Church as Polis*, 377.

¹⁹ J. Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (ed. E. Kelly; Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2001) 32-38.

²⁰ Here, of course, I echo briefly the thesis of John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

Christian social ethics is primarily an attempt to make the world more peaceable or just'. The task of the church is not so much to contribute to some form of public social ethics, but rather, as Hauerwas puts it, 'to be the church', to be itself 'a social ethic'.²¹

Readings in Paul: models for Christian ethics

With these debates and issues in mind, we turn to Paul, and to three different readings in Pauline ethics, in the hope that such readings may help to generate fruitful reflection.²² The interpretative process is, then, two-way: on the one hand, the contemporary debate shapes the kinds of questions with which our readings are concerned; on the other hand, the engagement with Paul's thought is intended to generate critical and constructive reflection on the issues raised in this debate. The hermeneutical stance that is thereby presupposed requires, I think, no more long and sophisticated justification than the pithy and felicitous description given by Francis Watson: 'in the last resort, to interpret is *to use the texts to think with*'.²³ The function of the canon, Watson insists, is not to restrict or foreclose thought, but to generate it. I do not, let me stress, intend to imply that Paul might somehow supply a definitive resolution of the issues of debate, or a systematic model for Christian ethics. Only a naively biblicistic approach would pretend either that the Bible alone could supply such a model, or that a biblical perspective could somehow trump contemporary critical debate. All I presume is that at the very least theologians regard the Bible as a primary source for the Christian tradition, one with which they

²¹ Hauerwas, *Peaceable Kingdom*, 99.

²² Insofar as I seek to develop a conversation between Paul and these contemporary approaches in ethics my project shares aims in common with the recent work of Douglas Harink (*Paul Among the Postliberals* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2003]). Harink brings postliberal theologians, notably Hauerwas (along with Barth and Yoder), into conversation with Paul, and concludes that Paul thoroughly affirms postliberal theology: it is 'a genuine recovery of the authentic Pauline gospel' (p. 18). What I miss in his book is any sense that engaging with Paul might raise some critical questions for Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics or that Paul's thought might resonate in some ways with liberal concerns or with other approaches. The idea that liberalism might find some points of connection with Paul is sharply dismissed (cf. p. 84 n. 29; p. 92). But Harink is selective in what he takes from Pauline theology and ethics (and from contemporary Pauline scholarship) and thus excludes some of the contrasting perspectives that might be considered. For further thoughts on this stimulating and significant book, see my review in *JTS* 55 (2004) 663-68.

²³ F.B. Watson, *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic* (Cambridge: CUP, 2000) viii.

engage in order to further develop that tradition in response to contemporary dilemmas and issues. I should also make clear that by presenting three different readings in Paul's ethics, I do not intend to imply that three (or more) distinct 'models' for ethics can be identified in Paul. Rather, by sampling the Pauline material, I aim to illustrate some of its diverse facets and potential for contemporary appropriation.

The story-formed community: ecclesial ethics in Philippians 2

Philippians 2:5-11 is among the most influential and theologically rich passages in the New Testament. It is also, as Markus Bockmuehl remarks, 'a passage which in the twentieth century has been the subject of an uncontrollable deluge of scholarly debate, quite possibly more so than any other New Testament text'.²⁴ The crucial question for our purposes is whether, and how, the hymn of Christ functions in Paul's ethics. Ernst Käsemann famously argued that the hymn did not have an ethical function: verse 5 should be interpreted not as suggesting a parallel between the attitude the Philippians should have and the attitude Christ had, but as calling the Philippians to adopt the attitude which is fitting 'in Christ Jesus'.²⁵ The hymn which follows presents the mythical scheme of the salvation event, and it is this which forms the basis for Paul's paraenesis — not some depiction of Christ as ethical *Vorbild*. Verses 9-11, Käsemann insisted, add weight to this thesis, since they can hardly serve as an outline of an example to be imitated. Thus, according to Käsemann, 'it becomes clear that the hymn conveys eschatology and soteriology, not ethics'.²⁶ Käsemann's interpretation was widely followed in the 1950s and 60s, but subsequent work has on the whole reaffirmed an ethical reading of the hymn, and insisted, against Käsemann, that v. 5 is to be understood precisely as proposing a parallel between the attitude of the Philippians and that of Christ.²⁷

²⁴ M.N.A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1998) 115.

²⁵ E. Käsemann, 'Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2,5-11', in *idem, Exegetische Versuche und Besinnungen*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960) 51-95.

²⁶ Käsemann, 'Kritische Analyse', 94.

²⁷ Among many examples, see M.D. Hooker, 'Philippians 2:6-11', in E.E. Ellis and E. Gräßer, eds, *Jesus und Paulus. FS W.G. Kümmel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978) 151-164; L. Hurtado, 'Jesus as Lordly Example in Philippians 2:5-11', in J.C. Hurd and P. Richardson, eds, *From Jesus to Paul: Studies in*

In his opposition to what he calls the ‘ethical idealism’ of most previous interpretations,²⁸ Käsemann is surely right, however, to insist that the ethical function of the Christ-hymn cannot be merely to set out an ethical example, a pattern to be copied. As a rich and compact expression of the Christian myth, shared and proclaimed, whether ‘liturgically’ or otherwise, in the context of Christian gatherings, this text shapes the beliefs, identity, and behaviour of those who affirm it. In this sense, it is about soteriology, eschatology, *and* — *pace* Käsemann — ethics. Verses 9-11 are not then problematic for an ethical interpretation along these lines, though they are for a ‘mere example’ ethic. They belong in the text since they depict a crucial part of the story, which cannot end simply with death on a cross. But more than this, while Christ’s ‘story’ is in one sense unimitatable, the pattern of faithful endurance through suffering leading to resurrection glory is precisely one to which Paul points the Philippians and sees mirrored in his own, as well as Christ’s, experience (Phil 3:10-11, 21).²⁹

Looking back to verses 3-4, it becomes clear that the specific pattern of moral conduct which Paul sees exemplified in Christ is one characterised by ‘humility’ (*tapeinophrosunê*) — a self-lowering in which each person considers others before themselves, and looks not to their own [things]³⁰ but to those of others.³¹ This self-lowering other-regard is paradigmatically demonstrated in the central story of the faith, in Christ Jesus himself, whose self-lowering takes the extreme form of a movement from the form of God (and equality with God) to the form of a slave, a person ‘bereft of rights

Honour of Francis Wright Beare (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1984) 113-126; S.E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul* (JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: SAP 1990) 49-101.

²⁸ Käsemann, ‘Kritische Analyse’, 57.

²⁹ See further W.A. Meeks, ‘The Man from Heaven in Paul’s Letter to the Philippians’, in B.A. Pearson, ed., *The Future of Early Christianity: Essays in Honor of Helmut Koester* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1991) 329-36.

³⁰ As in 1 Cor 10:24, a closely parallel phrase, Paul does not specify a noun here (interests, concerns, rights, etc.) but speaks simply of *ta heautôn/ta heterôn* (cf. 1 Cor 10:24: *to heautou/to heterou*).

³¹ Cf. also Rom 15:2-3. On the theme of Christ’s self-giving as a paradigm for other-regard, see Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference*, chap. 7. This central norm of Pauline ethics is also stressed by Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T&TClark, 1997) 27-32.

and social status'.³² This 'social humility', that is, the lowering of oneself before (and for the sake of) those who are socially equal or inferior is *not*, it is widely agreed, seen as positive or morally commendable in Greco-Roman ethics,³³ nor does it exist with any degree of prominence as a virtue in pre-Christian Jewish tradition — though it has clear precedents and precursors there.³⁴ Yet it comes to prominence as a central Christian virtue, not least in Paul, precisely because it is demonstrated paradigmatically in the story of Christ's self-giving for others — his shameful and ignominious death becoming for Paul a positive model for imitation. As the Christians in Philippi affirm and celebrate the story of Christ's descent and ascent, humiliation and exaltation, so they are to conform their character and practice to this moral paradigm, and thus cultivate the virtues

³² F.J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 179.

³³ Cf., e.g., W. Schrage, *Die konkreten Einzelgebote in der paulinischen Paränese* (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1961) 204-205; W. Grundmann, TWNT 8: 1-6; and esp. G.G. Ortwein, *Status und Statusverzicht im Neuen Testament und seiner Umwelt* (NTOA 39; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1999), for a major study of 'renunciation of status' (Statusverzicht) as a value in the NT and its environment (cf. also G. Theissen, *A Theory of Primitive Christian Religion* [London: SCM 1999] 71-78, on this value as central to early Christian ethics). Ortwein comments: 'Demut wird in der paganen Antike nur sehr selten positiv bewertet'. The few positive references are to humility before the gods or under the law. 'Als Haltung vor den Menschen wird sie als Haltung der Unterlegenen den Überlegenen gegenüber gefordert, mit einer Ausnahme (Agesilaios) aber negativ bewertet. Als Haltung der Überlegenen gegenüber den Unterlegenen läßt sie sich m.W. nicht nachweisen' (p. 87).

³⁴ The extent to which the virtue of humility is evident in pre-Christian Judaism is debated, with, e.g., Klaus Wengst (*Humility: Solidarity of the Humiliated* [London: SCM, 1988]) and Stephen B. Dawes ('*ĀNĀWĀ* in Translation and Tradition', *VT* 41 [1991] 38-48; 'Humility: Whence This Strange Notion?', *ExpTim* 103 [1991] 72-75) arguing for its Hebrew Bible origins (though Dawes rejects Wengst's view that it originated in the solidarity of the oppressed poor = the humiliated). John P. Dickson and Brian S. Rosner have recently argued that, while some kinds of humility are certainly evident, humility as *social* humility — the lowering of oneself before a lesser or equal — appears positively only in *Sir* 4:8 ('Did Humility Exist Before the New Testament? Stephen B. Dawes Revisited', SNTS conference paper, Bonn 2003; part forthcoming as 'Humility as a Social Virtue in the Hebrew Bible', *VT*). On the developments towards humility as a social virtue in Jewish tradition, Ortwein, *Statusverzicht*, again offers a full survey (see the conclusions in this regard on pp. 156-58, 320-22).

embodied by Christ — humility, self-giving for others, confidence and joy in suffering, and so on.

This description should already make clear how closely this text resonates with the approach of Hauerwas's ecclesial ethics: the central Christian story, told and retold in the context of communal worship, inculcates the practice of certain kinds of moral virtue (humility, above all), through nurturing a particular kind of character, one conformed to that of Christ. Given this similarity it is not insignificant to note that here Paul's ethics finds its most distinctive emphases, compared with his non-Christian contemporaries, namely the prominence of social humility, self-lowering, and renunciation of status.

Ethics in the church and the world: distinct identity and shared ethics in 1 Corinthians 5

Paul's most extended treatment of sex and sexual ethics is in 1 Corinthians 5–7, three chapters dominated by this theme. Chapter 5 deals with what Paul regards as a shocking case of immorality within the congregation — a certain man in a relationship with his step-mother (5:1) — shocking not least because of the failure of the community to sense and to judge the sinner among them (5:2-3, 12-13).

As Alistair May has persuasively and incisively shown, Paul does not deal with this scandal in terms of an immoral *act*, but rather in terms which connect much more with issues of identity, with the offender as an immoral *person*, a *pornos*.³⁵ (Indeed, it is noteworthy, as May observes, that the so-called vice-catalogues in 5:10, 5:11 and 6:9-11 list types of sinful people not actual vices themselves.) His action is such as to (re)define him as a *pornos* and not an *adelphos* (cf. 5:11). 'The one who has done this' (5:2) is in the midst of the community when he should be outside, since by definition *pornoi* belong in the world (cf. 5:9-10) and not in the church. Paul's explicit concern, moreover, is not with what we might call 'individual ethics', but rather with the effect of such a misplaced person on the identity and purity of the group. Drawing clearly on the language and imagery of the Jewish scriptures,³⁶ he describes the presence of the offender as 'old

³⁵ A.S. May, *The Body for the Lord: Sex and Identity in 1 Corinthians 5–7* (JSNTSup 278; London: T&TClark International, 2004) 58-80.

³⁶ See esp. B.S. Rosner, *Paul, Scripture and Ethics: A Study of 1 Corinthians 5–7* (AGAJU 22; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 61-93.

leaven' which leavens the whole lump (5:6-7), quoting a proverbial saying which he also repeats verbatim in Gal 5:9: 'a little leaven leavens the whole lump (of dough)'. Leaven — not simply 'yeast', despite many modern translations (e.g. NRSV)³⁷ — comprises a portion of previously made dough which enables the raising effect of yeast to be reproduced through the incorporation of a piece of the old dough into a new batch. At the same time as this was a useful technique it was also risky, since any impurities or pollutants in the leaven would be transferred into the new dough, where they would come to permeate and infect the whole.³⁸ The Israelites' feast of unleavened bread thus served, at one level, periodically to start afresh and thus avoid the risk of contamination (Exod 12:15-20). This explains why in the New Testament 'leaven is used symbolically to symbolize (*sic*) an evil influence which spreads like an infection'.³⁹ The intimate connection between the festival of the Passover lamb and the period of eating unleavened bread (see Exodus 12; cf. e.g. Mark 14:1, 12) explains the link Paul draws here, between the imagery of the pure unleavened lump which the community is meant to be, and the sacrifice of Christ as the Passover which marks and enables the beginning of this period of new life and purity (5:7-8). It is the identity and purity of the community with which Paul is fundamentally concerned and with the offender insofar as he pollutes the whole.⁴⁰

Paul's verdict on the offender is implicit in the imagery with which he describes the person and his effect upon the community. Old leaven, a pollutant in the lump, must be cast away, put outside; *pornoi* belong in the world, not in the church. Thus, the offender must go where he belongs, be expelled from the community (5:2, 5, 13; cf. Deut 17:7). What exactly Paul means to imply in condemning the man to be 'handed over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord' (5:5) is obscure and much disputed. Is it effectively, as Käsemann suggested, a

³⁷ See esp. C.L. Mitton, 'New Wine in Old Wineskins: IV. Leaven', *ExpTim* 84 (1973) 339-343.

³⁸ Mitton, 'Leaven', 339-40.

³⁹ Mitton, 'Leaven', 342.

⁴⁰ Cf. D.B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1995) 168: 'Paul's primary concern in this passage is the purity of the church, the body of Christ, and his anxieties center on the man as a potentially [should we not say: actually?] polluting agent within Christ's body, an agent whose presence threatens to pollute the entire body.'

death sentence on the offender?⁴¹ Or does it refer only to his ‘exclusion from the fellowship of the Christian community’,⁴² with an expression of hope for his conversion, which would involve a more metaphorical destruction of the flesh?⁴³ However ominous the pronouncement, it is clearly also imbued with some kind of hope for the man’s eventual salvation, even though the necessary precursor to this is a negative judgment.

Running throughout this passage, then, is a strong sense of distinction between church and world: the church is (meant to be) a pure, holy community in the midst of an immoral world. Here again Paul’s discourse finds an echo in Hauerwas’s call for the church to be different, to be shaped by its own and not the world’s story, to stand as ‘a community of peace and truth in a world of mendacity and fear’.

Yet it is also to be noted that this sense of identity-distinction is found in conjunction with an explicit indication that the ethical norm to which Paul appeals is shared in common with the wider society: the reason the man’s behaviour is so shocking is that it is not tolerated ‘even among the Gentiles’ (5:1).⁴⁴ Commentators regularly note that indeed both Jewish and Roman law proscribed a relationship between son and step-mother.⁴⁵ Paul’s purpose, of course, is not to appeal to shared ethical norms but to sharpen the sense of shame the congregation should feel. Yet at precisely this point — the

⁴¹ E. Käsemann, *New Testament Questions of Today* (London: SCM, 1969) 71.

⁴² J.T. South, ‘A Critique of the “Curse/Death” Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 5.1-8’, *NTS* 39 (1993) 539-561, here p. 544.

⁴³ So May, *Body for the Lord*, 76-77.

⁴⁴ A verb needs to be supplied here: the suggestions include ‘not found’ (NRSV), ‘unheard of’ (H. Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975] 94), and ‘not tolerated’ (A.C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000] 385). Neither of the first two renderings would reflect the true situation, objectively, since cases of such incest were both known and reported ‘among the Gentiles’ (see e.g. Martial *Epig.* 4.16; further May, *Body for the Lord*, 64-65; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 385-86), making ‘tolerated’ an attractive suggestion.

⁴⁵ Cf., e.g., J. Héring, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962) 34, who mentions Lev 18.8 and Gaius *Inst.* 1.63; G.D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1987) 200-201; J.T. South, *Disciplinary Practices in Pauline Texts* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1992) 29-30; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 385-86, with further primary and secondary sources mentioned there.

only place in Paul's letters where an offender's sin is so grave as to require expulsion from the church⁴⁶ — Paul is making an ethical judgment which represents a point of moral agreement, shared 'common ground', between him and his contemporaries outside the church. Indeed, Paul stresses that he is not calling for separation from the world, correcting a misunderstanding of his previous letter along these lines (1 Cor 5:9-11). Here we see, ironically, the juxtaposition of a sense of distinct identity and shared ethical norms. Nor is this merely an isolated instance where Paul's ethics demonstrate points of contact and commonality with other contemporary ethical traditions. The so-called catalogues of vices and virtues, for example, again used by Paul to depict the distinct character of the Christian community (e.g. 1 Cor 5:10-11, 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-23), reflect both in their form and content a shared sense of what is good and bad.⁴⁷ In this case the extent of shared common ground is not acknowledged by Paul; historical criticism makes it evident. But in other places, as in 1 Corinthians 5, Paul's appeal to Christians to do good, and to do good to all, explicitly indicates that a sense of what is good constitutes common ground (Rom 12:17: *pronooumenoi kala enôpion pantôn anthrôpôn*). Indeed, crucial to Paul's argument for the universal condemnation of all humankind (Rom 1:18-3:20) — the necessary precursor to the announcement of good news (3:21ff.) — is the conviction that all people can, and do, recognise what is good, even if they fail to live by its standards (Rom 2:14-15).⁴⁸ That this is not merely a negative conclusion is shown by Rom 13:1-7, where Paul strikingly — and in many ways problematically, for us —

⁴⁶ The identification of the offender of 1 Cor 5 with the one referred to in 2 Cor 2:5-11; 7:12, occasionally suggested (e.g. G.W.H. Lampe, 'Church Discipline and the Interpretation of the Epistles to the Corinthians', in W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr, eds, *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* [Cambridge: CUP, 1967] 337-361, here pp. 353-54) is unlikely. But there is no indication that the offender in 2 Corinthians was expelled from the church, still less that Paul ordered his expulsion.

⁴⁷ H.D. Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1979) 282.

⁴⁸ Here and elsewhere (e.g. Rom 1.20; 12.1-2) Paul echoes Stoic language and concepts, also evident in, or filtered via, Hellenistic Judaism, thus giving another example of the way in which he uses the moral language of the surrounding world (cf. J.D.G. Dunn, *Romans* [2 vols; WBC 38A & 38B; Dallas, TX: Word, 1988] 58; B. Byrne, *Romans* [Sacra Pagina 6; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1996] 90, 92-93, 363-65). For a comprehensive argument that Paul's thought follows an essentially Stoic model, see T. Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000).

presumes that the secular authorities rightly recognise good and evil and act as God's servant accordingly, rewarding the one and punishing the other (vv. 3-4).

Thus we may suggest that the rhetoric of distinction can obscure the extent to which ethical norms and values are not so much distinctive as shared with the broader society. More specifically, 1 Corinthians 5 suggests that the claim to a sense of distinct and positive group identity is, at least in part, *dependent* on shared ethical values, since it essentially takes the form of the claim to moral superiority: 'we' are moral, 'they' are not — judged on the basis of shared norms, albeit 'ours' are more rigorous. But then, such claims in a sense reduce to an 'empirical' one — our tradition produces people of greater moral character than yours — which threatens to be falsified when someone like the Corinthian offender appears. Paul's attempt to redeem this claim by redefining the identity of the infamous sinner — he simply isn't really a Christian at all — is, at one and the same time, theoretically impregnable and profoundly unconvincing: the notion that the church is a moral community in an immoral world can always be sustained by (re)defining any sinner as 'really' a member of the world and not the church. But then the claim about the character of the church threatens to lose any connection with the realities that might make its claim convincing.⁴⁹

More constructively, we might suggest that despite the strong sense of distinction between church and world that characterises Paul's ethics, the extent to which shared ethical norms are both presumed and accepted indicates, at least from a Pauline

⁴⁹ Hauerwas is perhaps also vulnerable on this point, as, for example, when he makes such 'empirical' claims in defence of Christian truth: 'For those inclined to so dismiss my argument, I have no decisive response other than to ask if they represent practices that can produce a Dorothy Day' (S. Hauerwas, *With the Grain of the Universe: The Church's Witness and Natural Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2001] 231). And pointing to examples of virtuous communities to show that 'what Hauerwas commends can be done, has been done, and does produce people of virtue' (S. Wells, *Transforming Fate into Destiny. The Theological Ethics of Stanley Hauerwas* [Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998] 140) invites the kind of counter-example that Duncan Forrester presents, where 'Christian' virtues are displayed in a community 'far from the orbit of the church', while the church fails to embody such character (D.B. Forrester, 'The Church and the Concentration Camp: Some Reflections on Moral Community', in Nation and Wells, *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 189-207, here p. 206). Hauerwas's acknowledgment that his depiction of the church is an ideal, a 'task', not reality ('Where Would I Be', 326) empties the force from the claim that a certain tradition is better *because* it produces people of moral character.

perspective, that the liberal goal of discerning some kind of ‘overlapping consensus’ is by no means implausible or impossible.⁵⁰ In Paul’s case, as generally, ethical norms are motivated in tradition-specific ways, but the norms themselves are in many cases more broadly accepted.⁵¹ Furthermore, this example would also suggest the possibility for a sense of distinct identity and a commonly-shared sense of what is good and bad to coexist. The former is, of course, a key focus for communitarianism in general and Hauerwas in particular — identity and moral character formed in community by a particular tradition — while the latter is a key liberal and Habermasian concern — how to sustain a common, tradition-transcending moral framework within which distinct identities and traditions may co-exist.

Pauline ethics and societal ethics: a framework for tolerance and diversity in Romans 14–15

Romans 14:1–15:13, together with 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1, constitute the longest passages of focused ethical argumentation in Paul. The passages are, moreover, related: the Romans text draws on and adapts material from 1 Corinthians. The subject of food provides the topical connection between the two texts, while the main difference is that Romans 14–15 does not deal with idolatry and idol food, the focus of concern in 1 Corinthians 8–10. The issue in Romans 14–15 concerns people who hold different convictions with regard to food and the observance of special days. Those Paul calls the ‘weak’ eat only vegetables and keep certain days as special, while the ‘strong’, among whom Paul counts himself, regard all foods as clean and all days as alike (Rom 14:1-2, 5; 15:1). While the two groups may each have contained both Jews and Gentiles, the contrasting positions represent different stances towards the Jewish law, with the ‘weak’

⁵⁰ By ignoring these aspects of Paul’s thought, and the scholarship that highlights them, Harink (*Paul Among the Postliberals*) fails to do justice to this point (cf. further Horrell, ‘Review of Harink’, 666).

⁵¹ And sometimes Paul’s ‘Christian’ arguments simply presume certain (inherited) ethical convictions. For example, Paul’s argument that sexual union with a prostitute (*pornê*) is incompatible with union with Christ (1 Cor 6:12-20), while union with an unbelieving spouse is not — indeed, in the latter case, the non-Christian spouse is brought into the sphere of the holy (1 Cor 7:12-16) — proceeds from the *presumption* that sex with a *pornê* is immoral while sex with a spouse is not. The arguments about union with Christ do not indicate why this should be the case, but build on the basis of this assumption.

concerned to keep the dietary laws and avoid contamination, and the strong regarding all food and drink as clean and acceptable.⁵²

Paul makes his own ethical convictions plain: ‘I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself’ (14:14); ‘all things are clean’ (14:20). But he does not invest his argumentative energies into demonstrating why these convictions are correct and should therefore determine practice. Instead his energies go into outlining a basis for the tolerance of diversity within a united community.⁵³ The strong should not despise the weak, nor the weak judge the strong; each should instead welcome and accept the other, thus embodying the welcome already afforded them by God in Christ (14:1-3; 15:7). They belong together as siblings (*adelphoi*)⁵⁴ and as such are called to demonstrate the same kind of costly regard for the other which has been paradigmatically exemplified by Christ (15:1-3). Paul also seeks to legitimate the validity of different patterns of conduct, and does so with a certain kind of ethical relativism: ‘nothing is unclean in itself, but to the one who reckons it unclean, to that one it is unclean’ (14:14). What determines whether an act is legitimate or not is the ‘faith’ (*pistis*) of the actor: to act contrary to one’s faith is to sin (14:23). In other words, as with his treatment of ‘moral consciousness’ (*suneidêsis*) in 1 Cor 8:7-13, Paul argues that the rightness or wrongness of certain acts depends on the disposition of the actor. What is without question morally imperative is the demonstration of Christ-like other-regard; this, we may say, is the metanorm which provides the moral framework within which the toleration of diversity can operate.

At a general level it is clear, once again, that Paul’s is an essentially ecclesial form of ethics. His concern is with the community of the church, with the character of relationships among its members, and he grounds his ethical arguments on the particular story from which this community derives its identity: God’s welcoming act in Christ,

⁵² See further J.M.G. Barclay, “‘Do we undermine the Law?’” A Study of Romans 14.1–15.6’, in J. D. G. Dunn, ed., *Paul and the Mosaic law* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996) 287-308.

⁵³ See in more detail, D.G. Horrell, ‘Solidarity and Difference: Pauline Morality in Romans 14–15’, *SCE* 15.2 (2002) 60-78.

⁵⁴ This term is emphatically repeated in Rom 14:10-21, as in 1 Cor 8:11-13. See further D.G. Horrell, ‘From *adelphoi* to *oikos theou*: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity’, *JBL* 120 (2001) 293-311.

Christ's self-giving death for others, his status as the believer's *kurios*, and so on. It is notable, however, that rather than use the resources of this tradition to elucidate a substantive answer to the ethical dilemma at stake Paul uses them to construct a framework to protect the diversity within the community, while simultaneously sustaining its unity. Moreover, in this attempt there is a structural and substantive parallel with the ethics of contemporary liberalism, in which the individual's right to pursue their own (tradition-defined?) vision of the good is protected, and limited, by an 'intolerant' framework of metanorms within which a circumscribed 'tolerance' can be sustained. The similarities, as well as some of the problems, can be illustrated by comparing the criticisms brought to bear against both Paul and liberalism. Daniel Boyarin, a Jewish scholar, criticises Paul's vision of human Oneness in Christ, insofar as it relativises differences of cultural identity and ethical conviction such that they are emptied of their integrity, becoming mere 'matters of taste'.

What will appear from the Christian perspective as tolerance, namely Paul's willingness — indeed insistence — that within the Christian community all cultural practice is equally to be tolerated, from the rabbinic Jewish perspective is simply an eradication of the entire value system which insists that our cultural practice is our task and calling in the world and must not be abandoned or reduced to a matter of taste. The call to human Oneness, at the same time that it is a stirring call to equality, constitutes a threat as well to Jewish (or any other) difference.⁵⁵

For Hauerwas, similarly, liberalism's apparent tolerance and guaranteed 'freedom of religion' reduce Christianity to a matter of personal choice, and belief in God to something which fundamentally 'does not matter'.⁵⁶ Just as Boyarin argues that in Paul's thought religious and cultural differences are emptied of their integrity as they are brought within the encompassing (new) unity constituted in Christ, so, according to

⁵⁵ D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994) 32; cf. also Barclay, 'Do We Undermine the Law?', 303-308.

⁵⁶ Hauerwas, *With the Grain*, 231; *idem*, *After Christendom*, 8, etc.

Hauerwas, the same happens to Christian integrity within the encompassing framework of liberalism: what Paul does to Judaism, liberalism does to Christianity.⁵⁷

The closely parallel critiques illustrate the (in some ways) comparable structure of Pauline and liberal morality. The reasons why this structural similarity exists — aside from the possible *wirkungsgeschichtlichen* connections — may lie in the comparable social achievements that are sought in each case. Paul, like political liberalism, sought to unite diverse religious and social groups within a new form of human solidarity which at the same time transcended these differences. If we repudiate liberalism's attempts in this regard, in defence of Christianity's integrity, we should at least consider how the same arguments support a parallel repudiation of Paul, in defence of Judaism's integrity. More constructively, we might suggest that the ways in which Paul tries to deal with problems of solidarity and difference — sustaining both unity and diversity — could offer fruitful material for the development of a moral framework for contemporary plural societies. This, at least, is one possible mode in which the appropriation of Pauline ethics might proceed, one of a number we shall explore briefly below.

Towards the appropriation of Pauline ethics: three models

These three sample readings in Paul's ethics already indicate some of the ways in which the Pauline material might generate various perspectives, supporting various models of the church-world relationship. (I reiterate the caveat, however, that while reading Paul can hopefully be valuable in fostering our own reflection, this alone can neither resolve nor trump our contemporary debates.)

The first and most obvious model is, unsurprisingly, some form of ecclesial ethics: it is indisputable that Paul's is an ethic concerned primarily with the formation and development of the ecclesial community, and with individual Christians insofar as they are part of this 'body'. Moreover, Paul does not appeal, except in passing, to human rationality and reflection as significant means by which ethical norms can be tested (cf. Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 14:29; Gal 6:4; Phil 1:10; 1 Thess 5:21); his ethics, rather, are

⁵⁷ Harink, to my mind, unconvincingly dismisses Boyarin's point about Paul here, and fails to see the parallel with Hauerwas's criticism of liberalism (*Paul Among the Postliberals*, 91-92, 183-84 n. 45; cf. Horrell, 'Review of Harink', 667-68).

thoroughly grounded in his theology, his story about the redeeming work of God in Christ, as we saw in the case of Philippians 2. While this does imply a strong sense of distinction between church and world, it does not, for Paul, imply a withdrawal from the world (1 Cor 5:10), but rather, to paraphrase Hauerwas, the obligation to be the church in the world. Even when we read ‘with the grain’ of Paul’s discourse and thus affirm an ecclesially-focused ethics, however, the study of Pauline ethics may nonetheless raise some suggestive considerations and issues. For example, the extent to which Paul invests his argumentative energies into constructing a framework for the toleration of diversity within the context of communal solidarity might raise important questions about the *priorities* for an ecclesial ethics of a Pauline kind. A second example, drawn in part from 1 Corinthians 5: while Paul sees certain forms of practice as key for sustaining distinct Christian identity — primarily the avoidance of sexually immoral (or idolatrous) unions deemed incompatible with union with Christ⁵⁸ — his sense of what is ethical and unethical, say in the realm of sexual morality, derives to a considerable extent not from the Christian story as such but rather from his contemporary world. Thus, while an ecclesial ethics will be similarly concerned to foster a sense of distinct Christian identity, it need not reproduce the specific conventions Paul presumes, since these have no specifically Christian character. Indeed, to do so may lead to anachronistic attempts to reproduce ancient morality rather than a specifically Christian one.⁵⁹ Conversely, the

⁵⁸ In short, I think Paul sees union with Christ as the key marker of distinctive group identity, and thus proscribes especially other ‘unions’ deemed to threaten or destroy this union. In this respect, his treatment of sexual morality in 1 Cor 6:12-20 and of idolatry in 1 Cor 10:14-22 are closely parallel.

⁵⁹ For a comparable point in the context of a different argument, see Rudolf Bultmann’s reasons why the mythology presumed by the NT writers should not and cannot be appropriated by modern Christians: in the first place, such mythology is not specifically Christian but merely ancient; in the second place, such ‘world-views’ cannot simply be believed or disbelieved at will (R. Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings* [ed. and tr. S. M. Ogden; London: SCM, 1985] 3). The same applies to ethical assumptions shared by NT and other ancient writers. Such anachronism is often discussed in the context of the homosexuality debate, in considering whether what Paul and other biblical writers had in view was anything like modern homosexuality. But it is less often noted that this chronological and cultural divide equally affects subjects like marriage, where it is too easily presumed that Paul is addressing the same ‘ethical issue’ as we do. Not only are the cultural presumptions vastly different (cf. further L.W. Countryman, *Dirt, Greed and Sex: Sexual Ethics in the New Testament and their Implications for Today*

example of Paul's ethics shows that a sense of distinct identity, based on a particular story, does not necessarily correlate with a distinct set of ethical values but may in fact presume common standards of good and evil.

This begins to point towards a second model, one concerned not only with ecclesially-focused ethics but with the possible contribution of these ethics to the formation of the kind of 'moral consensus which alone can sustain a pluralist culture'.⁶⁰ Such a model might build on the indications Paul gives that his substantive ethical convictions are widely shared, and that what is good and evil can be universally recognised and agreed. Even where Paul most strongly appeals to the notion of the purity of the ecclesial community (1 Corinthians 5), his appeal also intimates that the standard for ethical judgment is shared by all: in effect, his appeal is for the members of the Christian community to do better than their contemporaries at meeting common ethical standards. On this model, the challenge to Christian ethics (in a very different context) would be to go beyond Paul (and beyond Hauerwas?) in not only strengthening a sense of distinct identity and motivating ethics in specifically 'Christian' ways but also in attempting an equally important task: to seek out and make explicit the extent to which the substance of ethical conviction forms (or could form) part of a broader moral consensus.

A third model might take a different approach to the possible contribution of Pauline ethics to contemporary social ethics, following the suggestions of Thomas Ogletree.⁶¹ For Ogletree, Paul's treatment of diversity *within* the Christian communities, not least in Romans 14–15, provides valuable material for 'the imaginative development

[Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988]; D.B. Martin, 'Paul Without Passion: On Paul's Rejection of Desire in Sex and Marriage', in H. Moxnes, ed., *Constructing Early Christian Families* [London and New York: Routledge, 1997] 201-215), but even simple facts like the average age of marriage make straightforward comparison invalid. Girls in the Roman empire often married at around twelve years of age, while husbands were generally somewhat older. For similar cautions about attempts to reproduce early Christian ethics, see W.A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality: The First Two Centuries* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 215-18.

⁶⁰ D.A.S. Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 75.

⁶¹ T.W. Ogletree, *The Use of the Bible in Christian Ethics* (Minneapolis: Fortress/ Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

of social thought in a modern context of cultural pluralism'.⁶² A 'Christian social ethic' can best be developed, according to Ogletree, not on the basis of the limited comments Paul and other NT authors make about wider societal institutions, but by taking Paul's ecclesial ethic as a model for an ethic for society — an approach which evidently presumes something like the 'political theology' rather than the 'theological politics' model. In effect, the distinctive identities of church and world are here blurred, and a Christian contribution to social ethics treats the (contemporary) world as analogous to the (early) church.⁶³ On this model, the ways in which Paul deals with diversity in the early Christian assemblies might be suggestive for ways of dealing with diversity in contemporary societies, and so on. Paul's attempts to articulate an ethic in which diverse ways of life, dictated by a person's 'faith', or 'conscience', are respected within a framework of communal solidarity could provide generative material for our reflections on similar challenges. To some extent this is obviously to accept the liberal agenda, though the Pauline material would also suggest a certain kind of 'communitarianization of liberalism':⁶⁴ rather than the focus on rational argumentation that Habermas's discourse ethics promotes, an approach which learnt from Paul would presumably be one in which some kind of shared story, enacted in ritual, was an essential basis for a societal ethic. This might perhaps imply something like the project Nigel Biggar refers to as 'recovering liberalism's lost theological horizon and rescuing it in non-secularist form'.⁶⁵ More radically still, it might suggest some kind of post-Christian project in which the resources of the Pauline (and more broadly, Christian) tradition made a contribution to the formation of stories with which *human* solidarity, and difference, might be sustained. However, while Paul was convinced of the need to read, reinterpret, and spiritualise his Jewish tradition in order for it to form the basis for a community in which Jews and Gentiles took their place 'without distinction' (cf. Rom 3:22; 10:12; 1 Cor 7:19; Gal 5:6;

⁶² Ogletree, *Use of the Bible*, 158.

⁶³ Cf. Ogletree, *Use of the Bible*, 192: 'a Christian social ethic must proceed not on the basis of explicit New Testament commentary on economic and political institutions, but by analogy to developments within the early Christian communities themselves'.

⁶⁴ Cf. Bell, *Communitarianism*, 8.

⁶⁵ N. Biggar, 'Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?', in Nation and Wells, *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 141-160, here p. 160.

6:15), he would no doubt have recoiled from the notion that his newly articulated Christian tradition might itself be subjected to a similar relativising and reinterpretative exercise.⁶⁶ Contemporary Christians too would no doubt find objectionable such a relativisation of the truth of their particular story, though if this is so, they should perhaps be wary of celebrating the social achievement that Pauline Christianity represents, which called for precisely such a relativisation of cultural and religious identity on the part of Jews.⁶⁷

There are, then, a variety of ways in which a contemporary appropriation of Paul's ethics might fruitfully proceed, ways which imply quite different understandings of the possible relationships between church and world. Each model, however, brings problems as well as possibilities. With an ecclesial model, there is the question of how to avoid the negative stereotyping of all who are 'outside'⁶⁸ — children of darkness,

⁶⁶ Though there are, perhaps, hints that Paul could imagine the position of Christ being one day transcended by the all-supremacy of God (1 Cor 15:24-28). Cf. also Rom 10:17–11:36, where Paul conspicuously presents his view of God's mysterious plan to save all Israel as well as the full number of the Gentiles without explicit reference to Christ.

⁶⁷ Cf., e.g., the comments of James Dunn ('Paul: Apostate or Apostle of Israel?', *ZNW* 89 [1998] 256-271): 'Paul saw his own apostolic work not as a disowning of his heritage, but precisely as its fulfillment' (p. 258); 'Paul's criticism of Judaism was... a criticism of the xenophobic strand of Judaism, to which Paul himself had previously belonged... Paul was in effect converting from a closed Judaism to an open Judaism' (p. 261). And this involved rejecting the importance of the 'trappings (*sic!*) of Jewish identity' — circumcision and food laws especially — in favour of an 'essence' of Jewishness 'determined from within' (*idem*, 'Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish-Christian Identity', *NTS* 45 [1999] 174-193, here p. 192). These positive comments confirm exactly the achievement which is for Boyarin a focus for criticism.

⁶⁸ Again this is at least a danger with what Fergusson refers to as Hauerwas's 'over-concentration on the distinctiveness of the church' (D.A.S. Fergusson, 'Another Way of Reading Stanley Hauerwas?' *SJT* 50 [1997] 242-249, here p. 244; cf. *idem*, *Community*, 67). Fergusson elsewhere comments on Hauerwas's tendency 'to depict secular arguments in the worst possible light. While not only unfair on much that is sane and decent outwith the church, this characterisation of an alternative position renders allies as foes and hinders the process of making common cause' (*Community*, 73). One example: Hauerwas does 'not know why people who are not Christians have children', and sees no reason to investigate (S. Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981] 210-11); but he is able to assert that '[f]rom the world's perspective the birth of a

doomed for wrath and destruction (cf. 1 Thess 5:5, 9; 1 Cor 1:18, etc.) — while the model which looks to preserve a sense of distinct identity while building a broader moral consensus might be suspected, in that very move, of allowing the story of liberalism to become implicitly determinative.⁶⁹ The relativisation of Christianity's integrity that might thereby be implied is more explicitly apparent in the third model, wherein the resources of the Christian tradition are used in the development of new forms of societal ethics — a radical idea that might well be felt to raise more problems than it could ever solve. So while reading Paul in the context of our contemporary debates can be suggestive and fruitful, using Paul's texts 'to think with' does not by any means suffice for the task of thinking about adequate models for Christian ethics, but only marks the beginning of that work.

child represents but another drain on our material and psychological resources' (p. 228). Cf. also the critique of Hauerwas by Stout, *Democracy*, 140-61, where, *inter alia*, he sharply criticises Hauerwas for his frequent offences 'against the vocation of charitable interpretation' (p. 157).

⁶⁹ I am grateful to Geoff Thompson for helping me to see another possible model, not mentioned above, which avoids this latter move, namely one in which the Christian story about the church and the world is construed such that the church is given a clear responsibility to attend to the truth (moral, theological, etc.) evident and revealed *extra muros ecclesiae*. This model, which Thompson develops through his work on Barth's 'secular parables' may provide a fruitful route for Christian theologians to avoid both Hauerwas's ecclesiocentric polemic against 'the world' and the ceding of priority to liberalism's secular story that my second model above may imply (see G. Thompson, "...as open to the world as any theologian could be"? *Karl Barth's Account of Extra-Ecclesial Truth and Its Value to Christianity's Encounter with Other Religious Traditions* (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1995).