

Paul's narratives or narrative substructure? The significance of "Paul's story".

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‘...the narrative structure for which we are searching is the structure of the gospel story, not of Paul's personal story.’<sup>1</sup>

**Introduction**

John Barclay's essay is both theologically powerful and exegetically incisive, clearly and frequently reflecting the influence of Ernst Käsemann and J. Louis Martyn. Two arguments seem to me most forcibly to emerge. One is deployed in opposition to any notion of Paul's story as part of some broader, temporally-continuous, linear narrative of salvation history: Paul's experience, his testimony, is rather of an 'apocalypse of Jesus Christ' which fractures and interrupts any line of logic or continuity; this apocalyptic event has consequences so radical that they can only be described — in terms relating to Paul himself — as implying a total demolition and reconstitution of the self. The second argument is that Paul's 'story' is of no significance in itself. It is only told, and only has significance, insofar as it embodies the gospel of Christ, the story of God's grace, and insofar as it represents in microcosm the story of Israel and of the Church in relation to this event of grace.

In responding to Barclay's essay, I shall endeavour to raise questions and issues which relate to the central question this book seeks to address: What is the value, if any, of a narrative approach to Paul? More specifically, in relation to this sub-section of the inquiry: How can an investigation of 'the story of Paul' aid us in an assessment of the narrative approach to Paul? Barclay succeeds, it seems to me, in demonstrating powerfully how Paul's story is only important (for Paul) insofar as it

embodies the gospel of Christ, but offers less insight into precisely how this relates to an assessment of the ‘narrative approach’ to Pauline theology.

### **Which way up? Paul’s stories and Paul’s texts**

Barclay begins his essay with the point that although narrative analysis is more obviously applicable to the Gospels than to Paul’s letters it can be applied to Paul, since Paul ‘sometimes tells stories, or parts of stories’ (p.1). Moreover, he suggests, it can be claimed that ‘these are not incidental to Paul’s theologising but are in some senses constitutive of it’ (p.1). Throughout the essay there is repeated reference to the stories Paul tells, and specifically the stories he tells about himself. Thus, Gal 1–2 is a particularly crucial text, since it constitutes ‘a quintessential narrative’ (p.3); examples in Romans are also evident, though less obviously so. Indeed, Barclay’s ‘lead questions’ all highlight this category of ‘Paul’s stories’, and the way in which he ‘tells his story’ (p.4). The significance of this way of setting the agenda is more far-reaching than might at first appear. For we need to note that this is precisely not the approach proposed by Richard Hays, in the work which to a considerable extent established the recent interest in narrative contours in Pauline thought.<sup>2</sup> Hays is not interested in looking at the Pauline texts as narratives, nor even at the narratives within them; that is why he looks at Gal. 3:1–4:11 and not at Gal. 1–2.<sup>3</sup> His claim, exemplified in his study of Galatians 3–4, is that Paul’s letters, as ‘reflective discourse’, are based on a story, a story which provides the ‘narrative substructure’ for Paul’s theology, and which is alluded to in Paul’s discourse.<sup>4</sup>

Barclay’s approach to Paul’s ‘story’ leads, I think, to some ambivalence over the term and its usefulness in interpreting Paul. On the one hand, he assumes that the term story is a useful one to employ because it is obvious that Paul tells some stories, including some about himself, and he (Barclay) speaks in terms of ‘the story of the

grace of God', 'the story of the gospel' (pp. 8, 17, cf. 27-28). Yet, on the other hand, Barclay argues that Paul does not see the grace of God in terms of a linear salvation history. On the contrary (and here the influence of Käsemann and especially Martyn is clear)<sup>5</sup> Barclay stresses the centrality of 'the apocalypse of Jesus Christ' (p.29), the decisive moment of God's saving action, which constitutes a radical break, a caesura, which punctures, fractures, and interrupts any and every story (pp.16-17, 29). To the extent that he sides with those who oppose a salvation-historical reading of Paul,<sup>6</sup> Barclay positions himself in opposition to the thrust of the narrative approach, while his frequent use of story terminology seems implicitly to embrace it.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the content of Barclay's essay seems to me, at least implicitly, to promote a perspective almost directly the reverse of that presented by Hays and others. Where Hays sees Paul writing reflective discourse based on an underlying story, glimpsed but not narrated in the text, Barclay sees Paul writing stories based on an underlying 'paradigm-pattern' (cf. pp. 18, 27, 29). Thus I think there is rather more difference between the two approaches than is suggested in Barclay's comment that his notion of 'pattern' may help to resolve an ambiguity in Hays' proposal (p.2 n.6). For Barclay, what underpins Paul's theologising, and his telling of stories, is not so much a story but a paradigm, the paradigm of Christ-crucified. This paradigm shapes, indeed determines, how all stories, Paul's own included, are rightly to be told; 'it punctures other times and other stories not just as a past event recalled but as a present event' (p.17). What does not quite become clear is whether this underlying paradigm is, or is not, valuably understood as having a narrative character; it would appear that for Barclay it does not (cf. also n.10 below). Barclay answers his own question concerning the relationship between 'story' and 'the truth of the gospel' (p.4) with the affirmation that God's grace is inevitably 'storied' (p.28), but what this seems to

mean is not that the gospel itself has a temporal, story-like character (it is not a ‘Story’) but rather that grace is, and must be, active in history and thus instantiated in stories such as Paul’s own. ‘Paul’s stories’ (plural) are all ‘narratives of God’s grace’ (p.27); they ‘convey the gospel inasmuch as they carry the pattern of grace’ (p.28, my emphasis).

### **Critical questions**

#### 1. The rhetoric of ‘newness’ and the influence of the ‘old’

While Barclay’s presentation of the epistemological revolution which Paul experienced in his encounter with Christ is powerful and in many ways compelling, there are questions to be raised. First, the rhetoric of ‘interruption’, of radical newness, somewhat obscures the extent to which Paul’s understanding and articulation of the meaning of the Christ-event are inevitably formed on the basis of already existing language and tradition. Paul may see his call experience as ‘an event which owes absolutely nothing to upbringing, human development or cultural tradition’ (p.7) — though the polemical context in which he narrates it surely has some impact on this presentation — but he nonetheless describes it in language which embeds him firmly in his cultural tradition. To claim, therefore, that Paul has somehow moved beyond culturally conditioned perspectives and human traditions because ‘he now sees with utterly different eyes, from a perspective that radically relativises, if it does not wholly obliterate, all social and historical categories’ (p.9), or that Paul experiences ‘the real and total demolition of the self’ (p.13), or that he ‘sees no humanly visible line of continuity through his own life’ (p. 29) is to reiterate Paul’s radical claims while ignoring, or at least downplaying, the other side of the equation. Paul may consider himself to have had an experience which renders him dead to

everything in his past and which causes him to see all things from an entirely new perspective, but the fact that he narrates the experience in terms drawn precisely from that past, and describes the new things precisely in the language and categories of Judaism and her scriptures, means that there is a much more complex interrelationship between ‘old’ and ‘new’ than Barclay’s essay (and Paul’s rhetoric) seems to imply. Paul’s new epistemology, in other words, represents, as it must in all such human experience, a reconfiguring<sup>8</sup> of his language and tradition, rather than a creation ex nihilo — which would be meaningless to Paul and his contemporaries.

Barclay does rather minimally concede, for example, that Paul’s ‘reference to being “set apart from my mother’s womb”... echoes, of course, prophetic call narratives’ (p.8) and that Paul’s former life in Judaism (Gal. 1:13) ‘at least provided him with the language in which to express the meaning of the revelation he received’ (p.9). But this point needs to be stressed rather more: Paul uses, indeed depends on, the very tradition-specific language of Judaism and its scriptures to apprehend and describe a divine act which at the same time radically reorders Paul’s sense of the meaning of that tradition. For instance, it is in some sense true to say, with Barclay, that Paul ‘radically relativises’ the distinction between Jew and Gentile (p.9; cf. Gal. 3:28; 6:15; Rom. 10:12; also 1 Cor. 7:19; 12:13), but again, our description of the complex interrelationship between new and old needs to be carefully nuanced. On the one hand, while to some extent remaining aware of an identity-distinction between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 2:15; Rom. 9:3; 11:1), Paul sees the new community of those in Christ as one in which the distinction symbolised by circumcision is now ‘nothing’ (1 Cor. 7:19; cf. Gal 6:15). But on the other hand he describes the identity of these community members in thoroughly Jewish terms: they are descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:6-29; 4:21-31; cf. Rom 9:8; 2 Cor 11:22), children of the Jerusalem above

(Gal 4:26),  $\text{✠}\text{✠}\text{✠}\text{✠}\text{✠}$   $\text{✠}\text{✠}\text{✠}\text{✠}\text{✠}$  (Rom 8:14; Gal 3:26, etc.), the ‘people of God’ (cf. Rom 9:24-25; 2 Cor 6:16); the scriptures were written for their instruction (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11); the patriarchs are their fathers (1 Cor 10:1; cf. Rom 4:1); they are even ‘the circumcision’ (Phil 3:3; cf. Rom 2:28-29), ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16).<sup>9</sup> The category distinction between Jew and Gentile has not entirely been dissolved or left behind, but to some extent relocated, transferred, such that it now distinguishes those who are in Christ from those who ‘remain in unbelief’ (cf. Rom. 11:23). Hence it is somewhat one-sided to say that ‘Paul’s theological categories have been changed at the most fundamental level’ (p.21) without at the same time pointing out how thoroughly Paul’s scriptural and cultural tradition continues to provide him with the categories in which he thinks.

So while Paul may present us with a personal story of radical disjuncture, with the rhetoric of a demolished and reconstituted self, it is clear from his frequent references to the scriptures, from the language in which he describes his own experiences and convictions, the identity of the members of the churches and so on, that this new self-identity has more continuity with the past than the rhetoric of interruption might suggest.

## 2. A story of salvation? Linear and punctiliar emphases

Secondly, it seems to me that Barclay, like Martyn, downplays the extent to which Paul places the Christ-event within — although as the climax and culmination of — the story of God’s saving purposes and their enactment in history.<sup>10</sup> Sensitivity to the problems of a certain conception of Heilsgeschichte, with its notions of linear progress and evolution<sup>11</sup> and its potential to detract from the centrality of the death and resurrection of Christ, should not lead us to ignore the extent to which there is a story of God’s saving purposes told by Paul.<sup>12</sup> For alongside the language of

demolition and renewal, as well as demonstrating his conviction that the scriptures remain a divinely-given source of instruction (Rom. 15:4), Paul also speaks of the Christ-event as the culmination of a story which he roots in time. One need not rehearse all the elements of that story, from Adam's creation and 'fall', through the promise to Abraham and the coming of the law through Moses, and so on. It is sufficient, I think, to note how hard those who deny this must work (exegetically) to downplay this sense of a story in Paul. Martyn, for example, describes Paul's interpretation of God's promise to Abraham's seed (Gal. 3:16) as being 'as polemically punctiliar as it is polemically singular... The distinction between linear and punctiliar is ... a distinction drawn by Paul himself. In Gal 3:16 he denies the Teachers' linear, redemptive-historical picture of a covenantal people, affirming instead the punctiliar portrait of the covenantal person, Christ.'<sup>13</sup> Even Gal. 4:4, Martyn insists, despite its clear setting of the coming of Christ in the context of time (□◊◆ℳ ℒℳ ☞ ⚡⊠●□ℳ■ ◆□☞ □●⚡☞□◆○☉ ◆□◆☞ ℳ □□☞■□◆), does not refer 'to a point that lies at the end of a line'. On the contrary, 'Paul does not think of a gradual maturation, but rather of a punctiliar liberation, enacted by God in his own sovereign time'.<sup>14</sup> But, as so often tends to happen, the alternative Martyn wishes to refute is painted in terms that make it easier to deny. Paul does not have to think of this story as a simple 'line', nor that it reflects a process of 'gradual maturation', in order to see the coming of Christ as something that is to be comprehended within the context of a history of God's dealings with Israel and the world, a history in which (viewed from the perspective of the Christ-event) there are some moments, some points, of especial significance, as in the announcement of the promise of blessing to Abraham's seed (cf. Gen. 12:3; 13:15; 17:8-9). This story is not simply linear, or steadily progressive: it is punctuated by key

moments of which the coming of Christ is the definitive, climactic moment which shows that the story is in its final chapter. But it is a story nonetheless.

In Barclay's case, it is in interpreting Romans 9–11 that the hard exegetical work is done, in order to show that the passage does not support the idea of a 'line of continuity', in a remnant chosen by grace, 'maintained through Jewish believers like Paul' (p.23). In Romans 9–11 'Paul does not', Barclay argues, 'present a continuity which runs from ethnic Israel, through the remnant, to the church, and he is not a representative of God's salvation plan in this sense. The only continuity is that of the gracious action of God...' (p.26).<sup>15</sup> Paul's presence in this story is 'not because he is an Israelite ... Rather, his presence in this paradoxical history is a sign of the workings of grace, and his story is worth telling as, and only as, it exemplifies that mystery' (pp.26-27, my emphasis). While I find much in Barclay's exegesis here which is compelling, it seems to me that the notion of continuity in the history of the people of Israel is rather too firmly excluded and the significance of Israel downplayed. Barclay rejects the idea that a 'remnant' represents a line of continuity in Israel's story to the present in which Paul stands; this interpretation has a 'fatal flaw' in its 'requirement that the remnant have remained, as it were, steady on their feet, whereas everything in Romans in general, and in Romans 9-11 in particular, shows that all, without exception, have stumbled' (p. 24). There are two reasons why I find this less than a 'fatal flaw'. Firstly, Paul's conviction that all are under the power of sin, and correspondingly that salvation is 'always and inevitably effected by the justification of the ungodly' (p.24) does not rule out the idea that there has always been a faithful remnant in Israel. This remnant, Paul insists, is precisely chosen by grace (Rom. 11:5) and thus, in Pauline terms, consists of those who recognise that their righteousness comes  $\aleph \heartsuit \& \square \times \boxplus \blacklozenge \aleph \blacklozenge \epsilon r$  as undeserved gift from a



gracious God and is not ‘their own righteousness’,  $\mu \diamond \boxtimes \quad \mu \equiv \square \gamma \diamond \blacksquare$  (Rom. 10:3). Paul does not consider, let alone answer, the question as to whether this implies that they had at some point ‘stumbled’ in order then to be righteoused by God’s grace, through faith, any more than he considers whether or not Abraham was at any point  $\diamond \diamond \mu \rho \approx \boxtimes \epsilon \tau$  in order to be justified by ‘the one who justifies the ungodly’ (Rom. 4:4-5; pace Barclay, Paul’s statement here is not quite a claim that ‘the justification of (even) Abraham and David [is]... a justification of the ungodly’ [p.24]). This leads to my second point, namely that Paul’s various arguments in Romans are not necessarily strictly or fully consistent or coherent with one another but are deployed to prove particular points, crucial at certain stages in the overall argument of the letter. The famous passage in 2:13-16, for example, where Paul insists that it is the doers and not the hearers of the law who will be righteoused, does not sit neatly with Paul’s later argument that a righteous status can only possibly come  $\mu \diamond \& \quad \square \times \boxtimes \diamond \mu \diamond \epsilon \tau$  and not  $\mu \diamond \boxtimes \quad \mu \equiv \square \gamma \diamond \blacksquare$ . But, in context, 2:13-16 serves to demonstrate that Jewish possession of the law carries no automatic privilege in terms of righteous status: the argument plays its part in establishing the equal standing (which then turns out to be an equally guilty standing) before God of Jew and Gentile (3:9-20). Similarly, in Romans 9–11 Paul is concerned to deal with specific questions about Israel and God’s promises to her. He deploys various arguments in his attempts to do this,<sup>16</sup> but they all serve in different ways to demonstrate the falseness of the suggestion that God has rejected his people. One argument to refute the suggestion is that ‘not all of those from Israel are Israel’ (Rom. 9:6), so only some should be reckoned as truly God’s children; there is a distinction to be drawn within what might appear to be Israel ( $\& \rho \diamond \rho \epsilon \nu \quad \diamond \rho \epsilon \nu \square \& \rho$ ; cf. 9:3, 5, 8 and 1 Cor. 10:18) since it is only the children of the promise who are truly

Abraham's seed (9:8). The same story can be told of the generation after Isaac, again on the basis of divine election rather than merit or deeds, for 'I loved Jacob and hated Esau' (Rom. 9:13, quoting Mal. 1:2-3). To be sure, as Barclay stresses, this is a story of divine election and grace, but it is one in which Paul never loses sight of the fact that this is also a story of Israel, and of the continued existence within Israel of a true Israel, or a remnant, chosen by grace, who serve as the demonstration of the truth that God has not rejected his people, has not forgotten his irrevocable gifts and calling. At no point, despite what might seem appearances to the contrary, would it be true to say that God had abandoned his people. So Paul's own membership of this chosen people is not relevant only as an instance of the working of divine grace. It is profoundly important that he is an Israelite because it is precisely on this basis that he can count as a witness to the fact that God has not rejected his people (Rom. 11:1). The story of Elijah's plea and God's response is relevant because it too demonstrates that at a time when it seemed that Israel was entirely lost there was a faithful remnant. This remnant was, of course, chosen by grace (11:5), since that is always the way God works according to Paul, but there is no implication here that this remnant was comprised of people who had stumbled but then been restored by God's grace, any more than Rom 4:4-5 implies that Abraham was  $\text{עֲבָרָה}$  before he was reckoned as righteous. Indeed, the citation from 1 Kings 19:18 refers to those who have not turned to worship Baal but have remained faithful. The point of the argument here is to establish that at other times too, just as now when Paul writes, when it might have seemed otherwise, God has always kept a remnant of his people, a point that is crucial to demonstrating that God has indeed never rejected them and broken his promises. In the olive tree analogy too, whatever Paul takes to be the 'root' (cf. Barclay, p.25), it is clear that this is more than an illustration of the faithfulness of God and the constancy

of God's grace and word. It is also an analogy which reflects the centrality of Israel in the story of God's saving purposes. The Israelites are by nature

(&🌀◆🌀👉 ✈️◆📦◆)(■) part of the tree — it is their own tree

(◆🌀📦🌀 ✈️❖📦)(📦🌀🌀 🌀❖●🌀)(📦🌀🌀: 11:24) — whereas Gentiles are not; they are grafted in 📦🌀📦🌀 ✈️◆📦◆)(■) (11:21, 24). Though the mysterious workings of God's grace have led to the inclusion of Gentiles as well as Jews, and though salvation is available through faith to all without distinction (cf. 11:20, 23; also 3:22; 10:12), God's gifts and calling belong to Israel in a way that cannot be said of the Gentiles (11:25-29).

### **Paul's story and the story of Christ**

None of the above should be taken to imply that I disagree with Barclay on one of his central arguments: that Paul's sense of identity, his world-view, and so on, are radically reconstructed following his encounter with Christ, and that Paul's story is only of real significance 'insofar as it is moulded by the story of the crucified Christ' (p.17; cf. p.27 etc.). It is the paradigm of self-giving seen in Christ's death, and the hope embodied in Christ's resurrection, that gives Paul the new and defining pattern with which to (re)shape his personal story (2 Corinthians could of course provide further examples of this: e.g. 6:4-10; 12:6-10). This paradigm of self-giving also provides a fundamental motivation and pattern for Pauline ethics (Rom. 15:2-3; Gal. 6:2; also 2 Cor. 8:9; Phil. 2:4-13).<sup>17</sup> Paul's conviction that his own experiences and practices embody the christological pattern explains his readiness to offer himself as a pattern for imitation, indirectly an imitation of Christ (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; 1 Thess. 1:6). Thus Paul's own 'story' and his ethics are linked through their dependence on this central 'paradigm-pattern'.

But does this conclusion mean that the partial ‘stories’ narrated in the Pauline letters, not least the story of Paul himself, have at their foundation not an underlying ‘narrative substructure’ (so Hays) but a ‘paradigm-pattern’, a punctiliar christological moment in which God’s action shatters all previous stories and paradigms (so Martyn and Barclay)? It seems to me, siding more with Hays, that one can place due weight on the centrality and newness of the Christ-event in Paul’s thought, not least in determining the shape which Paul gives to his own personal story, without denying that this event is rooted in, and gains its meaning from, a temporal narrative.<sup>18</sup>

Barclay, I think, is somewhat ambivalent on this point, for reasons outlined earlier, and does not really offer reflections on whether the category of story is valuable or not. This is perhaps in part a consequence of the focus on the story of Paul himself: Paul occasionally and for various reasons narrates certain aspects of his personal story, but these in themselves are not the story which engenders and structures Paul’s discourse.<sup>19</sup> Barclay rightly insists that Paul’s own story is significant only insofar as it serves as an example of a life stamped by the pattern of Christ’s cross and resurrection. I differ from Barclay here only in wanting to stress that this paradigm-pattern has its own narrative structure and context. I would also suggest that investigating ‘the story of Paul’, or any other ‘smaller’ story thought to be part of the wider theological story, is in fact rather unhelpful as a way of investigating this broader narrative structure.<sup>20</sup> For while Paul tells us bits of his personal story, for specific reasons, this personal story is not itself a part of the underlying narrative.<sup>21</sup>

Rather, the fundamental story of God’s gracious dealings with humanity reach their zenith in the Christ-event, itself the generative centre of this story, which then provides the paradigmatic story with which Paul shapes his telling of any other stories, including those about himself.

### **Why narrative?**

But if there is a narrative substructure to Pauline thought, what is the value in identifying it? What is gained by a narrative approach? Let me begin with a caveat. It seems that the approach is attractive, at least for some, because it appears to offer a route to discerning theological coherence in Paul, despite the obvious diversity of his letters. But since we do not have a Pauline narration of the underlying story, we cannot presume that this story is an entirely stable entity for Paul. The way he construes it may vary over time and circumstance; so just as the letters vary, so, to some degree, may the underlying story Paul reflects in his discourse (cf. the essays by Adams and Longenecker in this volume). A narrative approach to Paul, then, is no easy route to recovering coherence in Pauline thought.

To some extent, the rise of narrative approaches brings scholarship full circle. In the wake of the Enlightenment, some have viewed story, or myth, as a pre-critical, unscientific mode of thought which can be superseded by an approach which draws out principles or ideas in their own right. The narrative framework is a mythological husk which can (and must) be discarded. Bultmann's programme for the demythologisation of the New Testament's message is a clear example of such an approach.<sup>22</sup> But the critique of foundationalism, and specifically of the idea that there can be tradition-independent statements of rational or universal principles, has been part of the wider intellectual scene within which narrative has been rediscovered. Now, in the context of postmodernity, it is frequently asserted that every mode of thought is essentially a narrative, a particular story about the way the world is.<sup>23</sup> John Milbank, for example, sees capitalism, Marxism and so on, as competing narratives seeking to outnarrate one another. Christianity, likewise, is a competing narrative which can be convincing insofar as it can persuade people — for reasons of “literary

taste” — that [it] offers a much better story’.<sup>24</sup> Stanley Hauerwas similarly stresses the importance of story in forming identity, community, character and conduct.<sup>25</sup>

Hauerwas sees the Christian tradition as essentially story-based, and in conflict with the ‘liberalism’ of the West which promotes its own particular story about the world: ‘The story that liberalism teaches us is that we have no story, and as a result we fail to notice how deeply that story determines our lives’.<sup>26</sup>

It is in this wider intellectual context that I think the narrative approach to Paul should be located. Hays argues against this, though in a somewhat self-contradictory passage. He writes:

I am making no sweeping claims about the narrative structure of human consciousness in general, nor am I arguing that we all live “within stories.” Indeed, the point of my thesis is precisely that Paul’s thinking is shaped by a story in a way that not all thinking is. If all discourse were rooted in story, it would be rather pointless to single Paul out as an instance of this universal truth.<sup>27</sup>

The inner contradiction here is, of course, that while the first sentence denies any attempt to make sweeping claims, the second constitutes precisely a sweeping claim, albeit one phrased in a negative way, that some modes of thought are not story-shaped. Hays is of course right that not all discourse is of a kind susceptible to the literary analysis which can reveal its narrative substructure.<sup>28</sup> But the particular kind of analysis appropriate to discern the narrative substructure of Pauline texts can nonetheless valuably be located within the context of a broader conviction about the ubiquity of ‘story’. This conviction may make it less significant to identify Paul as a writer whose thought has a narrative basis, but it does not render investigation of that narrative basis ‘pointless’, quite the opposite.

If it is true, as some recent writers imply, that all convictions about the world derive from some kind of story or tradition, recounted in a community and reflected in that community's practices, then exploring the narrative substructure of Pauline thought is important in various ways. First, in opposition to a certain kind of cerebral Christianity, it shows that Pauline thought cannot be conveyed as a series of propositions to be believed but only as a story which is 'lived', retold and embodied in the practices of the community which celebrates that story.<sup>29</sup> Second, it shows that Pauline ethics, and Christian ethics more generally, is not a set of principles or judgments on issues, such as could easily be abstracted from the story and its community and recommended or implemented in wider public policy. Rather, Pauline ethics is firmly grounded in a character-forming narrative which has its essential basis in the Christian community and its corporate life.<sup>30</sup> Third, if other modes of thought are also deemed to have an essentially narrative, tradition-dependent, basis this implies that they too will be linked with specific communities and modes of practice, though this may be obscured or denied when those communities see themselves only as engaged in a search for rational truths, such as in the case of science perhaps. It also implies that such narratives may shape identity, values, and practice, even if they claim only to relate to a specific 'area' of life. Moreover, if all modes of thought are regarded as story-based, then Paul's story is competing on a somewhat more level playing field than might have once been thought. Instead of a mythological, ancient story being contrasted with the rational truths of science or economics we see instead — if we follow Milbank and others — competing narratives about the world. We may then ask about how Paul's story and these other stories construct a sense of human identity and shape human interaction. Capitalism's increasingly globalised story, for example, describes human beings as customers and producers and increasingly

narrates their interactions in market terms (whether in hospitals, universities or wherever); it has a very particular understanding of ‘freedom’. Exploring and narrating the Pauline story can be a means to articulate a counter-narrative, a challenge to this (and other) dominant narratives, a means to envisage human communities in which a different story constructs a different sense of identity and undergirds different patterns of community practice. Far from the ubiquity of story rendering such articulation pointless, I would argue that it is precisely in a world conscious of the power of stories to form identity, values and practice that the rediscovery of Paul’s gospel story as story is of critical value.

To return finally to Barclay’s essay, it seems to me that by too closely following Martyn’s emphasis on the punctiliar nature of the Christ event and the new epistemology that results, Barclay underplays the sense of a story of salvation underpinning Pauline theology, and underemphasises the extent to which Paul’s ‘new’ Christian theology is constructed with the materials of the ‘old’. Nevertheless, by convincingly showing how Paul’s sense of self is moulded, reshaped, by the story of Christ, Barclay illustrates precisely this power of stories to form identity. And, for Paul, the gospel story — a story which reaches back to Adam — so completely defines his life that he is now dead to any other sphere of influence (Gal. 6:14). The story that matters is not that of Paul, but the identity-defining story of Christ, the story of the gospel.<sup>31</sup>



## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> R.B. Hays, The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11 (SBLDS 56; Chico: Scholars, 1983) 29.

<sup>2</sup> Hays, Faith of Jesus Christ.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hays, Faith of Jesus Christ, 23, 29-30.

<sup>4</sup> Hays, Faith of Jesus Christ, 28.

<sup>5</sup> Käsemann is somewhat ambivalent on the issue of salvation history, vigorously opposing any emphasis on the idea of ‘an imminent evolutionary process’ of salvation (and Cullmann’s work in particular) on the one hand, and Bultmann on the other, with his tendency to focus the Pauline gospel merely onto the self-understanding of the believer. Thus Käsemann states that he ‘apparently stand[s] between two fronts...’ (‘Justification and Salvation History in the Epistle to the Romans’, in Perspectives on Paul [London: SCM, 1971] 63, 76 n.27). See further Hays, Faith of Jesus Christ, 62-63 and below nn.10-11.

<sup>6</sup> See further below, with nn.12-14.

<sup>7</sup> Contrast, e.g., Martyn’s emphasis on the ‘punctiliar’ and un-story-like character of Paul’s references to Christ and Abraham (see nn.12-14 below) with Hays’ argument against a punctiliar treatment of the Christ event (see n.14 below). Note also Hays’ conclusion that Cullmann’s views on Heilsgeschichte, vigorously opposed by Käsemann, ‘are congenial with the thesis that Paul’s theology has a narrative substructure’ (Faith of Jesus Christ, 59).

<sup>8</sup> The term reconfigure seems to me a helpful one: I have taken it from T.L. Donaldson, Paul and the Gentiles (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), who speaks of Paul’s Judaism being reconfigured around Christ and not Torah.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. further D.G. Horrell, ‘“No Longer Jew or Greek”’: Paul’s Corporate Christology and the Construction of Christian Community’, in D.G. Horrell and C.M. Tuckett (eds) Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole (NovTSup 99; Leiden: Brill, 2000) 333-42. For this interpretation of the famously ambiguous phrase in Gal. 6:16 see e.g. the still persuasive arguments of N.A. Dahl, ‘Der Name Israel: Zur Auslegung von Gal 6,16’, Judaica 6 (1950) 161-70; and more recently J.M.G. Barclay, Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 98.

<sup>10</sup> Barclay echoes Käsemann in his assertion that ‘the justification of the ungodly... is what constitutes “salvation history”’ (p.28); cf. Käsemann, ‘Justification and Salvation History’, 75-76. On Käsemann’s ambivalence regarding Heilsgeschichte, and specifically his rejection of the idea of a process of salvation in history, see above n.5. Barclay’s comment that justification by faith provides the only ‘criterion’ by which salvation history can be detected would seem to imply not that there is a connected ‘Story’ of salvation, but that various stories (testimonies) such as Paul’s are glimpses of salvation history insofar as they exemplify the recurring pattern of the justification of the ungodly.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Käsemann’s concern to oppose ‘a conception of salvation history which broke in on us in secularized and political form with the Third Reich and its ideology’. ‘Our experience’, he writes, ‘has made a theology of history suspect for us from the very outset.’ (‘Justification and Salvation History’, 64). For an argument that ‘salvation history’ can be disassociated from a notion of evolutionary development, see D.J. Lull, ‘Salvation History: Theology in 1 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, and Galatians: A Response to N.T. Wright, R.B. Hays, and R. Scroggs’ in J.M. Bassler (ed.) Pauline Theology I (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991) 247-65; here 251.

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<sup>12</sup> There are parallels between the modern debate over the shape of Pauline theology and the older debate (involving especially Bultmann, Cullmann and Käsemann) concerning Heilsgeschichte in Paul (see Hays, Faith of Jesus Christ, 51-63, for an overview). For example, in Bassler (ed.), Pauline Theology, J.L. Martyn voices his opposition to the notion of a linear Heilsgeschichte in Galatians (see n.14 below), whereas N.T. Wright, R. Scroggs, R.B. Hays and D.J. Lull, in different ways, argue for a ‘salvation-historical’ approach to Paul. Scroggs makes explicit links between ‘salvation history’ and the ‘now-popular “story theology”’ and advances the bold claim that ‘[t]o rethink Paul’s theology within the structure of salvation history does the least violence, I believe, to his own conscious thought processes’ (‘Salvation History: The Theological Structure of Paul’s Thought (1 Thessalonians, Philippians, and Galatians)’, 212-26 in Bassler [ed.] Pauline Theology; here 215-16).

<sup>13</sup> J.L. Martyn, Galatians (AB 33A; New York: Doubleday, 1997) 347-48. Cf. also J.L. Martyn, ‘Events in Galatia’ in Bassler (ed.), Pauline Theology, 172-73, for Martyn’s opposition to ‘a heilsgeschichtlich reading of Paul’. Galatians lacks the sense of ‘pre-Christ linearity necessary to a meaningful use of that term [Heilsgeschichte]. In Galatians, Abraham is a distinctly punctiliar figure rather than a linear one... Thus neither history nor story is a word well linked with Paul’s portrait of Abraham in Galatians.’

<sup>14</sup> Martyn, Galatians, 389; cf. also 283. Contrast Hays, who writes in criticism of Bultmann: ‘Bultmann also stressed the event-character of God’s action in Christ, but he tended to treat the event as punctiliar. My reading of Paul emphasizes that the salvation event has temporal extension and shape; the event of the cross has meaning not as an isolated event but as an event within a story’ (Faith of Jesus Christ, 267 n.1).

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<sup>15</sup> Contrast B.W. Longenecker, 'Different Answers to Different Issues: Israel, the Gentiles and Salvation History in Romans 9–11', JSNT 36 (1989) 95-123, who sees Paul as perceiving 'every stage of salvation history as operating through the agency of the ethnic race of the Jews' (p. 106), though he overstates the idea of an evolving 'process' of salvation (p. 105).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Longenecker, 'Different Answers', 95, 112-13 with n.73.

<sup>17</sup> See further D.G. Horrell, 'Restructuring Human Relationships: Paul's Corinthian Letters and Habermas's Discourse Ethics', ExpTim 110 (1999) 323-25; S.E. Fowl, The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul (JSNTSup 36; Sheffield: JSOT, 1990).

<sup>18</sup> Barclay is clearly concerned to oppose the idea that Paul presumes an 'essentially Jewish story' to which Christ adds a final, if surprising, chapter, a notion that the formulation above could be taken to support. Discussion at the Consultation seemed to me to demonstrate the importance of distinguishing two different senses in which the gospel Story has a beginning. Arranged chronologically, its beginning is the creation, Adam, and so on; in this sense the coming of Christ is a subsequent event within this temporal narrative. But we need also to make clear, as I failed to do above, that the Christ event is the 'determinative centre' (to use Andrew Lincoln's phrase), the generative beginning, of the story as Paul now perceives it. As John Barclay rightly pointed out to me, the Christ event gives meaning to the temporal narrative in which Paul places it, as much, or more, than it gains meaning from it. We can perhaps say that the Christ event (as generative beginning) gives meaning to a temporal narrative of God's creative and saving purposes, and then, seen within it, gains meaning from that narrative.

<sup>19</sup> Pace Wright, New Testament, 404, who suggests that we could 'construct from the Pauline corpus a narrative world of Paul's own life and experience'. This 'personal

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narrative world’, ‘we may safely say, was the narrative world upon which Paul drew to make sense of his day-to-day experience’. We might rather say that it is the story of Christ, as interpreted by Paul, upon which Paul draws to make sense of his experience.

<sup>20</sup> It seemed to me to emerge from a number of essays in this book, and during discussion at the Consultation, that the stories of God, creation, Israel, etc., are not meaningfully separable, since they can only be understood, in Paul, as part of the story of God’s saving purposes in Christ. It is a moot point, perhaps, whether Paul’s story (and that of other ‘inheritors’ – see Lincoln’s essay) is to be seen as part of that ongoing gospel narrative, or as a testimony, an exemplar of the gospel’s transforming power.

<sup>21</sup> It may be more legitimate to refer to ‘subplots’ which ‘derive their sense and significance from their participation in the larger narrative in which Jesus Christ is the protagonist’ (R.B. Hays, ‘Crucified with Christ: A Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians, and Galatians’, in Bassler [ed.], Pauline Theology, 234).

<sup>22</sup> See R. Bultmann, New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings, (ed. and trans. S.M. Ogden; London: SCM, 1985) 1-43; Hays, Faith of Jesus Christ, 51-55.

<sup>23</sup> For a clear introduction to this postmodern context and the place of story within it, see G. Loughlin, Telling God’s Story: Bible, Church and Narrative Theology (Cambridge: CUP, 1996) 3-26.

<sup>24</sup> J. Milbank, Theology and Social Theory (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) 330.

<sup>25</sup> See S. Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 9-35, where

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Hauerwas uses the novel Watership Down to illustrate the importance of narrative in forming and sustaining community.

<sup>26</sup> Hauerwas, Community of Character, 84.

<sup>27</sup> Hays, Faith of Jesus Christ, 19.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. the outline of Hays' Greimasian method in Faith of Jesus Christ, 94-103; also Wright, New Testament, 69-77.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Loughlin, Telling God's Story.

<sup>30</sup> Here there are of course echoes of Hauerwas's approach to Christian ethics. See e.g. Hauerwas, Community of Character.

<sup>31</sup> I am very grateful to Mark Wynn for discussing this essay with me, and to John Barclay for illuminating correspondence and discussion.