

## SOLIDARITY AND DIFFERENCE: PAULINE MORALITY IN ROMANS 14.1–15.13\*

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### 1. Reading Paul in the context of contemporary debate

One of the key debates in contemporary ethics is between liberals and communitarians, though these labels of course conceal a multitude of nuanced positions among those who — sometimes against their wishes — are labelled as proponents of one position or the other.<sup>1</sup> Broadly speaking, liberals emphasise the possibility of a rational basis for an agreed public morality and system of justice, within which individuals can pursue their own visions of the good, visions which vary according to identity, religion, culture etc. Communitarians, on the other hand, are critical of the liberal notions of tradition-independent rationality, the ‘unencumbered self’,<sup>2</sup> and of the separation between the just and the good, and argue that it is only in communities where a particular tradition is treasured and embodied that moral virtue, defined in tradition-specific ways, can be sustained and nurtured.

However, one cannot pretend that there is anything like a clearly defined set of doctrines which encapsulate ‘liberalism’ on the one hand or ‘communitarianism’ on the other. There are ‘different kinds of both liberalism and communitarianism’<sup>3</sup> with varied arguments and criticisms mounted by specific authors on either side of the debate. As a way into the debate, I shall therefore focus on two particular authors who embody contrasting approaches. Even with this restricted focus, the presentation must of necessity be brief, sketching broad outlines rather than dealing with the many nuances of position and argument.

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<sup>1</sup> For a valuable survey and mediating position, see David Fergusson, *Community, Liberalism and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998); also Stephen Mulhall and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians* (Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Seyla Benhabib refers to ‘the communitarian critique of liberal visions of the “unencumbered self”’ (*Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* [Cambridge: Polity, 1992] 3; cf. 71–76). Mulhall and Swift label this theme in the communitarian critique ‘asocial individualism’ (*Liberals and Communitarians*, 13).

<sup>3</sup> Mulhall and Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, 1.

As a representative of a broadly liberal position it would be hard to find a more prominent figure than Jürgen Habermas, described by Stephen Bronner as ‘the most encyclopedic thinker of the post-war period’ and ‘*the* great exponent of political liberalism in Germany’.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Habermas’ work, despite rather than because of his views on religion, it would seem, has proven of considerable interest to theologians and Christian ethicists.<sup>5</sup> Habermas seeks to establish a universal basis for morality grounded in the presuppositions of human communication. He insists that moral philosophy cannot properly formulate substantive ethical norms, but rather states the conditions under which these can be discerned. Moral dilemmas cannot justly be solved by appealing to an authoritative tradition; it is only from real discourse among participants that norms can be agreed.<sup>6</sup> There are, however, universal principles which are essential for such argumentative discourse, which form the basic principles of Habermas’s discourse ethics.<sup>7</sup> Norms which are valid are those which can be agreed to be in the interests of all and which emerge from a non-coercive discourse, where all have equal right to participate. Where no consensus seems possible (Habermas cites the example of abortion) what is required is a way to secure ‘the integrity and the coexistence of ways of life and worldviews that generate different ethical conceptions... under conditions of equal rights’.<sup>8</sup> Where Habermas stresses the aims of agreement and consensus, Seyla Benhabib, a persuasive interpreter of Habermas and proponent of discourse or communicative ethics, proposes shifting the emphasis of discourse ethics away from the ideal of rational agreement and towards ‘sustaining those normative practices and moral relationships within

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<sup>4</sup> Stephen Eric Bronner, *Of Critical Theory and its Theorists* (Oxford; Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994) 283-84. Cf. also p. 9, and the comment of Edmund Arens: ‘Jürgen Habermas ist in den letzten Jahren weltweit zum meistdiskutierten deutschsprachigen Philosophen der Gegenwart geworden’ (E. Arens, ‘Theologie nach Habermas. Eine Einführung’, in E. Arens (ed.), *Habermas und die Theologie: Beiträge zur theologischen Rekeption, Diskussion und Kritik der Theorie kommunikativen Handelns* [Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1989] 9-38; here p.9).

<sup>5</sup> See e.g. Arens (ed.) *Habermas und die Theologie*; Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza (eds) *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992). For discussion of Habermas’s views on religion and theology, see Arens, ‘Theologie nach Habermas’, 10-17.

<sup>6</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990) 50, 93-94, 103, 122, 211; John W. Rogerson, ‘Discourse Ethics and Biblical Ethics’, in J.W. Rogerson, M. Davies, M. Daniel Carroll R., (eds), *The Bible in Ethics* (Sheffield: SAP, 1995), 17-26; here p.19.

<sup>7</sup> See Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 65-66.

<sup>8</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *Justification and Application: Remarks on Discourse Ethics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993) 60.

which reasoned agreement *as a way of life* can continue'.<sup>9</sup> In her view, the process of dialogue and the furthering of mutual understanding are more important than consensus itself.<sup>10</sup> According to Habermas, such a structure of dialogical communication requires the principles of justice and solidarity: 'equal respect and equal rights for the individual' and 'empathy and concern for the well-being of one's neighbour'.<sup>11</sup> Benhabib similarly elaborates these principles as those of 'universal moral respect' and 'egalitarian reciprocity'.<sup>12</sup> These 'metanorms of communicative ethics'<sup>13</sup> transcend the perspective of any specific tradition but are required in any legitimate attempt to agree ethical norms.

In the field of theological or ecclesial ethics there is one voice which most prominently and forcefully articulates a contrasting, communitarian viewpoint, that of Stanley Hauerwas. Samuel Wells, for example, writes that Hauerwas 'has constantly embarrassed those who advocate or assume a liberal democracy which ignores the need for an underlying narrative to describe and prescribe the practices on which it has to rest'.<sup>14</sup> A major influence on Hauerwas is Alasdair MacIntyre,<sup>15</sup> whose seminal work, *After Virtue*, has been highly influential both for its critique of 'the Enlightenment project' and its promotion of an Aristotelian approach to virtue and morality.<sup>16</sup> In *After Virtue* MacIntyre argues that the

<sup>9</sup> Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 38.

<sup>10</sup> Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 52.

<sup>11</sup> Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 200.

<sup>12</sup> Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 29.

<sup>13</sup> Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 45. They are 'metanorms' (I assume) in that they provide a universal moral framework within which the 'specific norms' of varied traditions can operate, though within limits: 'where there is a clash between the metamoral norms of communicative ethics and the specific norms of a moral way of life, the latter must be subordinated to the former' (*ibid.*).

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Wells, 'Introduction to the Essays', 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) 5.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. the comments in the preface to Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997) vii.

<sup>16</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, second edn 1985). For further discussion see John Horton and Susan Mendus (eds) *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994). In MacIntyre's subsequent work, as Horton and Mendus point out (p.3), it is Aquinas who emerges as the prominent hero, the one who most successfully synthesizes biblical theology and Aristotelianism (cf. *After Virtue*, 278).

contemporary situation is one in which the established traditions within which ethical decisions could be made have broken down; all we have are the scattered ruins of various older traditions. The Enlightenment project of supplying a universal, rational basis for morality has failed — and was bound to fail, for it is only from a location within a tradition that we can have any sense of what is virtuous, what is good. MacIntyre concludes that book with the hope that some new Saint Benedict might enable ‘the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us’.<sup>17</sup>

Hauerwas quotes Joseph Blenkinsopp with approval: ‘without the tradition there is no shared memory and therefore no community’.<sup>18</sup> The great failing of the model of liberal democracy, according to Hauerwas, is that in its concern to accommodate all people, whatever their beliefs and traditions, it deprives us of any meaningful story. ‘Ironically, the most coercive aspect of the liberal account of the world is that we are free to make up our own story. 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>19</sup> Hauerwas insists that there are no universally given human desires or virtues; the liberal-democratic attempt to create a universal, rational moral framework which is ‘just’ fails, because it does not provide any tradition-based account of what kind of virtue justice might be, nor any narrative basis for cultivating the virtue of acting justly. Desires and virtues are formed by stories and traditions, differently conceived and shaped in different communities engaged in particular practices, and it is precisely in communities shaped by a narrative tradition that people may be trained to be good, to cultivate virtue.<sup>20</sup> For Hauerwas, Christian, or biblical, ethics cannot be abstracted from the biblical story which is the Christian faith, nor, indeed, from the truth about God without which it makes no sense.<sup>21</sup> Christian ethics cannot therefore somehow be promoted ‘outside’ of the community of the Church, nor commended as a moral framework for secular society. It is only in communities which believe and celebrate the Christian story

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<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 263.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) 53.

<sup>19</sup> Hauerwas, *Community of Character*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues*, 149.

<sup>21</sup> See Stanley Hauerwas, ‘The Truth about God: The Decalogue as Condition for Truthful Speech’, in *Sanctify Them in the Truth: Holiness Exemplified* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998) 37-59.

that Christian ethics makes sense. Hauerwas therefore calls the church to the practice and cultivation of a distinctively Christian life, in which Christian character and virtue are nurtured, and which stands as witness and challenge to the world.

The aim of this essay is to read one of Paul's passages of moral argumentation with an awareness of this contemporary debate and thus to consider how Paul's voice might sound in this context. I am interested not so much in Paul's stance on a particular ethical issue, but rather in the ways in which Paul seeks to establish and shape the moral character of the Christian community. To read Paul in this way, and in relation to modern ethical debates, is not, I would argue, anachronistic. Firstly, because I am concerned to read Paul's moral instruction in context; that is, to read it with due attention to its circumstances of production, before considering its bearing on wider issues. Secondly, because I am *not* intending to pose the clearly anachronistic question, 'Was Paul a liberal or a communitarian?', but rather to consider how Paul's patterns of moral argument compare with the emphases found in certain liberal and communitarian approaches to ethics and how Paul might stimulate our thinking about ways of doing ethics. That, it seems to me, is one way in which we can take the Bible seriously in ethics,<sup>22</sup> without claiming that we can simply read our ethics from it, and is no more 'anachronistic' than a reading of Aristotle or Aquinas which seeks to develop their tradition without slavishly following it.<sup>23</sup>

It is worth making clear at the outset that I take from Habermas what I think is a useful (and I put it no more strongly than this) distinction between ethics and morality (terms often used interchangeably)<sup>24</sup> though without pretending that any neat separation can be

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Francis Watson's comment that 'in the last resort, to interpret is *to use the texts to think with*' (*Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline Sexual Ethic* [Cambridge: CUP, 2000] viii).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. MacIntyre's comment: 'it is central to the conception of [a tradition of thought] that the past is never something merely to be discarded, but rather that the present is intelligible only as a commentary upon and response to the past in which the past, if necessary and if possible, is corrected and transcended, yet corrected and transcended in a way that leaves the present open to being in turn corrected and transcended by some yet more adequate future point of view' (*After Virtue*, 146). To which one might add that reading the past is one way to engage critically with the present in the interests of further development and 'correction'.

<sup>24</sup> Frank Matera, for example, is candid: 'Throughout this work I use the adjectives "moral" and "ethical" interchangeably' (*New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996] 259 n.1). Note also the use of both terms in the title of Richard B. Hays' important book *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1997).

maintained. Habermas proposes that ethics has to do with the choices and actions of the individual, choices which are ‘inextricably interwoven with each individual’s identity’,<sup>25</sup> while morality is concerned with the compatibility of one’s own maxims with those of others, with the regulation of interpersonal relations, where differing convictions and interests cause conflicts which need to be resolved.<sup>26</sup>

## **2. The importance of Rom 14.1–15.13 as a piece of Pauline moral argumentation**

Obviously any study of a specific passage in Paul or elsewhere will be restricted in its claims: without studying the whole range of Paul’s ethical instruction we cannot make general statements about the shape of Pauline morality. Nevertheless there are reasons why Rom 14.1–15.13 is an important and central passage for understanding Pauline ethics. While Romans is no longer widely viewed as a ‘compendium of Christian doctrine’ (Philip Melancthon), nor as Paul’s ‘last will and testament’ (Gunther Bornkamm), and while its specific and contextual character are increasingly recognised,<sup>27</sup> nevertheless it is a mature and measured statement of at least some of the central themes of Pauline theology, a carefully constructed and extended piece of argumentation, and historically the most influential Pauline letter.<sup>28</sup> Our passage itself, moreover, is clearly based to some extent on 1 Cor 8.1–11.1.<sup>29</sup> The significance of this is twofold. First, it means that we are studying a passage which contains ideas on questions of ethics which Paul found important and relevant enough to

<sup>25</sup> Habermas, *Justification and Application*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Habermas, *Justification and Application*, 1-9. It is worth noting the contrast with Wayne Meeks’ approach to the two terms: for Meeks ‘morality’ ‘names a dimension of life, a pervasive and, often, only partly conscious set of value-laden dispositions, inclinations, attitudes, and habits’, whereas ‘ethics’ is a ‘reflexive, second-order activity: it is morality rendered self-conscious’ (Wayne A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993] 4).

<sup>27</sup> See further Alexander J.M. Wedderburn, *The Reasons for Romans* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988); Karl P. Donfried (ed.) *The Romans Debate: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Hence it forms the basic ‘template’ for the massive discussion of Pauline theology in James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

<sup>29</sup> For details, see Robert J. Karris, ‘The Occasion of Romans’ in Donfried, *Romans Debate*, 71-77 (who suggests that Romans 14–15 is general Pauline paraenesis not a specific response to issues at Rome). For a detailed study of the ethics of 1 Cor 8.1–11.1 see David G. Horrell, ‘Theological Principle or Christological Praxis? Pauline Ethics in 1 Cor 8.1–11.1’, *JSNT* 67 (1997) 83-114.

adapt for more than one situation.<sup>30</sup> Second, since these two passages form unusually lengthy passages of moral argumentation in Paul's correspondence — indeed, 1 Cor 8.1–11.1 is the most extended piece of such argument focused on a specific issue<sup>31</sup> — these texts can claim a central place in any attempt to understand Paul's thinking on ethics and morality. In Romans 14–15, then, we see Paul adapting and representing patterns of moral argument which he had already presented to the church at Corinth.

### 3. The context of Rom 14.1–15.13 and its significance for understanding Paul's aims

The issue in Rom 14.1–15.13 concerns people who hold different convictions with regard to food and the observance of special days. Those Paul calls the 'weak'<sup>32</sup> abstain from certain foods (they 'eat only vegetables'; 14.2) and observe certain days as special (14.5) while the 'strong' (□兆II  呂◆■◎◆□兆□), among whom Paul counts himself (15.1), regard all foods as acceptable and all days as alike (14.2, 5). It seems clear from the passage, *pace* Mark Nanos and Neil Elliott (who argue that the 'weak' are non-Christian Jews),<sup>33</sup> that both groups are Christian believers:<sup>34</sup> Paul gives exhortations to both groups (14.3, 10 etc.); describes both groups as practising their different customs 'for the lord' (14.6; cf. 14.4), clearly

<sup>30</sup> Paul had neither founded nor visited the Roman church(es), whereas he had had considerable interaction with the congregations at Corinth. However, I think that Romans 14–15 (and Romans more generally) does reflect some awareness of issues and tensions among the Roman Christians, rather than simply a generalising adaptation of the teaching from 1 Corinthians, as Wayne Meeks suggests ('Judgment and the Brother: Romans 14:1–15:13', in G.F. Hawthorne and O. Betz (eds), *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earle Ellis* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987] 290–300; here 291, 299 n.3). Cf. Joel Marcus, 'The Circumcision and the Uncircumcision in Rome', *NTS* 35 (1989) 67–81 and the works cited in n.19 above.

<sup>31</sup> 1 Cor 5–7 might also be mentioned, with the theme of sex and sexual ethics connecting those three chapters. However, there is no connected and continuous argument, as there is in 1 Cor 8–10 and Rom 14–15, but rather a number of shorter sections, each with its own distinctive concerns and arguments (compare, for example, 5.13 with 6.2; 6.16 with 7.14).

<sup>32</sup> 'The weak in faith' in 14.1; 'the powerless' or 'incapable' (◎❖呂◆□■◎◆□兆) in 15.1.

<sup>33</sup> Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 95–119; Neil Elliott, 'Asceticism among the "Weak" and the "Strong" in Romans 14–15', in L.E. Vaage and V.L. Wimbush (eds), *Asceticism and the New Testament* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) 231–51.

<sup>34</sup> Paul S. Minear's monograph, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Epistle to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1971) valuably shows the importance of Rom 14–15 for illuminating the context to which Paul's whole letter is addressed. However, Minear's outline of five distinct groups, to whom different aspects of Paul's instruction were addressed, goes beyond what the text itself suggests and permits as a plausible reconstruction.

Christ;<sup>35</sup> denotes both groups as Σ♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) (14.10, 13, 15, 21), a term which Paul characteristically reserves for members of the Christian congregations,<sup>36</sup> and grounds his exhortation in the example and attitude of Christ (15.1-7). What is less clear is the extent to which the two groups should be identified as Jewish and Gentile respectively. Against such a straightforward identification is the fact that Paul locates himself among the strong — those who eat anything and keep no special days. Moreover, Mark Reasoner has recently explored the evidence concerning vegetarianism, asceticism, observance of special days and so on in first-century Rome, concluding that while the ‘weak’ doubtless included some Jewish Christians the group may well have also included non-Jews who had their own reasons for avoiding meat and observing special days.<sup>37</sup> However, not only does Reasoner’s own evidence point rather strongly to the centrality of Jewish concerns in Rom 14.1–15.13,<sup>38</sup> but the text of Romans itself seems to confirm that issues relating to the relationship between Jews and Gentiles are central to Paul’s purposes in writing the letter (see e.g. Rom 1.16; 2.9–10; 3.1, 9, 29; 9.24; 10.12; 15.7–13). While both ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ groups may certainly each have contained Jews and Gentiles, the issue at stake in Rom 14.1–15.13 concerns ‘the observance or non-observance of the Jewish law’, as John Barclay, among others, has persuasively shown.<sup>39</sup> Although the Jewish law does not, of course, prohibit the consumption

<sup>35</sup> Note the distinction between &♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) and □ℳ●✗□Χ(¤) in 14.6 and the statement in 14.9:

ℳ Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) &♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Ιο Τℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Ιο Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤)  
 Σ♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Σ♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Μℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Ηℳ●✗□Χ(¤) &Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Μℳ●✗□Χ(¤) &  
 Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Κℳ●✗□Χ(¤) &♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Σ♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Κℳ●✗□Χ(¤)

<sup>36</sup> Rom 9.3 is unique in Paul’s letters in using Σ♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) to denote Jews, rather than Christians.

However, it is here immediately clarified and qualified with the phrase

♦♦ℳ●✗□Χ(¤) ♦♦Ιο Ιοℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Ο□♦ &Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) Ιο Τℳ●✗□Χ(¤) &Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤). It is therefore unconvincing to see this as a parallel supporting the idea that the Σ♦Ξℳ●✗□Χ(¤) in 14–15 may include non-Christian Jews (cf. n. 33 above).

<sup>37</sup> Mark Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak: Romans 14.1–15.13 in Context* (SNTSMS 103; Cambridge: CUP, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Reasoner, *The Strong and the Weak*, 128–38, 146–58. In addition, Reasoner’s argument that the ‘strong’ and the ‘weak’ are sociological designations, with the weak lower on the social scale than the strong (see pp. 218–19), does not carry conviction, since Reasoner himself shows both that ‘in first century Rome there were strong precedents for vegetarianism even in the upper classes’ (p. 205) and that ‘the Jewish sabbath was popular among some of the upper levels of Roman society’ (p. 151).

<sup>39</sup> John M.G. Barclay, “‘Do We Undermine the Law?’ A Study of Romans 14.1–15.6” in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. J.D.G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996) 287–308; here p. 289.

of all meat (and wine — if this is also at issue in Rome: cf. 14.21) the practice of Jews restricting their diet to avoid all meat and wine when eating in Gentile contexts is well known from Daniel (1.8-16) and Esther (Esth 4.17x LXX) as well as Josephus (*Life* 14).<sup>40</sup> The motivation for such practice was evidently to ensure that Jewish dietary laws were not violated and to avoid the idolatrous connections of Gentile meat and wine.

This conclusion is important insofar as it indicates that Paul's concern here cannot be regarded as addressing merely trivial ethical disagreements. It is not simply a matter of whether some prefer to eat this or that, or to mark certain days or not, but rather a question of difference among Christians who hold different convictions concerning obedience to the Jewish law, which clearly specifies obligations concerning food and sabbath (Lev 11.1-47; 23.1-3; Deut 5.12-15; 14.3-21; cf. *m. Hul* esp. 7-10), and which is of immense religious, cultural and social significance.<sup>41</sup> The two groups to which Paul refers in Romans 14–15 represent two ends of the spectrum of reactions: one abstains entirely from meat and wine, in order to avoid breaking the law and contamination; the other regards all food and drink as clean and acceptable.

#### **4. Solidarity and difference and their christological foundations: exegesis of the text**

On the specific issues of food and days, 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' (¶ΘΑΓ■♦Θ &ΘΘΘΘΘΘ: 14.20). And, of course, there is the judgment implicit in his choice of the labels 'strong' and 'weak' (cf. 15.1: 'we the strong...'). However, what is interesting is that he does not mount an argument in favour of this ethical conviction; Paul does not invest his argumentative energies into demonstrating that 'all foods are clean' and to arguing that all should therefore eat without observing Jewish customs and regulations. Instead his energies go into mounting an argument, with strong theological — and specifically christological — foundations, which seeks to enable ethical diversity to remain within a context of corporate solidarity. His concern does seem to be the properly *moral* question, as Habermas sees it, of 'the legitimate ordering of coexisting forms of life'.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. also Hegesippus' testimony concerning James, brother of Jesus, who 'drank no wine or strong drink, nor did he eat flesh' (in Eusebius, *HE* 2.23.5) and *Test. Isaac* 4.5, where Isaac is described as one 'who would not eat meat or drink wine all his life long'.

<sup>41</sup> See further Barclay, 'Do We Undermine the Law?', 305-308.

<sup>42</sup> Habermas, *Justification and Application*, 60.

#### 4.1 Sustaining diversity

As in 1 Cor 8.1-3, here too Paul effectively summarises the main points of his argument in the opening verses of the passage (14.1-3). He opens with the call to welcome or accept (ΠΡΟΣ•●ΘΟΔΟΣ ΘΕΑΝ Μ•□Μ) the weak in faith and not to argue over disagreements (ΩΗΘ•●□ΥΨΗ•○□Χ(Ε)) (v.1), then outlines the issue of contention at Rome, where some eat anything, others only vegetables (v.2). There then follows a more specific exhortation to each side of this disagreement: those who eat freely are not to despise (ΟΜΩΣ Μ•♦■□◆□Μ•■ΜΧ(Ε)♦♦) those who do not eat; those who restrict their eating are not to judge (ΟΜΩΣ &□Χ(Ε)■Μ•■◆♦♦) those who eat without restriction. And the basic theological foundation for this is that God has accepted or welcomed (ΠΡΟΣ•Μ•●ΘΟΔΟΣ Μ•♦□) each of these types of person, with their different practices (v.3). These basic terms and exhortations recur as the more detailed argumentation progresses (see 14.10, 13; 15.7).

Paul then proceeds to show why judgment of one another is inappropriate, one of the prominent themes of this passage.<sup>43</sup> All of his addressees are someone else's servants — they belong to the Lord — and the right to judge them therefore belongs solely to their master; the &◆□Χ(Ε)er alone decides whether they 'stand' or 'fall', and Paul is confident that they will all 'stand', since the Lord has the power to ensure this (14.4). In other words, not only is it inappropriate for believers to judge one another at all, but their negative judgment is misplaced in any case. Each person, Paul insists, whichever way they act with regard to foods and special days, acts 'in honour of the Lord' (&'♦□Χ(Ε)♦♦ — an associative dative, or dative of respect: the action is done to, for, or in relation to, the Lord; 14.6). Christian life is essentially life lived not for oneself, but for the Lord. It here becomes clear that the Lord to whom each person's actions are directed is Christ, who by his dying and rising has become Lord over both the living and the dead

(... ΧΘ■Θ &ΘΧ(Ε) ■Μ&□♦□ ■ &ΘΧ(Ε) Ω♦□■◆♦■ &◆□Χ(Ε) Μ  
◆□♦■■♦① – 14.9).<sup>44</sup>

<sup>43</sup> A theme explored especially by Meeks, 'Judgment and the Brother'. See 14.3-5, 10, 13, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. too the distinction between &◆□Χ(Ε)er and □Μ•□Χ(Ε)er in 14.6; and note also how Paul's composite citation in 14.11 expresses acclamation of both 'the Lord' and 'God'. Paul has achieved this by adding the common phrase Ω♦□ Μ•♦□ Υ•□ ●Μ•□Υ•Μ•Χ &◆□Χ(Ε)er (see e.g. Num 14.28; Zeph 2.9; Isa 49.18; Jer 22.24; Ezek 5.11) to Isa 45.23 LXX (which adds the closing words ◆♦□ Μ•♦□ to the Hebrew text).

While in other contexts Paul does call for judgment to be exercised over other Christians (most firmly and famously in 1 Cor 5.11-13) here he seeks to legitimate different patterns of ethical conduct and to remove any basis for judgment or criticism. He does so by outlining a form of ethical relativism, which seems, interestingly, to acknowledge the constructed nature of ethical convictions regarding food, but at the same time to insist on their reality for those who hold them. Nothing is unclean ✕ ♦ ™ II ☽◆♦□◆☞, ‘in itself’, Paul writes, expressing a conviction he holds ‘in the Lord Jesus’ (possibly echoing Mark 7.15; Paul certainly agrees with the Markan gloss in 7.19).<sup>45</sup> But it *is* unclean (&□✖■□☞er) to the one who reckons it so (14.14). This is a concise, but nonetheless powerful, expression of an approach to morality which seeks to legitimate a variety of ethical stances without denying their importance, their reality even, to those who hold them.<sup>46</sup> We might perhaps label it, albeit oxymoronically, a constructivist realism: things really are such, to the one who reckons them so.<sup>47</sup> This is why people should be fully convinced in their own minds about the stance they adopt (14.5); this is why it is so important for people to act in accordance with their convictions. Not to do so, not to act according to faith, is to *sin*, Paul insists: ☽☞■ ✕ ™ ☞ ☽✿ ☽◆♦&

#### *4.2. Building solidarity*

But Paul is not only concerned to legitimate the concurrent practice of different ethical convictions. He is primarily concerned to secure and strengthen the unity and solidarity of the Christian community while sustaining this diversity of ethical practices. There are various bases on which Paul mounts his appeal for solidarity. All are servants of the same &◆✉□✉er, and the welcome extended to all by God (in 14.3) or by Christ (in 15.7) is a paradigm for the practice of acceptance and welcome which Paul seeks to engender among

<sup>45</sup> For a study of the echoes and allusions to Jesus' teaching in Rom 12–15 see Michael B. Thompson, *Clothed With Christ: The Example and Teaching of Jesus in Rom 12.1–15.13* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991).

<sup>46</sup> It is possible that Paul derived this idea from the wording of Lev 11.4-8 etc. where the repeated conclusion in the list of unclean animals is not that they are ‘unclean’ as such, but ‘unclean for you’

<sup>47</sup> Peter Tomson speaks of Paul's 'pluralist rationalism', seeing Paul's ingenious solution here as providing a "neutral" rationale which allows both gentile and Jewish diets' (*Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles* [Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990] 245, 250.).

the Roman Christians. All are Ἐ·Φ·Ω·Μ·●·Ξ·Φ·Ω· — Paul’s favourite designation for members of the Christian communities which is here emphatically repeated, as in 1 Cor 8.11-13 (see Rom 14.10 *bis*, 13, 15, 21).<sup>48</sup> It is the status of the other as an Ἐ·Φ·Ω·Μ·●·Ξ·Φ·Ω·ετ — moreover, an Ἐ·Φ·Ω·Μ·●·Ξ·Φ·Ω·ετ ‘for whom Christ died’ (14.15; cf. 1 Cor 8.11) — that indicates the shame of judging and despising them (cf. 1 Cor 6.5-8). And while Paul does not argue for the adoption of a particular ethical stance regarding food, he does urge the practice of other moral values which he sees as imperative for the building up of the community. His main concern is that his addressees pursue the things of peace and the things for building one another up (14.19; cf. 15.2). Thus in their mutual welcome of one another, their formation of a united community offering praise and glory to God through Christ, they will fulfil the scriptures which describe the Gentiles and God’s people (Israel) together praising God (15.9-12).<sup>49</sup> A unity of mind and purpose is the goal to which Paul looks (15.5-6).

The moral value which Paul sees as fundamental to achieving this divinely willed and scripturally announced goal, this unified community which at the same time protects the diversity within it, is that of other-regarding love, a self-sacrificial looking to the interests and well-being of the other. This theme is prominent throughout 14.13–15.7, culminating in the explicitly christological appeal of 15.1-7. What his hearers should ‘judge’ (&□兆■☛ℳ), Paul suggests, is not one another but rather the importance of not placing any stumbling block in the way of a sister or brother (14.13). Although one may be free ‘in the Lord Jesus’ to eat anything, if doing so causes grief to an ☛ℳ●☒□☛er for whom Christ died then the action no longer expresses the practice of ☛ℳ○☒□ℳ (14.14-15 –

Their practice with regard to matters like food should not destroy ‘the work of God’, which is, presumably, this **□****○****❖**&**□****○****❖****□****○****❖****□**, this building-up of the community comprising all

<sup>48</sup> See further David G. Horrell, ‘From ☩❖✉ℳ●☞□খ☞ to ☠খ(✉&□er) ☠ℳ□◆☞: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity’, *JBL* 120 (2001) 293-311.

<sup>49</sup> The scriptural quotations here are connected by the keyword ἔθνη (Gentiles/nations) but also express the idea of the Gentiles joining with Israel in praise and hope (see especially the second quotation, from Deut 32.43 LXX), and so relate to Paul’s aim here and throughout Romans, to unite Jews and Gentiles within the Christian congregation. Cf. Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 878: Paul cites the OT ‘to show that the inclusion of Gentiles with Jews in the praise of God has always been part of God’s purposes’.

those whom God has welcomed in Christ. In 14.14 Paul expressed the idea that while nothing was unclean ‘in itself’ it was unclean to the one who reckoned it so. That idea is developed in the direction of an other-regarding, relational morality in 14.20. Here Paul reiterates the idea that in themselves all things are clean (¶ΓΗ■♦Ω &ΓΩΓΩΓΩ) but then adds that it is a bad thing (&Γ&ΓΗ■) if a person’s eating becomes a cause of stumbling (ΠΩΠΩ•&ΠΟΠ). The criterion for action is not simply whether or not it is ‘unclean’ to the individual but rather, and more decisively, the impact it has on others. Hence the assertion, comparable to 1 Cor 8.13, that it is a good thing (&Γ●ΠΓΗ■) not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything if it might cause an Ω❖Ωℳ ●×ΠΓ to stumble (14.21). In practice, then, the solution to the tensions among those who are more or less scrupulous regarding food is for the ‘strong’ to accommodate their actions to take account of the concerns of the ‘weak’ (at the Christian communal meals).<sup>50</sup>

This other-regarding practice is grounded especially in the example of Christ, which Paul presents explicitly in the opening verses of chapter 15. His exhortation that ‘we the strong ought to bear the weaknesses of the weak and not to please ourselves’ (v.1) is reminiscent of Gal 6.2, where bearing one another’s burdens is stated as the way to fulfil the ‘law of Christ’.<sup>51</sup> The following instruction here to each person not to please themselves but their neighbour, for the good purpose of building up the neighbour (v.2), as well as echoing the commandment Paul sees as encapsulating the whole of the Law (Lev 19.18; Rom 13.8-10), is justified by an appeal to the practice of Christ, ‘who did not please himself’ (15.3). Imitating this pattern of other-regarding conduct is the fundamental moral responsibility. In other words, the christological basis of Paul’s moral argument here undergirds not so much an individual’s stance on specific ethical matters but more a *pattern of relating, an ‘other-regard’, which is morally imperative*. The Christian’s duty is not specified as some particular ethical stance in relation to the issue (of food, or more broadly the Jewish law) but rather a duty concerning Christ-like other-regard. Unlike the Kantian-type individual, whose monological reflections lead her or him to a conviction as to what is right, the Pauline Christian cannot discern what is right or wrong except in the context of human relationships: what is right or wrong in terms of one’s conduct cannot be specified in the abstract, but only in terms of a particular community setting, in terms of the others with whom one is placed.

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?”, 302-303.

Overall, then, what Paul seeks to do in Rom 14.1–15.13 is to foster the corporate solidarity of the Christian congregation in Rome while legitimating differences of ethical practice. He seeks to undercut the basis on which some judge or despise others, and urges the priority of mutual up-building and the pursuit of peace, in order that those with differences might nonetheless welcome and accept one another. What Paul does present as morally imperative is the practice of other-regarding love, seen paradigmatically in the self-giving of Christ, a relational moral imperative which provides the basis for both the fostering of solidarity and the respect of difference.

But what are the implications of Paul's argument and what are the problems and prospects which it presents? And how might Paul sound when read in the context of the liberal-communitarian debate?

### **5. Problems and prospects: Paul in contemporary context**

As we stand back from our text and consider what it may offer for our thinking about issues of ethics and morality it is well to begin with some of the apparent problems with the approach that Paul presents. First, we must acknowledge that despite his attempts to promote mutual acceptance and regard, there is a superiority concerning Paul's own ethical stance implicit in the terms 'strong' and 'weak'. Even if we render the term Σφραγίδης as 'delicate', as Peter Tomson suggests,<sup>52</sup> and even if Mark Nanos is right to detect a critical edge in Paul's use of the word 'strong' — a critique of arrogance and presumption on the part of the Gentile Christians (cf. Rom 11.20-25; 12.3 etc.)<sup>53</sup> — nonetheless along with the attempt to legitimate diversity comes an apparent conviction that Paul's stance represents a strength of *faith* that the weak's does not. So Paul's 'tolerance' does not entirely avoid presenting his own ethical conviction as preferable, or at least as the position which demonstrates most consistently the consequences of faith in the Lord Jesus (14.14). His tolerance may even depend on this conviction: perhaps it is only from a perspective which regards food in some 'absolute' sense as morally indifferent that one can adopt the relativist and tolerant stance we find in this passage.<sup>54</sup> Secondly, there is the problem that the paradigm

<sup>51</sup> See further Richard B. Hays, 'Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ', *CBQ* 49 (1987) 268-90.

<sup>52</sup> Tomson, *Paul and the Jewish Law*, 193-98.

<sup>53</sup> Nanos, *Mystery of Romans*, 98-101.

<sup>54</sup> I am grateful to Donald Murray and Mike Higton for their comments on this point.

of Christ's self-giving can be taken as placing self-humiliation, self-degradation, self-denial, at the heart of Christian morality. This is especially pernicious when it is used by the powerful to urge those who are socially and politically weaker to accept suffering and injustice passively and quietly, in imitation of Christ (cf. 1 Pet 2.18-23). However, while these dangers should be fully and carefully considered,<sup>55</sup> Paul's use of the christological paradigm here is hardly susceptible to these criticisms. It is the strong, the group in which Paul includes himself, who are particularly urged to follow the pattern of Christ's self-giving, and the purpose of their self-denial is not their own humiliation but the building up of a united community in which harmony and agreement may emerge. Thirdly, there are problems that arise from Paul's advice here, as in 1 Cor 8.1–11.1, that the strong who eat with impunity should accommodate their practice to take account of the weak and their sensibilities. Does a christologically patterned morality always require that one's freedom to decide and to act on certain issues should be compromised because of the demands of what might be a small, scrupulous minority? It is not hard to see how the principle of 'causing a sister or brother to stumble' could be invoked in all sorts of situations to justify all sorts of restrictions. On this point Paul perhaps offers fewer answers, though it is significant to note that the issue does to some extent emerge in a tension within our text: on the one hand, 'it is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything by which your brother or sister is offended' (Rom 14.21); on the other hand, each person should be fully convinced in their own mind of the rightness of their actions, and neither group should judge or despise the other (14.3-5, 10). In other contexts, of course, most famously at Antioch, Paul was clearly quite unprepared to urge people to alter their conduct to please or accommodate others (Gal 2.11-21). The approaches may not be unconnected, however: perhaps Paul's conviction that the basis for solidarity and identity is Christ, so firmly asserted in Galatians, provides the grounds for Paul's 'tolerance' in Romans, where different customs with regard to food, no longer defining of identity and belonging, are in themselves indifferent and so can be treated with a Christ-like generosity.<sup>56</sup>

This raises wider issues about the impact of Paul's moral teaching here in Rom 14.1–15.13. John Barclay, for example, while noting Paul's attempt to protect 'Law-observance and Jewish Christianity', argues that in the end 'Paul effectively undermines the social and cultural integrity of the Law-observant Christians in Rome'. This is because Paul both

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<sup>55</sup> They are somewhat ignored in Philippa Carter's otherwise valuable book on *The Servant Ethic in the New Testament* (New York: Peter Lang 1997).

requires of Jewish Christians the cultivation of ‘a deep bond of unity with people fundamentally neglectful of the law’ and also ‘relativises’ the Jewish cultural heritage, presenting it as ‘merely one option, one preference among others’.<sup>57</sup> Daniel Boyarin has developed this last issue more widely, in his immensely stimulating and provocative reading of Paul. While Boyarin sees value in Paul’s attempt to unite diverse peoples as one in Christ (Gal 3.28 is Boyarin’s key text) he also argues that the corollary of this is that all other cultural specificities are to be eradicated, or at least emptied of their integrity. Boyarin writes:

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.<sup>58</sup>

There are a number of responses to make to these arguments, though in the end something of their force remains. One is to question Boyarin’s rather pointed phrase ‘a matter of taste’. For in Rom 14.1–15.13 Paul does *not* quite say that one’s practice with regard to food is simply a matter of personal taste or preference. He not only states that things *are* unclean to the one who reckons them so, but also insists that people *must* act in accordance with their faith-convictions; not to do so is to sin (14.23). (Is this so very far from Boyarin’s insistence that certain groups of people have a particular ‘task and calling in the world’?) A second response is to note that it is the ‘strong’ upon whom Paul places most of the burden of changing practice, in acknowledgment of, and sensitivity to, the convictions of the ‘weak’. In other words, the practices of the weak — the law-observant — are protected more thoroughly than the practices of the strong. However, neither of these observations negates the point made by

<sup>56</sup> I am grateful to Mike Higton for his comments here.

<sup>57</sup> Barclay, “Do We Undermine the Law?”, 303–308. Cf. also Francis Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), 94–98, who argues that the aim of Paul’s instruction is to unite two divided congregations into one ‘Paulinist’ congregation, where the Pauline principle of freedom from the law is accepted.

<sup>58</sup> Daniel Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 1994) 32.

Boyarin and by Barclay, that Paul's arguments here effectively undermine the value system, the cultural and social 'integrity', of the Jewish Christians in Rome.

Still, there is a further point to be pressed. While Boyarin reads Paul as a cultural critic of Judaism, from within, it is not insignificant to note that Paul is writing *Christian* theology, writing to people who already share a commitment to Christ as Lord.<sup>59</sup> Among *these* people, then, it is indeed true to say that their Jewish or Gentile identity is to a significant degree relativised (to use Barclay's term) because of their common commitment to Christ, a commitment which takes primacy, at least in Paul's view, over all others (Rom 1.6; 10.9-17; Phil 3.7–4.1). Within these Christian communities, therefore, the foundation of solidarity, the basis for identity and belonging, is being 'in Christ' (hence the insistent argument of Gal 2.11-21).<sup>60</sup> But given this basis for unity and community, it is nonetheless significant that Paul tries to create the kind of moral space within which distinctive convictions and practices can co-exist with mutual respect and love.

## **6. Paul and the liberal-communitarian debate**

Finally, we return to the wider debate with which the paper began, and to the question as to how Paul's voice might sound in the context of the liberal-communitarian debate. It is clear

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<sup>59</sup> Cf. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 1-12, 262 n.6. This is perhaps a rather significant point, since it determines the basic interpretative position from which Paul is viewed. Obviously there are great complexities involved in discerning the extent to which Paul's theology fits within, or breaks from, the Judaism of his time, and much scholarly ink has been spilt on precisely this question. But insofar as Paul is founder and instructor of communities containing both Jews and Gentiles, who find their common identity and unity not in Jewish markers of belonging, but in faith and baptism in Christ, then there is at least some kind of theological and sociological distinction between the groups Paul is addressing and the Judaism contemporary with them (cf. 1 Cor 10.32). Paul's theology is, of course, a thoroughly Jewish theology, but one which is (to use Terence Donaldson's felicitous term) 'reconfigured' to centre on Christ (T.L. Donaldson, *Paul and the Gentiles: Remapping the Apostle's Convictional World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997]). Given these basic observations, Paul should perhaps not so much be judged as a cultural critic of Judaism, but by the ways in which he addresses the issues of morality and difference within the communities to which he writes, those who share his 'Christian' commitment. Ironically, therefore, those who see Paul's argument in Romans 14-15 as concerned with relations between Christians and (non-Christian) Jews (see n.33 above) may make Paul *more* and not less problematic in terms of the implications of his thought for Jewish culture and identity.

<sup>60</sup> On these issues of identity and their relationship to Paul's corporate Christology, see further David G. Horrell, "'No Longer Jew or Greek': Paul's Corporate Christology and the Construction of Christian Community', in

that Paul's arguments are thoroughly rooted in his theology: moral values and practices are grounded in and motivated by the story of God's saving action in Christ. To this extent Paul exemplifies the communitarian view that morality can only be articulated and engendered on the basis of a particular story embodied in communities; specifically, it is Paul's convictions about God and Christ that underpin his appeal for both the acceptance of difference and the fostering of solidarity and mutual regard. However, it is also important to point out that the rootedness of Paul's ethics in the Christian story did not (at least in this context) imply the promotion of a clear position on specific and significant ethical disputes: the resources of the Christian story do not — and perhaps should not — necessarily generate clear consequences with regard to one's stance on some particular ethical issues.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, in Rom 14.1–15.13, as in 1 Cor 8.1–11.1, Paul did not seek to use the resources of the Christian story to show what ethical stance Christian theology implied. Rather, his energies went into constructing a theologically — and specifically christologically — undergirded moral framework within which different culturally-rooted ethical convictions could be affirmed and practised without destroying the unity of the community. He sought to foster solidarity while at the same time preserving the space for difference, for a diversity of ethical practice. Here Paul's priorities seem to parallel key liberal concerns, at least insofar as they envisage an agreed framework of morality which leaves room for individuals to pursue different visions of the good.<sup>62</sup> To put the matter differently, what Paul does regard as morally imperative are the relational practices of mutual acceptance and other-regarding love. And these moral imperatives bear rather close similarity to the 'metanorms' of justice and solidarity which Habermas and Benhabib see as implicit foundations for discourse ethics and the liberal project of sustaining a democratic plural society. Habermas, we recall, describes these as 'equal respect and equal rights for the individual' and 'empathy and concern for the well-being of one's neighbour'.<sup>63</sup> A more Pauline description of such basic moral values might be 'a sense of corporate belonging

D.G. Horrell and C.M. Tuckett (eds), *Christology, Controversy and Community: New Testament Essays in Honour of David R. Catchpole* (Leiden: Brill, 2000) 321–44.

<sup>61</sup> Is it therefore a sign of moral bankruptcy if '[t]here seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture', as MacIntyre suggests (*After Virtue*, 6)?

<sup>62</sup> To this extent, without at all wishing anachronistically to 'modernise' Paul, it seems to me that Paul reflects more of an ethos of what we call 'tolerance' than Stephen Barton suggests in 'Paul and the Limits of Tolerance', in G.N. Stanton and G. Stroumsa (eds) *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 121–34.

where each person has equal value and respect, and where there is a constant regard for the other, a generous self-giving in looking to the interests of the other'. Yet unlike the liberalism in which a set of universal moral values are (often implicitly) held as essential but shorn of any shared narrative tradition by which they might be grounded and motivated, Paul's advocacy of solidarity and difference is firmly grounded not in some universal rationality, or natural law, but in the Christian story, with human action motivated by the paradigmatic actions of God and of Christ (Rom 14.3; 15.2-3, 7). The similarities in central moral values perhaps lend weight to the thesis that the moral 'metanorms' which underpin a 'rational' liberal morality like that of Habermas are in fact, to some extent, the moral values of the Christian, or Judaeo-Christian tradition, but stripped of the explicit story or tradition within which they are engendered.<sup>64</sup> In a more communitarian vein one might say that the moral values which are imperative for Paul are precisely those values which his tradition cultivates as virtues and that it is only with these virtues — according to Paul — that the communities he addresses can contain their diversity of ethical practices.

So if Paul's thought raises some questions for the communitarian approach in terms of its openness to sustaining (or its 'failure' to resolve) diverse ethical convictions at least on certain issues, and, indeed, in eschewing even the task of arguing for a certain ethical stance on the disputed topic, it certainly cannot be deemed to sit comfortably in the liberal camp. Even if the moral convictions which underpin Paul's argument bear a similarity to key liberal values, it is clear that Paul's convictions derive from his understanding of the Christian story and are addressed to the Christian community: Paul shows no concern here to root his moral arguments in universal dimensions of human experience, though there are elsewhere some

<sup>63</sup> Habermas, *Moral Consciousness*, 200. See further above, with nn. 9-10.

<sup>64</sup> I am grateful to Mike Higton on this point. Cf. also Nigel Biggar, 'Is Stanley Hauerwas Sectarian?' in Nation and Wells (eds), *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 159-60, who speaks of the 'respects in which liberalism is rooted in Christianity', while also pointing out that 'it is largely from liberalism that Christianity has learnt some of the (more liberal) political implications of its "story"'. Biggar concludes by referring to 'the project of recovering liberalism's lost theological horizon and rescuing it in non-secularist form'. That the founding members of the Frankfurt School were all Jews would also be relevant to pursuing this issue further (cf. Edmund Arens, 'Interruptions: Critical Theory and Political Theology Between Modernity and Postmodernity', in David Batstone, Eduardo Mendieta, Lois Ann Lorentzen and Dwight N. Hopkins (eds), *Liberation Theologies, Postmodernity and the Americas* [London and New York: Routledge, 1997], 223-24).

limited moves in this direction.<sup>65</sup> If, then, one wishes to find in Paul moral resources which may help in the task of constructing and sustaining diverse, plural societies within which there is nonetheless a strong sense of belonging and community — a pressing moral task about which ecclesial ethics has too little to say<sup>66</sup> — then there are perhaps two ways in which one might proceed. One is to look to the (somewhat limited) ideas Paul expresses about the basis on which Christians are to relate to non-Christians. For example, the fact that, from the perspective of the Christian story, Christ is &◆▣□▣XS□er □XS▣■◆♦■ (Rom 10.12; cf. Phil 2.9-11) provides an implicit motivation for giving thought to ‘what is good in the sight of all’ (&XS●XS▣ M ♦■◆▣XS□XS□ ■ XS▣■◆♦■ XS ♦■XS□XS♦■XS) and ‘living peaceably with all’ (O M ♦XS▣ XS XS■◆♦■ XS ♦■XS□XS♦■XS).<sup>67</sup> A second way involves more clearly moving beyond, and even against, Paul, taking from his moral argumentation the idea that human solidarity requires some shared story which narrates and grounds that solidarity, within which a basis for the tolerance of difference, within limits,<sup>68</sup> might also be articulated. Boyarin seems to agree that the fundamental human challenge is to nurture a sense of ‘deeply felt and enacted human solidarity’ while respecting and affirming the integrity of varied cultural and religious practices, though he has little to say about how this human solidarity might be grounded or

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Rom 1.18–2.16; 1 Cor 5.1. On natural law in Second Temple Judaism and the New Testament more generally, see Markus Bockmuehl, *Jewish Law in Gentile Churches: Halakhah and the Beginning of Christian Public Ethics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 87–143.

<sup>66</sup> For example, Hauerwas's comment that 'a worldwide network of local churches... is the vision of peace... it would be unthinkable for people in such a network to kill one another for any loyalties that are not determined by the network itself', while it hopefully conceives of the Christian church as a bulwark against war between nation states, leaves unmentioned the issues concerning the tensions between those who are and are not a part of this Christian network ('Where Would I Be Without Friends?', in Nation and Wells (eds), *Faithfulness and Fortitude*, 332).

<sup>67</sup> I am grateful to Francis Watson for this point, which warrants further consideration.

<sup>68</sup> The question of the limits of tolerance raises important questions which take us beyond the scope of this essay, in regard to both Paul and liberalism. Paul, it is clear, argues for tolerance on some issues — namely food — but not on others — namely sexual ‘immorality’ (cf. 1 Cor 5.1-13; 6.12-20). Moreover, the ‘metamoral’ values such as a Christ-like other-regard are imperative and not optional, and provide the essential moral framework within which diversity of ethical practice can be tolerated. The liberal tradition faces the issue that its apparent ‘tolerance’ of diverse cultural and religious practices is limited, or framed, by its (sometimes coercive) insistence on a (sometimes implicit) universal set of morals (cf. further Benhabib, *Situating the Self*, 45-46).

sustained.<sup>69</sup> Paul, whatever the weaknesses and inadequacies of his thinking, does at least attempt to use the resources of his theological tradition to undergird and motivate a ‘deeply felt solidarity’ while at the same time also using that same theological tradition to sustain different practices and to remove the bases for judgment and criticism. And if Paul’s attempt to ground solidarity in Christ while preserving the room for a diversity of ethical convictions does ‘relativise’ these other ethical convictions and their cultural significance, perhaps that indicates something inherent in the nature of encompassing and acknowledging plurality under some broader umbrella of belonging.<sup>70</sup> In any quest for a new story with which to foster and sustain a genuinely human solidarity, Paul’s contribution — as Boyarin has so acutely shown — is ambivalent. Paul and the early Christians told a new story, albeit one profoundly rooted in much older traditions, and on the basis of this story, the story of God’s reconciling grace in Jesus Christ, they struggled, not without success, to create new communities united by a new solidarity in Christ which transcended the distinctions between Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female (Gal 3.28; Eph 2.14-16). Yet just as this new community transcended old distinctions, so it constructed new ones, dividing those in Christ from those ‘outside’, children of the light from children of darkness, those being saved from those who are perishing (1 Thess 4.12; 5.5; 1 Cor 1.18). In this double-edged achievement lies both the potential and the problem.

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<sup>69</sup> Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 257.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. for example Peter Berger’s argument that one of the effects of modernisation and the development of plural societies is that traditions that were simply taken for granted as ‘the way things are’ inevitably come to be seen as one among a number of possible choices or commitments, in a way which relativises their absoluteness. In Berger’s words: ‘*Modernization is a shift from givenness to choice on the level of meaning.*’ (Peter L. Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice: Political Ethics and Social Change* [London: Penguin, 1976] 196; see further 193-216.)