

The Moral Vision of the Bible: A New Testament Approach

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The title given to this essay is that originally allocated by the organizers of the seminar in which it was presented, and it makes a deliberate allusion to the title of Richard Hays' *magnum opus* *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, subtitled *A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*.¹ Indeed, Richard Hays was originally scheduled to present a paper under this title, but was unfortunately prevented from doing so by illness. I mention these aspects of the essay's *Vorgeschichte* because they are crucial to its aims and scope. My overall aim is to outline the methodological foundations for one approach to New Testament ethics, and to illustrate that approach in practice by drawing on my own collaborative work connecting biblical exegesis and ecological ethics. I begin by outlining the approach taken by Hays in his landmark work, in order to establish some of the key concerns central to discussing 'the moral vision of the Bible', and also to distinguish my own approach through a critical dialogue with Hays. After a discussion of Hays' book, I present these constructive methodological proposals, before finally illustrating their practical application in ecological interpretation. It should, I hope, go without saying – and be clear from the tone of my discussion – that this engagement with Hays presumes the importance and value of his work, and engages this work in critical conversation precisely because of its significance. Hays' work is also important as a benchmark for comparison because of the space it gives, unlike many works on New Testament ethics, to issues of methodology, hermeneutics, and contemporary application.

1. Richard Hays' *Moral Vision: An Overview of Method and Key Concerns*

Given the title of this essay, and its allusion to Hays' work, two key concerns, central to Hays' project, are suggested for our consideration. The first of these is *synthesis*. After attempting to 'listen' attentively to the diverse voices of the New Testament canon in the

¹ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996 / Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997).

first major section of the book, Hays attempts, in the second part of the book, a synthesis, proposing three focal images – community, cross, and new creation – “as guidelines for synthetic reflection about the New Testament canon”.² The wider project to which this essay contributes presses us to think still more broadly about the moral vision of the Bible as a whole, and about how its two main parts (assuming a Christian Bible is in view) might be related and even synthesized in our work. This is also an issue Hays briefly addresses.³ His own work, he notes, is focused on the New Testament partly for pragmatic reasons of scope and complexity;⁴ but there are also more theological judgments at work. While Hays urges that the New Testament texts must be read “with careful attention to their Old Testament subtexts”, he is also clear that “within the canon the New Testament has a privileged hermeneutical function... Christian theology reads the Old Testament through the lens of the New Testament”.⁵

The second concern to which Hays’ work points us is for the contemporary application of New Testament ethics. Parts three and four of Hays’ book are devoted to reflection on the hermeneutical task of using the New Testament in Christian ethics and to various case studies of particular ethical issues. Here Hays does not shrink from clear conclusions concerning what Christians should do in connection with issues such as divorce, abortion, violence, and homosexuality.

As Hays’ important volume shows, with appropriately explicit and extended methodological consideration, exegetical and historical analysis can go hand in hand with synthesis and contemporary appropriation. For Hays it is clear that this contemporary appropriation is done in and for the Church: the “primary goal” of his book, he states, is “*to engage the theological problem of how the New Testament ought to shape the ethical norms and practices of the church in our time*”.⁶ Thus understood, the task of scriptural interpretation is undertaken from a Christian standpoint – something made explicit by Hays but which pervades biblical studies much more widely,

² Hays, *Moral Vision*, 196.

³ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 306-309.

⁴ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 306.

⁵ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 309; cf. also 310.

⁶ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 9, original italics. Cf. also xi: the programmatic task of the book is “the task of *critical, reflective conversation in which we stand together under the judgment and guidance of Scripture*” (original italics).

if often only implicitly. For reasons that will become clear later, I regard this acknowledgment of the confessional context that shapes the work as important, for it makes this fundamental orientation explicit and thus lays it open to critical scrutiny as one part of the perspective adopted in the work. Too often, in the field of biblical studies, theological and ecclesial concerns lie unnamed and unacknowledged in the background, shaping what is ostensibly historical work without this orientating framework being laid open for critical discussion.

Needless to say, this confessional orientation significantly affects how the tasks of synthesis and contemporary appropriation are conceived, especially with regard to the relationship between what in the Christian Bible are known as Old and New Testaments. This stance implies not only that the object of study is the Christian Bible (notwithstanding the different canons in different ecclesial traditions – though these are inadequately considered in Western exegesis, where the Protestant canon has received the lion’s share of attention) but also that this whole text is interpreted from the perspective of the conviction that God has acted in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. This is, one might say, the hermeneutical key that unlocks the meaning of Scripture as a whole. This does not quite mean, as Hays suggests, that the New Testament trumps the Old in terms of authority, nor even that the New Testament is the hermeneutical key to interpret the Old. Rather, it means that Scripture is to be interpreted from a *christological* standpoint, and this – as Luther clearly saw⁷ – means discerning where the word of Christ is to be found, and where it is not found, in both New Testament and Old Testament texts. Such a christological reading of the Bible is not quite the same as a reading in which the New Testament supersedes or trumps the Old, even if it is a reading in which certain christological perspectives from the New Testament provide a hermeneutical key to the whole of the (Christian) Bible. Rather, such a christological criterion would operate just as critically in relation to New

⁷ In his “Preface to the Epistles of St. James and St. Jude”, he writes as follows: “The true touchstone for testing every book is to discover whether it emphasizes the prominence of Christ or not... What does not teach Christ is not apostolic, not even if taught by Peter or Paul. On the other hand, what does teach Christ is apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate, or Herod does it.” Quoted from John Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings* (New York: Anchor Books, 1962), 35-36. See further the discussion in Francis Watson, *Text, Church and World: Biblical Interpretation in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 231-36.

Testament texts as to those from the Old. To take an example discussed by Hays, it is not that the New Testament's witness to nonviolence trumps the Old Testament's acceptance of violence and war,⁸ but rather that – accepting the pacifist position for sake of argument here – Christ's words and actions refusing retaliation and promoting nonviolence constitute the authoritative perspective from which the rest of Scripture may be critically read. This may appear a mere nuance, as it were, but it is a significant one not least in relation to issues concerning ecological ethics, to which I shall turn below. Rather than requiring that New Testament texts – simply by virtue of their being 'New' rather than 'Old' – be at the centre of the synthesis, texts from both Old and New Testaments might equally stand at the centre of such a vision, depending on their resonance with this christological criterion.⁹

2. Outline of an Alternative Method

These methodological and theological perspectives are important in order to define explicitly the parameters and goals for our approaches to New Testament (and indeed biblical) ethics. Having briefly summarized Hays' influential approach and highlighted the twin concerns of synthesis and appropriation, I want now to outline an alternative approach to these issues, in terms of the kind of procedure by which one may attempt to derive some kind of 'moral vision' from the New Testament, or more broadly from the Bible, set within the broad context of Christian theology and ethics. Labelling this 'an' approach is deliberate: I claim only that it represents one way in which we might coherently and cogently seek to explore the moral vision of the New Testament, and of the Bible more widely, not that it somehow constitutes the sole model of legitimate interpretation.

In my collaborative work with Cherryl Hunt and Christopher Southgate at Exeter on ecological hermeneutics and environmental ethics we found especially valuable the hermeneutical model set out by South African theologian Ernst Conradie. Conradie attempts to identify the various factors that influence biblical interpretation, from the text in its ancient context to the reader in their contemporary context, and including the

⁸ Hays, *Moral Vision*, 309.

⁹ A similar point was made by Jacqueline Grey in her response to my initial paper presentation, for which I am most grateful.

traditions of interpretation, the ‘spiral’ of ongoing interpretation, and the various interpretative interests hidden beneath these various factors.¹⁰ The key point, however, concerns the sense that interpretation takes place in an ongoing and creative encounter between the text (and its ancient context) and the reader (and their modern context). Crucial here in particular is Conradie’s notion of ‘doctrinal constructs’ or ‘keys’ and their role in this process of interpretation. They serve, Conradie argues,

to identify *both* the meaning of the contemporary context *and* of the biblical texts. They therefore (and simultaneously) enable the interpreter also to establish a *link* between text and contemporary context. Doctrinal constructs are not only employed to *find* similarities but to *construct* similarities, to *make* things similar, if necessary.¹¹

One of the implications of this is that attempts to present the theology and ethics of some biblical book, or, indeed, of the New Testament or the Bible as a whole, are never – despite the way they are often presented – solely an exegetical or historical reconstruction. The questions asked, the agenda pursued, the concepts and terminology deployed will all reflect the location of the interpreter. Insofar as interpreters claim to discern some central theme, or ‘focal image’, this will be a product of the interaction between their contemporary context and the ancient text. Furthermore, as Jacqueline Grey has rightly stressed, this point should not be expressed in an overly individualistic way; the issues and concerns that shape and focus our interpretative endeavour arise from communal contexts of various kinds and at various scales: ecclesial, local, cultural, global.¹²

Moreover, as Conradie suggests, ‘doctrinal constructs’ succeed precisely because they prove fruitful, both (and simultaneously) in terms of making sense of the Bible and

¹⁰ For a broad and accessible overview of his approach, see Ernst M. Conradie, *Angling for Interpretation: A First Guide to Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* (Study Guides in Religion and Theology 13; Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2008); related specifically to ecological hermeneutics, see Ernst M. Conradie, “What on Earth is an Ecological Hermeneutics? Some Broad Parameters”, in David G. Horrell et al. (eds), *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (London & New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 295-313.

¹¹ Ernst M. Conradie, “Interpreting the Bible Amidst Ecological Degradation,” *Theology* 112 (2009) 199-207 (201). Cf. also *idem*, “The Road Towards an Ecological Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics,” *Scriptura* 93 (2006), 305-14; “What on Earth Is an Ecological Hermeneutics?”

¹² The point was raised in her response to my initial seminar paper; see further her comments in the chapter below.

in relating closely to the contemporary context. To take a rather well-known example, Luther's notion of justification by faith is not simply an exegetically-based summary of what is taken to be the heart of Paul's theology but rather a reading of Paul, produced in a very particular social and ecclesial context, which 'makes sense' of Paul and also seems theologically fruitful in terms of the dilemmas and issues Luther himself faces as he reads Paul. Similar things might be said regarding the prioritizing of the message of liberation for the poor in the context of twentieth-century Latin America. What this perspective also illustrates well is the way in which certain biblical texts – parts of Romans and Galatians for Luther, parts of Exodus, Luke, and James (among others) for the Liberation Theologians – come to the centre of attention. Such texts are part and parcel of the doctrinal or hermeneutical key by which sense is made of both the Bible and the contemporary world.

Adopting this approach requires a different starting point – or at least, a differently articulated starting point – from that which Hays presents. Contrary to what Hays' procedure suggests, it is impossible first of all simply to listen to the texts, to hear what they say, before then deciding how to synthesise and to appropriate their message – a point on which Hays has been criticized, notably, if over-polemically, by Dale Martin.¹³ This is not to deny the central place of attentive exegesis, but it is to insist that even such exegesis is configured in its execution by tradition, context, and agenda. Even community, cross and new creation – Hays' three 'focal images' – do not simply represent an exegetically-grounded synthesis of the New Testament material but rather a selection of themes driven partly by the New Testament material but also by the ecclesial and theological tradition inhabited by Hays and the priorities and concerns of that tradition. For example, as Richard Burridge has pointed out, Hays' focal lenses reflect the dominant place given to Paul's letters in Hays' work (and, indeed, in the Protestant theological tradition in which Hays stands).¹⁴ Equally significantly, the particular kind of ecclesial focus of Hays' approach, with its oppositional contrasts drawn between a

¹³ Dale B. Martin, "Review of Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*", *JBL* 117 (1998) 358-60 (358).

¹⁴ Richard A. Burridge, "Review of *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* by Richard Hays", *Journal of Theology of Southern Africa* 102 (1998) 71-73; cf. also Richard A. Burridge, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 14-16.

counter-cultural church community and the wider world, reflects a particular theological tradition and perspective, not least as forcefully articulated by his colleague Stanley Hauerwas.¹⁵ The relationship between church and world could be differently cast, through a different prioritising and interpretation of New Testament texts.¹⁶ Again, this will prove to be a significant issue when it comes to considering the potential for an ecological-ethical reading of the New Testament.

Another reason why such acknowledgment is important is to contextualise ourselves as interpreters, to locate our readings, and thus to make clear that our exegesis is not a universally relevant, neutrally positioned, reading from nowhere, but a particular product, the product not only of an individual's context but also (in this case) of the wider tradition of Western exegesis – largely Christian (especially Protestant) and Western European (and now North American) in terms of its origins. Just as whiteness studies have called for critical deconstruction of the tendency of white people to speak as if they spoke for humanity as a whole, from an *unraced* universal location, so we must, I would argue (as have others before), make corresponding self-critical moves in biblical studies to acknowledge that our exegesis – and I speak as a white, Western male, trained in the Protestant theological tradition – is the product of a specific location, religiously and also racially.¹⁷ Instead of declaring ourselves merely attentive, obedient 'listeners', then, we must acknowledge – however historically or even archaeologically focused our work – that the questions we ask and the answers we derive are always already shaped

¹⁵ See further David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (Second edn; Cornerstones; London & New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015 [2005]), 42-43, 296-98.

¹⁶ For remarks along these lines, see Charles E.B. Cranfield, "A Response to Professor Richard B. Hays' *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*", in *idem, On Romans: And Other New Testament Essays* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 167-175; Judith M. Gundry Volf, "Putting the *Moral Vision of the New Testament* Into Focus: A Review", *BBR* 9 (1999): 277-87.

¹⁷ For one significant example from the field of whiteness studies, see Richard Dyer, *White* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 4: "It has become common for those marginalised by culture to acknowledge the situation from which they speak, but those who occupy positions of cultural hegemony blithely carry on as if what they say is neutral and unsituated – human but not raced... there is something especially white in this non-located and disembodied position of knowledge, and thus it seems especially important to try to break the hold of whiteness by locating and embodying it in a particular experience of being white." For programmatic efforts to acknowledge and reflect on the social location(s) of biblical interpretation, see Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert (eds), *Reading from this Place* (vol 1: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States; vol 2: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in Global Perspective; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1995).

by our contemporary contexts, as well as by the character and content of the texts themselves.

3. Method in Practice: An Ecological-Ethical Reading of Paul

Next I want to illustrate the way such an approach might work in practice, by outlining some of the key steps entailed in our attempts to read Paul ecologically. This decision to focus on Paul represents, of course, a decision to focus on one particular part of the biblical canon and not somewhere else. That is not intended to imply that other texts could not also be valuably and fruitfully approached from this perspective.¹⁸ Nor does it imply that Paul's letters are an especially fruitful place to search for ecological ethics; indeed, other parts of the Bible may well offer more potential for ecological reflection. In one sense the choice of focus is a pragmatic one, based on areas of interest and expertise. More significantly, however, it also reflects a sense of the theological weight that Paul carries, within the Protestant tradition in particular. Given the christological criterion mentioned earlier, Paul's focus on the death and resurrection of Christ and its soteriological and ethical implications makes his theology a crucial (and contested) site for the articulation and development of Christian theology and ethics. Put in a more specific way, if we cannot show how a case for the ecological reconfiguration of the Christian tradition might plausibly emerge from a reading of Paul, then there remains a significant question-mark over the potential for such an ecological theology to claim widespread appeal as an authentic and faithful representation of that tradition.

The first step, as outlined above, is to recognize that the contemporary context shapes our exegetical and historical enquiries. Such recognition helps to avoid the pretence that this is a reading from nowhere, or that the arguments being conducted are purely exegetical. (All too often in the field of biblical studies, arguments are conducted as if they were fundamentally historical and exegetical in character, when the real issues of debate are about contemporary stances on such issues as biblical authority, human sexuality, and so on.) At least in the case of ecological issues it is easy to make the case that these are modern concerns, not those that directly preoccupied the writers of the biblical texts, even if there are certain parallels and similarities. Those writers may have

¹⁸ Again I am grateful to Jacqueline Grey for raising this issue in her response to my initial paper.

been well aware of issues such as the potential for the land to flourish productively or to suffer drought and destruction, and understood this theologically in terms of complex interconnections between God, people, and land.¹⁹ But they clearly had no conception or experience of anthropogenic climate change on a global scale, of a rapid rate of species extinction worldwide, or of the pressures exerted on a limited planet by the levels of production and consumption current among a human population of around seven billion, and rising, some of whom consume spectacularly more than others. It is important, then, to make explicit the pressing concerns of the environmental crisis – the various factors that are drastically affecting the earth’s ecosystems and call for urgent ethical reflection and action. These provide a context and agenda for the investigation.

Secondly, it needs to be acknowledged, following Conradie’s analysis, that both existing and new construals of biblical theology and ethics will inevitably have some doctrinal constructs or hermeneutical keys at their heart, the products of various attempts, in diverse and changing contexts, to ‘make sense’ of both the Bible and the contemporary world. In the case of Paul, the Lutheran tradition’s influence has been strong, with its central focus on justification by faith. Subsequent interpretation of Paul, influenced by early figures such as Albert Schweitzer, has sometimes found more plausible a focus on participatory models, or on reconciliation and peace as the centre of Pauline theology. Even in such interpretation, though, the predominant focus of scholarly enquiry has remained anthropocentric, that is, focused on questions about human salvation, relationships, community, and so on. Ecological issues scarcely register.²⁰ Indeed, Hays’ book is one example of this: though published back in 1996, when environmental concerns were somewhat less prominent than now, it is still a notable gap, and the choice of issues concerned with sexual ethics and violence reflects a well-established agenda in debates in Christian ethics. The same absence is even more striking in Willard Swartley’s book, published in 2006, that makes peace and reconciliation central to its reading of Paul but still only contemplates inter-human

¹⁹ On the ecological significance of such interconnections, see esp. Hilary Marlow, *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-reading Amos, Hosea and First Isaiah* (Oxford: OUP, 2009).

²⁰ See further David G. Horrell, “A New Perspective on Paul? Rereading Paul in a Time of Ecological Crisis”, *JSNT* 33 (2010) 3-30 (7-12).

relationships in this regard.²¹ Paul's massive influence within the Christian tradition, especially the Protestant tradition, as noted above, means that there is particular reason to ask the key questions we pose at the beginning of *Greening Paul*:

Does the Pauline tradition essentially and unavoidably set out a gospel focused more or less exclusively on the redemption of human beings, with an ethic correspondingly focused only on inter-human (or intra-ecclesial) relationships? Or can the Pauline letters offer resources for an ecological theology and ethics, for a Christian tradition reshaped and rearticulated in light of the ecological challenges that face us today?²²

Answering these questions requires engaging with the texts in a historically and exegetically careful and serious way. However, it also requires a consideration of how certain texts are interpreted and prioritised in any reading of the tradition.

Thirdly, then, it is important to reflect on what texts have functioned, and might function, to help generate doctrinal or hermeneutical keys that in turn focus our reading of the Pauline tradition. All such readings bring some texts to the centre of attention, and marginalize, ignore, or reject others. In the 'justification by faith' tradition, the central focus is of course texts like Gal 2.16 and Rom 3.28: "we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal 2.16, NRSV). For a more participationist reading of Paul, Romans 5–8 provides a better focus, hence, for example, Douglas Campbell's efforts to overturn the key foundations for the justification by faith tradition in Romans 1–4.²³ In terms of ecological concerns, there are two clear favourites in the Pauline letters: above all Rom 8.19-23 and then also Col 1.15-20. These texts, we argue, through a detailed analysis of each, do indeed provide important foundations for an ecological theology and ethics: they indicate, in their different ways, that the scope of God's redeeming work is all-encompassing, including

²¹ Willard M. Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006).

²² David G. Horrell, Cheryl Hunt, and Christopher Southgate, *Greening Paul: Rereading the Apostle in a Time of Ecological Crisis* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 3.

²³ Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009). For a probing critique of Campbell's proposals, see R. Barry Matlock, "Zeal for Paul but not According to Knowledge: Douglas Campbell's War on 'Justification Theory'", *JSNT* 34 (2011) 115-49.

“the whole creation” (Rom 8.22) or “all things” (Col 1.16-17, 20).²⁴ While the eschatological tenor of Romans 8 is one of forward-looking hope and painful groaning, Colossians gives a more realized depiction. In Romans, creation shares a hope for its liberation, while in Colossians the reconciliation accomplished in Christ is literally cosmic and all-embracing. Together they infuse the whole creation with moral value and enduring worth.

Fourthly, it is crucial to attempt to move beyond the focus on certain favourite texts (despite the fact that mere citation of these favourites, whether on justification by faith or care for creation, is often as much as one finds). The question is whether, and to what extent, Romans 8 and Colossians 1 can stand at the heart of a reconfigured Pauline theology and ethics, in which ecological concerns are central, or whether they can only be isolated outliers on the landscape of Pauline thought. Addressing this question requires attentive and plausible exegesis as well as a particular orientation for the analysis. One of the things we attempt to show in *Greening Paul* is that other texts in Paul (e.g., Rom 11.36; 1 Cor 8.6; 15.28; 2 Cor 5.19) can indeed be read as contributing to a construal of Pauline theology as focused on “*God’s incorporative transformation of the whole creation in Christ*”.²⁵ Paul’s theology can very plausibly be read as *participatory* in its central focus and *cosmic* in its scope, even if this construal’s explicit orientation to modern ecological concerns goes beyond and in some respects even against what Paul himself envisaged (for example, in terms of what we call animal ethics).²⁶

The fifth step is to consider how we begin to move more explicitly towards ethics. Here, drawing on my earlier argument in *Solidarity and Difference* that the key meta-norms of Pauline ethics are corporate solidarity and other-regard, we seek in *Greening Paul* to consider how far ‘other-regard’ – that is, a generous and self-sacrificial looking to the interests of others, rooted in the example of Christ’s self-giving – might be extended

²⁴ Horrell, Hunt, and Southgate, *Greening Paul*, 63-115.

²⁵ The phrase is taken from Horrell, “New Perspective”, 25 (italics original).

²⁶ In 1 Cor 9.9, quoting from Deut 25.4 in the context of an argument about the right of an apostle to material support from the Christian communities, Paul infamously declares that God is not concerned about oxen, but speaks instead “for our sake” (1 Cor 9.10). The point is that, as I framed it elsewhere, “we can perceive ecological dimensions to the wider themes of Pauline theology whether or not Paul was conscious of those dimensions and whether or not he would have agreed with them” (Horrell, “New Perspective”, 22 n. 34, italics original).

and interpreted ecologically. We acknowledge that Paul's own focus is inter-human and indeed often intra-ecclesial, but the logic of Paul's own theology, as sketched above, suggests that we can plausibly infer from it moral values and ethical responsibilities with wider scope. If it is the case, as Colossians 1 and other Pauline texts suggest, that God's reconciling action in Christ brings all things together "in him", then, we argue, the 'community' which is included in Christ is literally all-encompassing. Other-regard is therefore owed, not only to other Christians, or even to other humans, but to all things, all of which are valued and reconciled in Christ. Here again we might note a contrast with Hays' heavily ecclesial orientation, in which the focal lens of 'new creation' is primarily interpreted in terms of the ecclesial community, which stands counter-culturally against its wider world.²⁷ As I have suggested above, this focus is not simply a product of attentive exegesis but also of Hays' own theological and institutional location, and it serves to configure the appropriation of New Testament ethics in a particular way. In the context of today's ecological crisis we might argue that what is required is an ecclesiology that is not so much about a counter-cultural distinction between church and world, but one in which both 'community' and 'new creation' – or other themes such as creation and the reign of God – are seen to encompass both human and non-human creatures; thus the ethical challenge might focus more on the ways the church is called to embody and enact the transformation of the cosmos in which everything is already caught up and towards which all things are already orientated.

As the ethical corollary to the theological vision of God's incorporative transformation of the whole creation in Christ, then, stands "*the associated imperative to embody that transformation in human action shaped by the paradigm of Christ's self-giving for others*".²⁸ This is, of course, a very broad ethical norm, and does not provide any specific or concrete guidance on the particular ethical quandaries we might face. We argue, however, that the biblical material most plausibly and fruitfully makes its contribution to contemporary ethics precisely in this broad orientation of values and

²⁷ New creation is introduced as follows: "The church embodies the power of the resurrection in the midst of a not-yet-redeemed world" (Hays, *Moral Vision*, 198). On the counter-cultural stance that may be required, see e.g., pp. 342-43, 446, 458-60 – and see also my comments on Hays' (and Hauerwas') treatment of the abortion issue in *Solidarity and Difference* (2nd edn), 313 n. 5.

²⁸ Horrell, "New Perspective", 25 (italics original).

practices rather than in instruction on specific issues – again in some contrast to the method pursued by Hays.²⁹ Yet just as Hays’ arguments on particular issues represent a particular balancing of the claims of scripture, tradition, reason and experience,³⁰ so too does our own position, insisting (inter alia) that modern scientific analysis is crucial to determining ethical action. In many cases, the specific issues we face are alien to the world of the Bible and therefore absent from its explicit reflection. And even where the same specific issues are discussed – marriage and divorce being an obvious example – the nature of the cultural assumptions and practices about the topic are vastly different, making any direct transfer to the present day highly precarious.³¹

In the case of ecological ethics, we argue that reasoning on specific issues might valuably be shaped by the kinds of (meta-)moral values we discern in Paul – especially the appeals for reconciliation and other-regard – but that concrete ethical decisions need to be based also on the best insights from science and other forms of contemporary knowledge, albeit critically appraised. We need such insights in order to translate a concept such as ‘reconciliation’ into a form that is cogent and meaningful when applied to ecosystems in which patterns of predation, and other forms of suffering and violence, are unavoidably present. The notion of ‘flourishing’ might be one way to do this: in an important book on approaches to environmental justice, David Schlosberg notes that “part of the flourishing of animals is to be protein for other life forms. All flourishing is not a pretty version of harmony; some is not-so-pretty, but nonetheless harmonious... flourishing happens in systems, with creatures in relation with one another”.³² To take more specific examples, exegetical study of Paul (and, indeed, of any other biblical

²⁹ Martin’s critique, though overly polemical, is again pertinent at this point. He argues that Hays masks his own agency as interpreter behind the claim to be articulating the ethical stance implied by the NT material on such issues as violence, abortion, divorce, and homosexuality, and that weighing the relative contributions of reason or experience (etc.) differently might lead to different results: “neither the *text* nor the *method* renders the conclusions. *Hays* renders the conclusions” (Martin, “Review of Hays”, 359).

³⁰ So Martin, “Review of Hays”, 359.

³¹ For one aspect of the cultural differences, see, e.g., Dale B. Martin, “Paul Without Passion: On Paul’s Rejection of Desire in Sex and Marriage”, in Halvor Moxnes (ed.), *Constructing Early Christian Families* (London & New York: Routledge, 1997) 201-215. To note a more practical difference, Roman law allowed marriage for girls at age 12 and for boys at age 14, even if average ages of marriage tended to be somewhat higher. See Richard P. Saller, *Patriarchy, Property and Death in the Roman Family* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 26-41.

³² David Schlosberg, *Defining Environmental Justice: Theories, Movements, and Nature* (Oxford & New York: OUP, 2007), 151.

writer) cannot clearly tell us whether the imperatives of reconciliation and other-regard should lead us to be vegetarians, or whether it is right to intervene directly to save endangered species (e.g., by relocating some to alternative locations),³³ or whether other possible actions (or deliberate inaction) might better embody these imperatives. We would need to know – to focus just on the issue of meat-eating – about the global impacts of meat production, the ecological dimensions of various forms of agriculture, the forms of suffering that meat-production entails, and so on, in order to make an informed and ethical judgment, within a broader (and eschatological) moral vision. Paul can perhaps help us on this last point, but much less so on the preceding ones.

4. Broader Engagement with the Bible

This kind of approach, rooted in Conradie's model of biblical hermeneutics and picking up his notion of doctrinal constructs, illustrates one way in which an ecological reading of Pauline ethics might, through exegetical engagement, attempt both synthesis and contemporary appropriation. The same kinds of principles could apply to broader attempts to treat the whole Bible in this way, although the challenges and demands of this kind of task are still greater in scale and complexity.

The possibilities for such a broader engagement may be briefly illustrated through a short summary of my own attempt to outline aspects of an ecological biblical theology and ethics. As in regard to the Pauline corpus, so too in regard to a broader approach, such an attempt calls for an explicit acknowledgment of the contemporary context and the ecological issues that generate our interest in the subject, and orientate our investigations. Likewise, again as in the reading of Paul, such an engagement necessarily entails some kind of prioritizing of certain texts over others, potentially reconfiguring the kind of construals of biblical theology and ethics that previous attempts have presented, both by giving central place to different texts and also by reading texts differently.

Some texts, such as Genesis 9.1-17, have traditionally been read as focused on humans – specifically Noah and his descendants – but can be seen to have a much wider concern, namely God's covenant with every living thing, with the whole earth, a point

³³ These are the two examples we discuss in some detail in *Greening Paul*, 202-10.

made repeatedly and emphatically in the text (vv. 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17). Other texts, notably in the Psalms (esp. Pss 66.1-4; 98.4-9; 148), might contribute the theme of creation's praise, suggesting that the community of those called to worship God and thereby caught up in God's saving purposes is much wider than the human community. Eschatological visions of peaceable and nonviolent coexistence (famously in Isa 11.6-9) provide a guiding moral vision towards which human action might strive, whether through a commitment to vegetarianism or other forms of ecological concern. Drawing on a wide range of biblical texts, it is possible to suggest a series of doctrinal keys for an ecological biblical theology and ethics: the goodness of all creation, humanity within the community of creation, interconnectedness in failure and flourishing, the covenant with all creation, creation's calling to praise God, and liberation and reconciliation for all things.³⁴ The methodologically important point, however, is that these cannot plausibly be presented simply as the result of reading the biblical texts. Rather, they arise from a creative and critical reading shaped from the outset by ecological interests and concerns – and concerns that are not merely the interests of an individual interpreter, but those that arise from contemporary communities, as Jacqueline Grey rightly stresses in her chapter below.

One difficult issue such engagement also brings to light is how far such an ecological re-reading should entail critical exposure of the negative ideas and implications of certain texts.³⁵ To take perhaps the most famous example in the context of ecological engagement with the Bible: should Gen 1.26-28 be rescued from its (modern) history of interpretation as support for human authority over nature and re-

³⁴ See David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology* (Biblical Challenges in the Contemporary World; London & New York: Routledge, 2014 [2010]), 128-36.

³⁵ For further reflections on such hermeneutical issues, pursued through a critical engagement with Richard Bauckham's *Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX/London: Baylor University Press/Darton, Longman & Todd, 2010) and Norman Habel's *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATF, 2009), see David G. Horrell "Ecological Hermeneutics: Reflections on Methods and Prospects for the Future", *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* 46 (2014), 139-165 (with responses by Elaine Wainwright and Steven Bouma-Prediger). Another new approach in the field of ecological hermeneutics has recently been proposed by Tina Dykesteen Nilsen, and Anna Rebecca Solevåg, 'Expanding Ecological Hermeneutics: The Case for Ecolonialism', *JBL* 135 (2016), 665-83. The authors review both the Earth Bible project and the Exeter project, along with other significant works in ecological hermeneutics, and propose an approach that draws on the "Earth Charter" as a basis for a more interdisciplinary method rather than a restrictively theological one.

read as a text encouraging responsible environmental stewardship, or should it be exposed as a dangerous and unfortunate text that legitimates aggressive human domination of the earth?³⁶ Answers to such a question within the realm of Christian theology and ethics immediately and unavoidably reflects wider convictions and disagreements about the nature of biblical authority and its role in Christian ethics. My own sense, however, is that attempts to show that such a text promotes an ecologically responsible form of stewardship are often overly apologetic and exegetically implausible – as is the case with interpretations of other difficult texts such as 2 Pet 3.10-13. That means, I think, that we need an approach that can incorporate theologically and ethically grounded resistance of scripture, as well as positive recovery of it (cf. n. 7 above). Moreover, such an approach to reading the biblical material consciously marginalizes some texts while bringing others to the centre of the picture – thus making explicit a procedure that has in some form characterised the relationship between biblical exegesis and contemporary ethical appropriation throughout the history of interpretation, as Conradie's model makes clear. Explicit acknowledgment of this centering and decentering of certain texts, however, also invites critical reflection on what the implications and attractions of such reconfigurations might be. For example, how might it shift the moral vision that emerges from a reading of the Bible if, instead of giving central place to the motif from Genesis 1.26 of humanity uniquely made in God's image – a very rare image within the Hebrew Bible – it was the divine speech in Job 38–41 that was given a more decisive and orientating position? In this thundering speech, as other ecological critics have noted, humanity's ignorance and relative insignificance is effectively demonstrated: much of God's providential care takes place without human knowledge, without any relation to human needs, and emphatically not by human power or action (cf., e.g., Job 38.26, 41; 39.26-27).³⁷ Indeed, Norman Habel has suggested that the depictions of the ox and the horse in Job 39.9-12 and 19-22 parody and reverse the perspectives of Genesis 1 and 9, suggesting that humanity cannot exercise dominion over such animals, and that humans fear animals just as animals fear humans (cf. Gen

³⁶ See the overview of differing perspectives in Horrell, *Bible and Environment*, 23-36.

³⁷ See, e.g., Dale Patrick, 'Divine Creative Power and the Decentering of Creation: The Subtext of the Lord's Addresses to Job.', in Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions* (The Earth Bible 3; Sheffield/Cleveland, OH: Sheffield Academic Press/ Pilgrim Press, 2001), 103-15, and the discussion in Horrell, *Bible and Environment*, 55-61.

9.2).³⁸ Bill McKibben sees in these speeches to Job a call to another kind of Copernican revolution: the realization that we humans are not at the centre of creation, but one part of its community.³⁹ If this text were to take a more central role in orientating theological ethics, instead of a stress on humanity's uniqueness, we might decentre humanity, emphasising our relative ignorance and insignificance, as one part of the vast and varied community of creation, all of which enjoys God's direct attention. Once again, that shift in perspective would hardly solve or answer our ethical dilemmas, but might at least represent a challenge to the arrogant hybris of the richest and most industrialized nations, when domination and manipulation of nature take precedence over notions of harmony, sustainability, and mutual and equitable flourishing.

5. Conclusion

These brief outlines hopefully illustrate, with specific reference to ecological ethics, one kind of procedure by which we might seek to elucidate a moral vision from the Bible. My most detailed example has been drawn from Paul, but I have also given a brief indication of the way this might operate in a much wider study of the Bible as a whole. My central methodological point is that we cannot plausibly and convincingly claim to articulate 'the moral vision' of any part of the Bible simply as an exegetical and historical reconstruction, as if our interpretation were not itself shaped from the very start by all sorts of facets of our contemporary location. Such acknowledgment of the contextual shaping of our productions of knowledge is important not least in order to 'particularise' the specific traditions of Western exegesis that all too often pass themselves off as decontextualized and of universal validity. Especially insofar as we are interested in synthesis and appropriation, these reconstructions will be a product both of our contemporary concerns and contexts and our attempts at attentive reading, and will make a connection between our context as readers and the content of the texts by identifying – or constructing – some hermeneutical or doctrinal keys, derived (in part) from the text, which then attempt to make fruitful sense both of the biblical text and the

³⁸ Norman C. Habel, "'Is the Wild Ox Willing to Serve You?'" Challenging the Mandate to Dominate', in Norman C. Habel and Shirley Wurst (eds), *The Earth Story in Wisdom Traditions* (The Earth Bible 3; Sheffield/Cleveland, OH: Sheffield Academic Press/ Pilgrim Press, 2001), 179-89.

³⁹ Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), 37.

contemporary world, concurrently bringing certain texts and topics to the centre, while marginalising others. One thing this means is that we cannot really speak of a singular moral vision, whether it is taken to emanate from Paul, the New Testament, or the Bible as a whole. Rather, since we read from various and ever-changing contexts, in which new ethical challenges will doubtless arise, we will continue to construct various moral visions from our texts, all of which will require ongoing critical scrutiny from both exegetical and ethical perspectives.

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